PS 0500: Terrorism

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https://williamspaniel.com/classes/worldpolitics/

Outline

- 1. Definition of Terrorism
- 2. Rationality of Terrorists
- 3. Do Terrorists Respond to Incentives?
- 4. The Profile of a Terrorist
- 5. Understanding Suicide Terrorism
- 6. Provocation
- 7. Spoiling
- 8. Outbidding
- 9. Counterterrorism as a Collective Action Problem

Definition of Terrorism

- Bluntly: we don't really have one
 - The term "terrorism" is heavily politicized
 - Whether you call something "terrorism" depends on which side you are on

What are the defining features of terrorism?

- 1. Violence/force (83.5%)
- 2. Political (65%)
- Fear/terror emphasized (51%)
- 4. Threat (47%)
- (Psychological) effects and (anticipated) reactions (41.5%)

- 6. Victim-target differentiation (37.5%)
- 7. Purposive, planned, systematic, organized action (32%)
- 8. Method of combat, strategy, tactic (30.5%)
- 9. Breaches rules/without humanitarian restraint (30%)
- 10. Coercion/extortion (28%)

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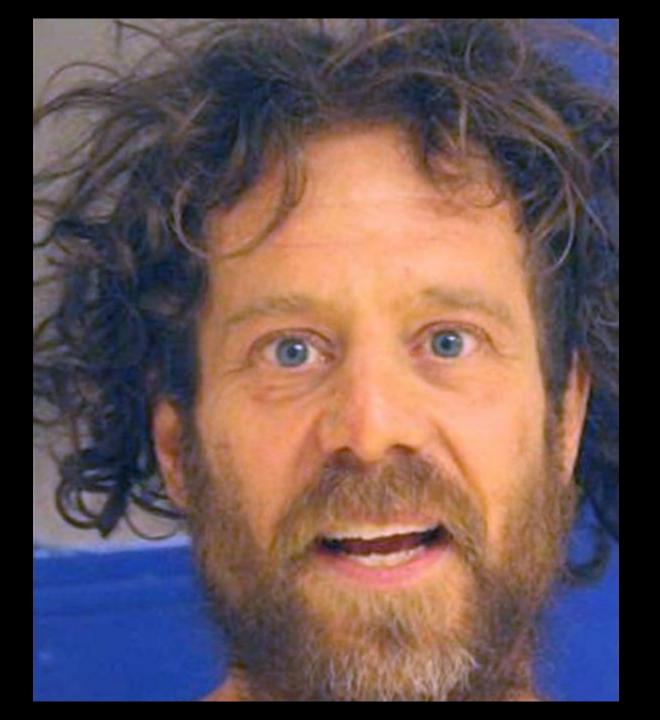
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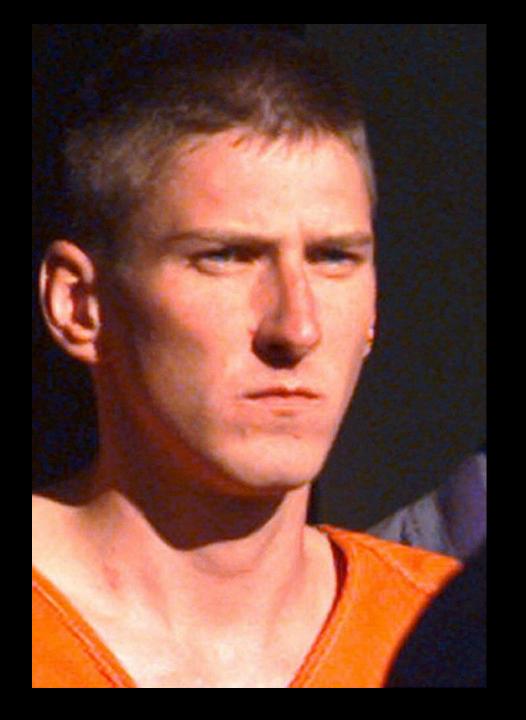
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Distilling...

- 1. Violence
- 2. Political goal
- 3. Audience extends beyond direct victims





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Rationality

- Common criticism of rational choice modeling of terrorism: "people who kill themselves are not rational"
 - We don't need to understand why people are okay with killing themselves to kill civilians to understand how they behave

Rationality Definition

- In science world, rational =/= sensible
- "Rational" means that an actor's preferences are complete and transitive
 - Complete: For any outcomes a and b, the actor prefers a to b, prefers b to a, or is indifferent
 - Transitive: For any outcomes a, b, and c, if the actor prefers a to b and b to c, then he also prefers a to c

Which of these People Is Rational?

Person 1

 "I prefer the Steelers to the Penguins. I also prefer the Penguins to the Pirates. And I prefer the Pirates to the Steelers."

Person 2

 "I prefer blowing myself up to kill five people to working a 9-5 desk job. I prefer working a 9-5 desk job than being in Will's class. And I prefer blowing myself up to kill five people than being in Will's class."

Explaining These Preferences

- Not so much a topic within IR
 - Psychology, sociology
 - But we can take these preferences as given and investigate the implications for strategic behavior

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Alternate Conception of Irrationality

- Previously: Terrorism is completely compatible with rational preferences
- Different concern: Terrorists are irrational because they do not respond to incentives
 - Test: Are terrorist attacks completely random? Or do attacks occur more frequently when we would expect them to?

"On Welfare and Terrorism" (Burgoon): social spending is correlated with less terrorism

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- "Democracy, Foreign Policy, and Terrorism" (Savun and Phillips): greater foreign policy activity is correlated with more terrorism

 "...Poorly Managed Political Conflict and Terrorism in India" (Piazza): unaddressed grievances are correlated with more terrorism

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- "Sabotaging the Peace" (Kydd and Walter): attacks are clustered around peace talks

 "Why Respecting Physical Integrity Rights Reduces Terrorism" (Walsh and Piazza): greater physical integrity rights is correlated with less terrorism

- "Why Respecting Physical Integrity Rights Reduces Terrorism" (Walsh and Piazza): greater physical integrity rights is correlated with less terrorism
- "Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination, and Domestic Terrorism" (Piazza): economic discrimination is correlated with more terrorism

Strategic Problems

 If terrorists did not respond to incentives, how do we explain how groups survive for so long?

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American Airlines # 11



Al Sugami



Waleed M. Alshehri Wail M. Alshehri





Alomari



Atta

American Airlines #77



Moqed



Almihdhar



Nawof Alhazmi



Salom Alhazmi



Hanjour

United Airlines # 93



Alghamdi



Al Haznawi



Alnami



Jarrah

United Airlines # 175



Al-Shehhi



Alghamdi



Al Qadi Banihammad



Hamza Alghamdi



Alshehri

Not all organizations that use suicide bombings are religious.



Not all suicide bombers are male.

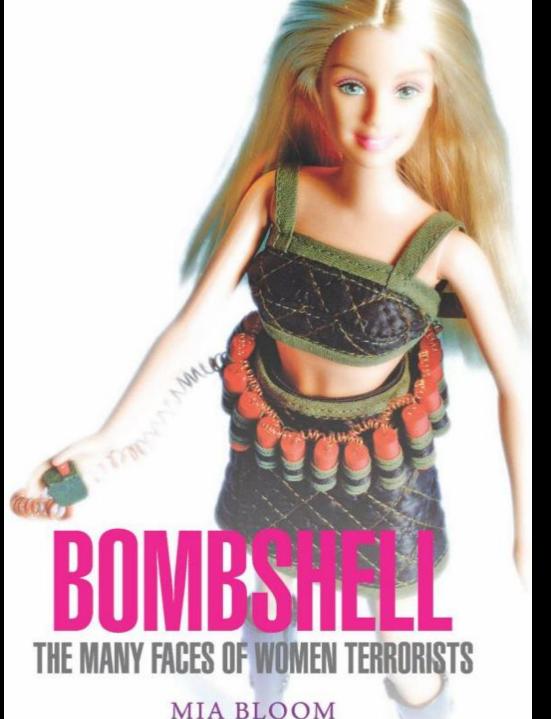




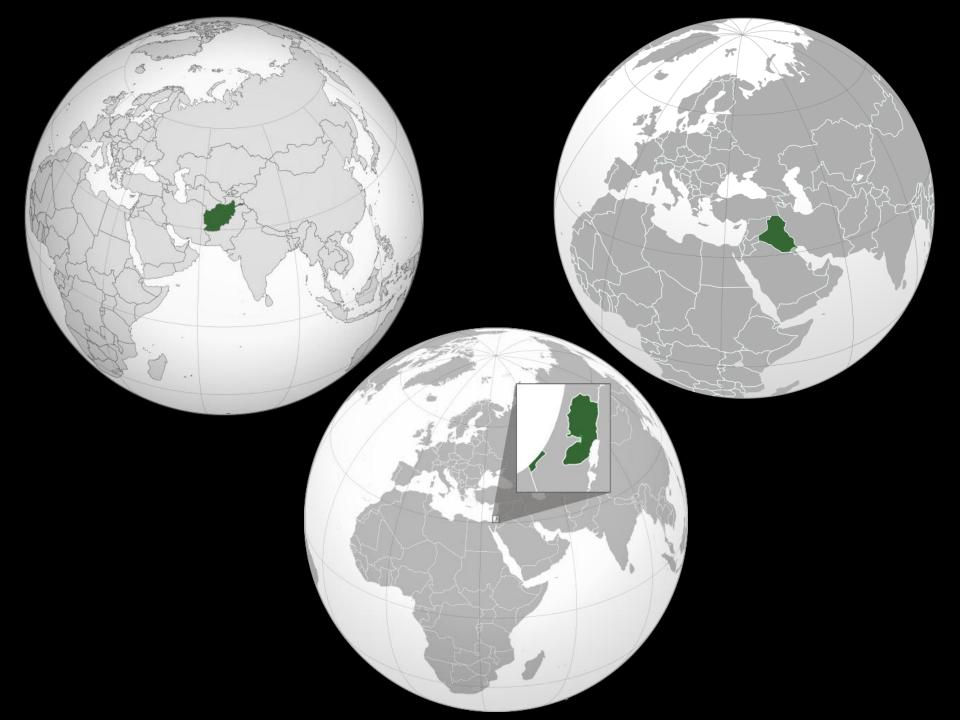
Women and Terrorism



MIA BLOOM



Terrorists usually aren't dirt poor.



American Airlines # 11 American Airlines #77









Waleed M. Alshehri Wail M. Alshehri

Alomari

Atta









Moqed

Almihdhar

Nawof Alhazmi

Salom Alhazmi

Hanjour

United Airlines # 93









Alghamdi

Al Haznawi

Alnami

Jarrah

United Airlines # 175









Al-Shehhi Alghamdi

Al Qadi Banihammad Hamza Alghamdi

Alshehri

Terrorists tend to come from poor regions, but terrorists tend not to be poor.

Competency

- Suppose you are a terrorist commander
- You only want to commit one attack right now
- Do you send the poor guy or the middle class guy?
 - Who is smarter?
 - Who has better access?
 - Who can blend in better?

Signaling

- Terrorists work alone, without direct observation
 - Principal-agent problem
- Organizations want to hire most motivated individuals
 - Who is more motivated: the poor guy or the rich guy?

Richer terrorists kill more people.

Improving economic opportunities might not reduce terrorism.

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Why Become a Suicide Terrorist?

- Lack of opportunity is not a good explanation
- There are strategic and tactical advantages to suicide terrorism
- A very small percentage of people with extreme grievance/ideological preferences are willing to exploit those advantages

Strategic Advantage

- Long-term goal of terrorism: convince political opponent that sustained costs are not worth the policy in dispute
 - Having operatives commit suicide is also a costly signal of things to come

Tactical Advantages

- Planning an attack is harder when you also need to plan an escape
- Suicide bombers are smart bombs
- Non-suicide attackers leave evidence behind

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Provocation

- Terrorist organizations commit attacks hoping to provoke large-scale, counterproductive responses
 - Economic and military costs
 - Recruitment problems

Provocation

• Puzzle: Why would governments choose counterterrorism policies that backfire?

Domestic Explanations

- Policymakers do stupid things
- Rally 'round the flag effects
- Diversionary incentives
- Purges

Information Problems

- Targeted governments know less about how sympathetic audience will respond
- Who is less likely to attack: a robust group or a weak group?

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Puzzle

- Terrorist attacks are not randomly distributed
 - Clumping around peace talks
 - What does this say about terrorists' responsiveness to incentives?
 - Why this clumping?

Preferences

- Home and foreign state negotiate
- Foreign state wants peace
- Foreign is unsure whether home wants peace

Preferences

- If Home wants peace, it will actively police extremists within its country
 - Foreign thus does not want peace with uncooperative Home types

Preferences

- Extremists always want conflict
 - Need to convince Foreign that Home is uncooperative regardless of Home's true type

Monitoring Problem

- Policing is not fully effective
 - Even if a peace-loving Home tries to stop extremists, it might fail
- Policing effort is hard to observe
 - Foreign can thus only make inferences based on whether an attack has occurred, not on what Home did to (possibly) stop an attack

Updating

- Suppose no attack occurred
 - What should Foreign infer about Home?

Updating

- Suppose an attack occurred
 - What should Foreign infer about Home?

Updating

- Suppose an attack occurred
 - What should Foreign infer about Home?
 - It cannot know for sure that Home is uncooperative
 - But its belief that Home is uncooperative increases

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Puzzle

- After an attack, multiple groups often claim responsibility
- If survival favors the clandestine, why not just keep quiet?

Organizational Conflict

- Terrorist organizations need foot soldiers and donations to keep the business running
- Both are scarce



Outbidding

 When multiple competing groups exist, each terrorist organization has incentive to outbid the other by increasing quantity and intensity of attacks

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Incentives

- Who benefits from offensive attacks against terrorist organizations? Who pays the costs?
- Who benefits from defensive measures to stop terrorist attacks? Who pays the costs?