

PS 0500: Terrorism

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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

- 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?

Terror Definition Features

1. Violence/force (83.5%)
2. Political (65%)
3. Fear/terror emphasized (51%)
4. Threat (47%)
5. (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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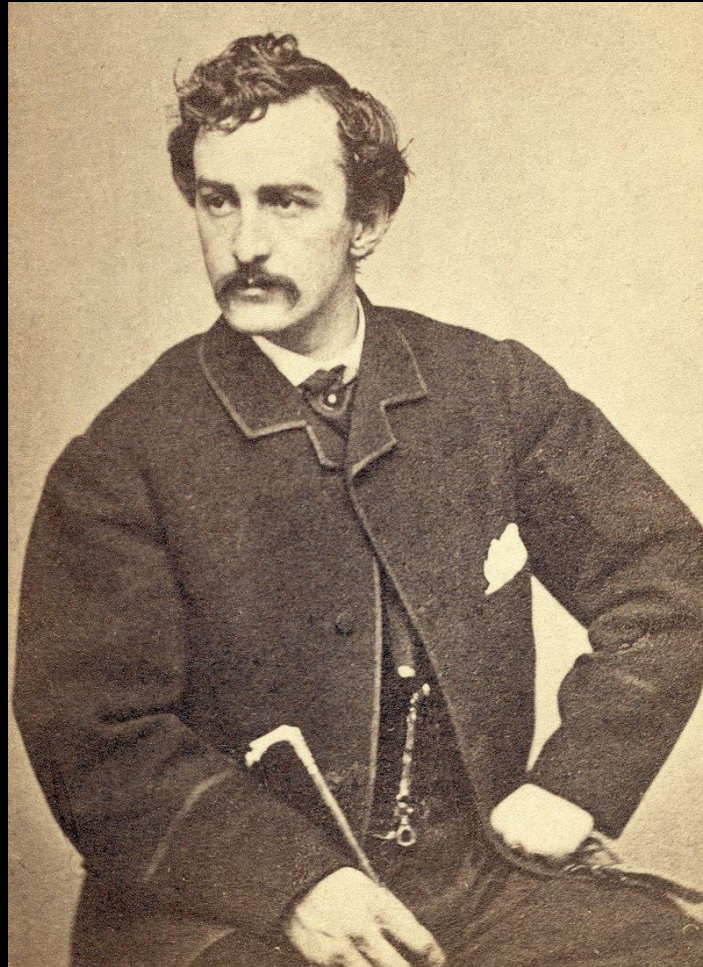
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Distilling...

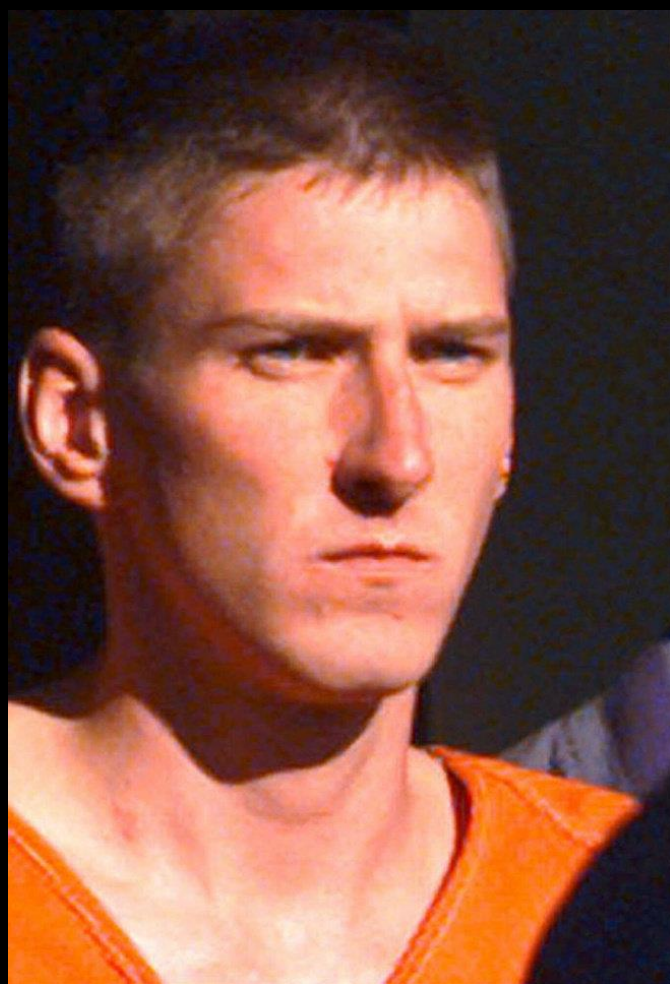
1. Violence
2. Political goal
3. Fear/victim-target differentiation













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Rationality

- Common criticism of analysis 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 \neq 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 to being an ant farmer. And I prefer blowing myself up to kill five people than being an ant farmer.”

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

- 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?

Correlates of Terrorism

- “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

Correlates of Terrorism

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

Correlates of Terrorism

- “...Poorly Managed Political Conflict and Terrorism in India” (Piazza): unaddressed grievances are correlated with more terrorism
- “Sabotaging the Peace” (Kydd and Walter): attacks are clustered around peace talks

Correlates of Terrorism

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

Correlates of 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 Suqami



Waleed M. Alshehri



Wail M. Alshehri



Alomari



Atta

American Airlines
77



Moqed



Almihdhar



Nawaf Alhazmi



Salem 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

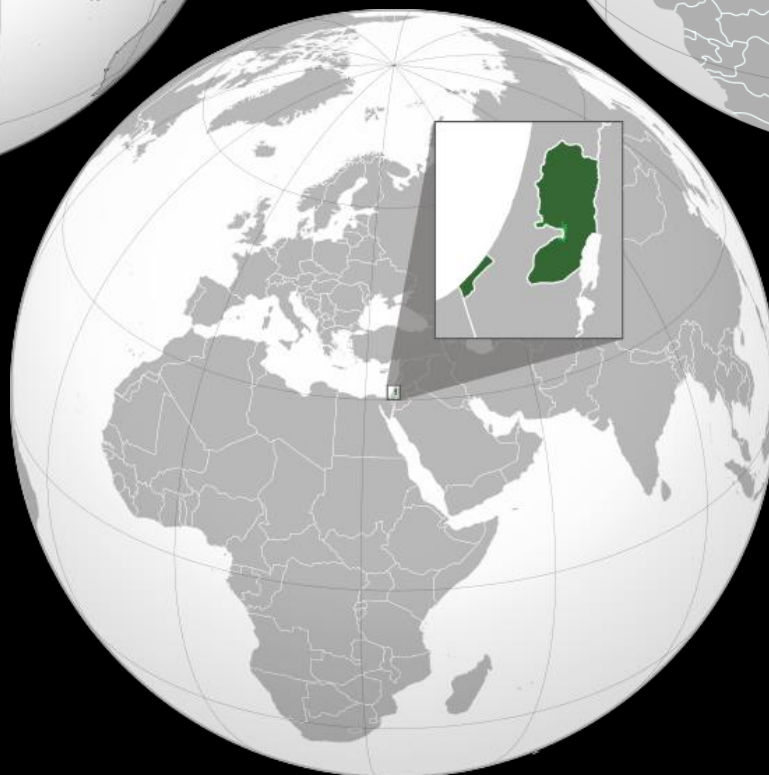
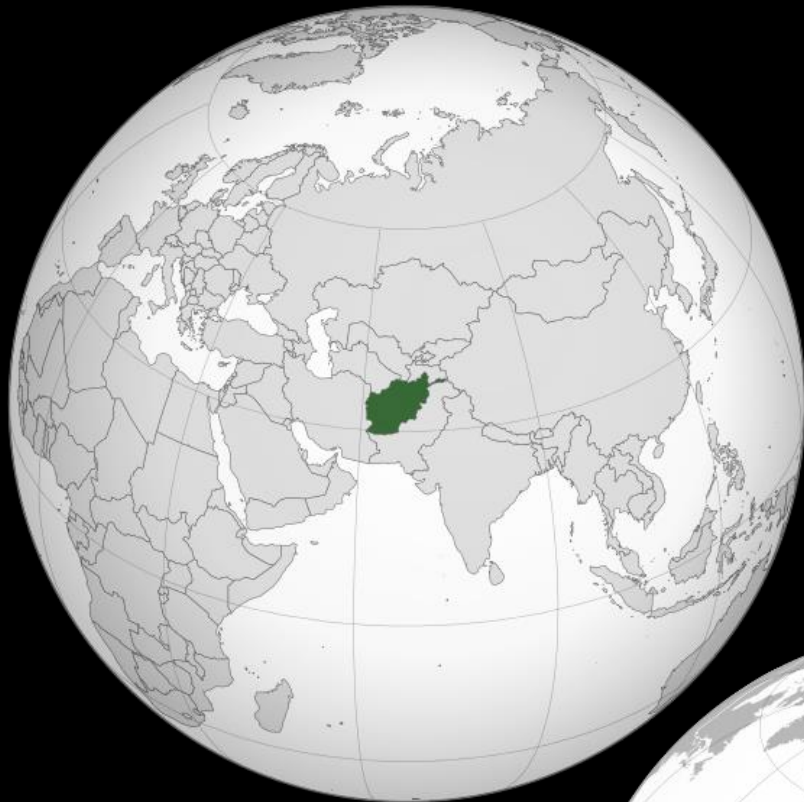


Not all suicide bombers are male

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ



Terrorists usually aren't dirt poor



American Airlines
11



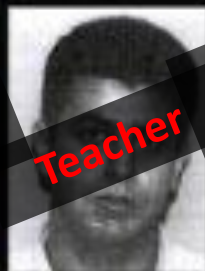
Law
Student

Al Suqami



College
Student

Waleed M. Alshehri



Teacher

Wail M. Alshehri



College
Grad,
Security
Guard

Alomari



Architect

Atta

American Airlines
77



Law
Student

Moqed



?

Almihdhar



?

Nawaf Alhazmi



Alcoholic,
Thief

Salem Alhazmi



U Arizona,
Pilot

Hanjour

United Airlines
93



College
Student

Alghamdi



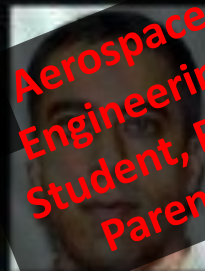
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Al Haznawi



College
Student

Alnami



Aerospace
Engineering
Student, Rich
Parents

Jarrah

United Airlines
175



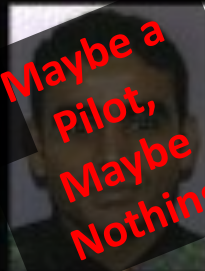
College
Student

Al-Shehhi



College
Student

Alghamdi



Maybe a
Pilot,
Maybe
Nothing

Al Qadi Balthammad



?

Hamza Alghamdi



College
Dropout

Alshehri

Terrorists tend to come from relatively 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

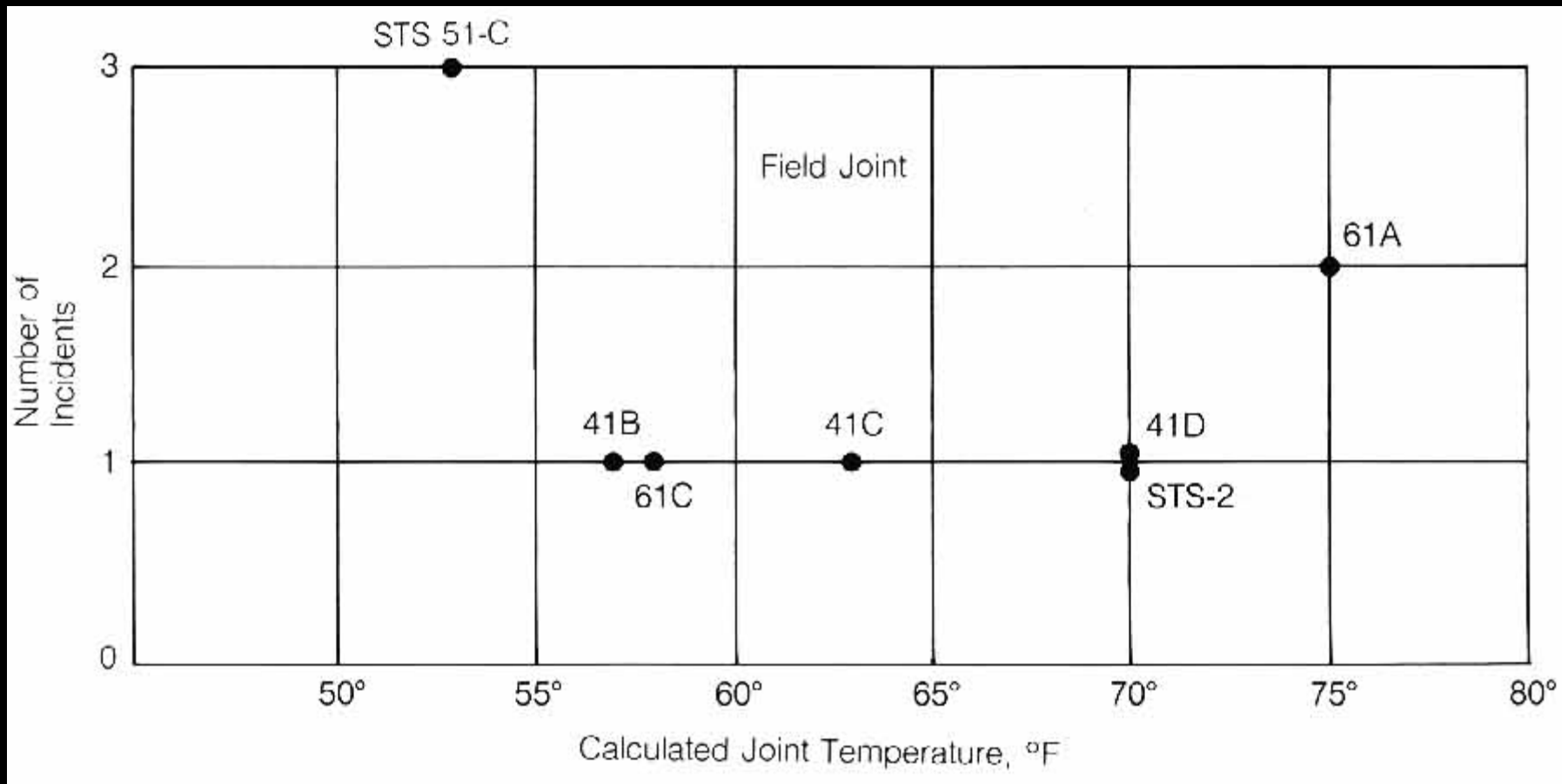
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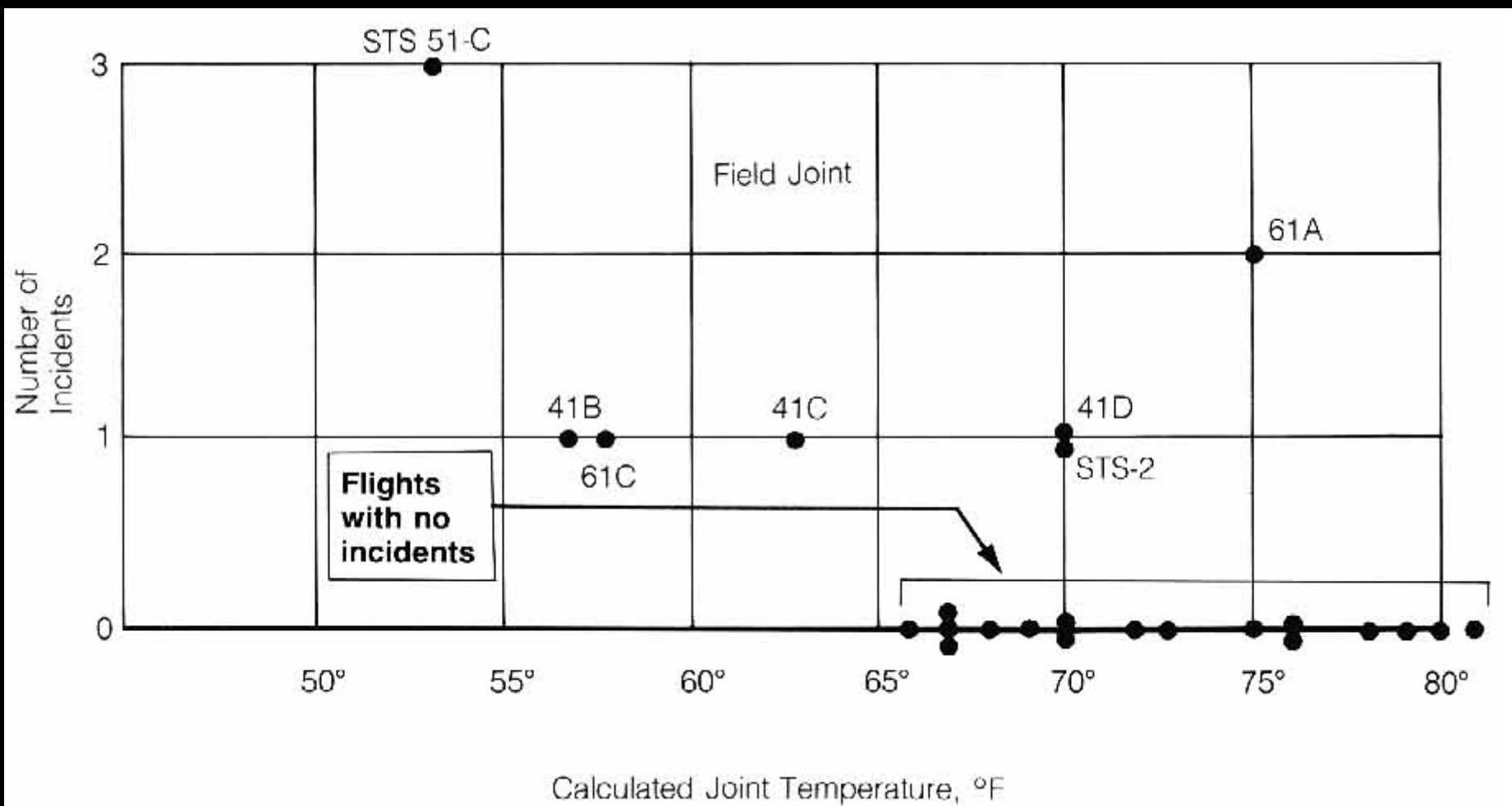
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Suicide Terrorism Campaigns, 1980—2001

- Hezbollah/Hamas vs Israel
- LTTE vs Sri Lanka
- PKK vs Turkey
- Al Qaeda vs US
- Chechen Rebels vs Russia
- Kashmiri Rebels vs India

An investigation at the local hospital has revealed that all patients who died there over the last month consumed large quantities of dihydrogen monoxide over their lifetimes. The CDC is now weighing whether to ban the chemical.





Selecting on the Dependent Variable

- If you want to know what causes x , you cannot only look at incidents of x and see common traits
 - Need both incidents of x and not x
 - Then look at what is more common in cases of x and less common in cases of not x

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

Strategic Advantage

- Long-term goal of terrorism: convince political opponent that sustained costs are not worth the policy in dispute
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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
 - But why?

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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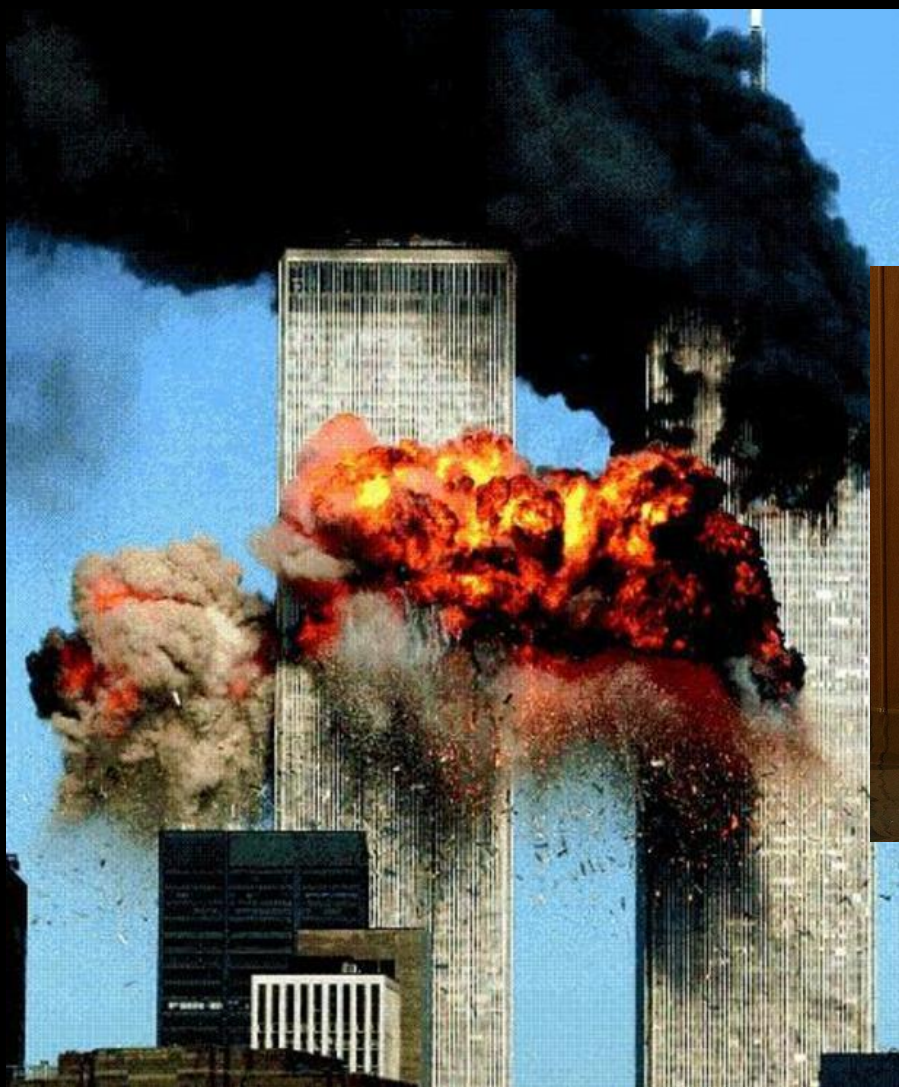
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Puzzle

- 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?