Chapter 12
New Terrorism and Media

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ABSTRACT

New terrorism has been recently considered a new type of terrorism. The terrorism characteristics that have instigated the introduction of the term stem from the modern evolutions in most aspects of terrorism, such as its organizational structure, financing, recruitment, training, motivations, tactics, reach, targets, and lethality. This chapter reviews discussions surrounding new terrorism, explains its key characteristics and features, and demonstrates the dual role of the media and information technologies. Distinctions from conventional terrorism recognize it as loose, decentralized cell-based networks, using high-intensity weapons, religiously and vaguely motivated, using asymmetrical methods for maximum casualties, and highly skillful in using new media and information technologies. Moreover, the most critical features focus on how the functioning of new terrorism adapts new media technologies, which in turn, contribute to all of its aspects. However, it is concluded that regardless of the label—new or old—attention should be focused on the act and the actors, whether the ways they function utilize the conventional or adapt with the most recent technologies, media, and weapons, and most crucially, recognizing how fast and efficient terrorists are in utilizing the most advanced media and information technologies.

INTRODUCTION

It is debated that terrorism in our modern era may have a “new-look.” Terrorism, it is claimed, has entered a new phase, which is referred to as the “new terrorism.” At present, terrorism demonstrates new characteristics that have instigated the exploration and the adaptation of the new term (e.g., Adkins, 2013; Burnett & Whyte, 2005; Copeland, 2001; Duyvesteijn, 2004; Grover, 2002; Gurr & Cole, 2005; Field, 2009; Hoffmann, 1999; Kurtulus, 2011; Laqueur, 2000; Lesser et al., 1999; Martin, 2006; Mockaitis, 2007; Murphy, 2009; Neumann, 2009; Otenyo, 2004; Sandole, 2004; Simon, 2003; Spalek, 2010; Spencer, 2006, 2011; Zimmermann, 2004). The question of whether or not contemporary terrorism should be titled “new terrorism” is contested among many scholars. The idea of the new terrorism has prompted increased concern, scholarly debates, and governmental interventions (Spencer, 2011). Although this shift in nomenclature continues to be debated, it is said to be due to an evolution in this form of violence.

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Debates involve discussions on how terrorism today has new actors, targets, motivations, weapons, and organizational structures (to name a few), warranting the need for further research and analysis (e.g., Copeland, 2001; Otenyo, 2004). This chapter reviews the discussions around the emergence of new terrorism, explaining the key characteristics and features that have been attributed to terrorism labeling it new in most of its aspects and the ways it functions. It focuses on the dual role of the media and information technologies being both highly used by modern terrorists in almost all aspects and weapons of terrorism and influential in shaping the ways modern terrorists function.

WHAT IN NEW TERRORISM IS “NEW”

A few characteristics and features have been most common in terrorism in recent decades; hence, some tend to label it as “new.” Terrorism is argued now to be new in structure, financing, recruitment, training, motivations, tactics, reach, targets, and lethality.

New terrorism is decentralized (Adkins, 2013). New terrorists are less-cohesive organizational entities (Hoffman, 1999). Traditionally, terrorists have relied on state support and sponsorship (Jenkins, 2006; Spencer, 2006). Recently, the financing of terrorism most commonly comes from illegal sources such as credit card fraud, video piracy, drug trafficking, legal business investments, and donations from wealthy charities and individuals (Spencer, 2006). New terrorism is no longer limited to traditional organizations that are exercised by conflicts within specific nations; instead the battleground for new terrorist groups is global (Mythen, 2013). Targets of the new terrorism are also more global in reach (Burnett & Whyte, 2005; Lesser, 1999) and tend to be indiscriminate (Duyvesteyn, 2004). New terrorism is more dangerous and more difficult to counter than conventional terrorism in that it has a new network structure, facilitated by information technologies, amateur personnel, willingness to cause mass casualties perhaps by using chemical, biological, nuclear, or radiological weapons, and most importantly is no longer in need of state-sponsorship (Tucker, 2001).

Gus Martin (2006) summarizes the most distinguishing characteristics of new terrorism as follow:

- Loose, cell-based networks with minimal lines of command and control
- Desired acquisition of high-intensity weapons and weapons of mass destruction [WMD]
- Politically vague, religious, or mystical motivations
- “Asymmetrical” methods that maximize casualties
- Skillful use of the Internet and manipulation of the media (Martin, 2006, p. 10)

Key characteristics in the weapons and tactics of new terrorism are “the threat of [WMD], indiscriminate targeting, and intentionally high casualty rates”; for instance, the attacks of 9/11 in the United States; March 11, 2004, in Spain; July 7, 2005, in Great Britain; and July 23, 2005, in Saudi Arabia resulted in high rates of victims (Martin, 2006, p. 34). As well, the targets of new terrorism are now different and shifting away from particular states and toward specific ideologies; the new terrorism has a global reach and is considered lethal (Burnett & Whyte, 2005). New terrorists are characterized as “highly funded, technologically articulate groups capable of inflicting devastating damage to a wide range of targets” (Gordon & Ford, 2003, p. 9).

The 9/11 attacks sparked increased attention to terrorism and its functioning in the new millennium. This continues to captivate scholars, politicians, and policymakers who agree that terrorism has changed and entered a new reign
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