Chapter 1
Types of Terrorism

Gus Martin
California State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Terrorist typologies are descriptive classifications explaining the quality of political violence arising from distinct political and social environments. Although many terrorist typologies are accepted without controversy by analysts, some are the subject of definitional debate. Accepted typologies include the following: The New Terrorism, state terrorism, dissident terrorism, religious terrorism, ideological terrorism, and international terrorism. Sub-classifications of accepted typologies include nationalist terrorism, ethno-national terrorism, and racial terrorism. In contradistinction to accepted typologies, other classifications are conceptually “cutting-edge” and the subject of definitional debate. These include gender-selective terrorism and criminal terrorism (often referred to as narco-terrorism). Nevertheless, there is growing recognition that gender-selective and criminal terrorism are features of the modern global terrorist environment. This chapter will identify and discuss terrorist typologies in the modern era, including the emerging recognition of newly defined typologies.

INTRODUCTION

Security experts and scholars in the modern era have defined and described terrorism within the context of systematic typological classifications (e.g., Barkan & Snowden; Eherenfeld, 1990; Hoffman, 2006; Lacqueur, 1999; Marsden & Schmid, 2011; Purpura, 2007; Rubenstein, 1974; Tucker, 2000; White, 2009; Zafirovski & Rodeheaver, 2013). Typological classifications or typologies have been used across disciplines as a means of organizations apparently related phenomena (Marsden & Schmid, 2011). The identification of patterns and organization of things and ideas is beneficial in many regards, a primary utility of typology “is the greater conceptual clarity they allow” (Marsden & Schmid 2011, pp: 159).

Prior to departing into this discussion on the categorization of terrorism typologies, it is important to emphasize the multifaceted nature of terrorism and its typologies. That is, not only does the term “terrorism” vary depending on geographical, political, or cultural factors (to name a few), the ways in which typologies within this definition are organized are also versatile. Thus, despite the definitional debate that exists surrounding the lines of categorization, this chapter explores eight terrorist typologies, which will be explained within the following contexts:

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The New Terrorism: The modern terrorist environment that arose during the end of the 20th century, culminating in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City. The New Terrorism is characterized by the threat of mass casualty attacks from dissident terrorist organizations, new and creative organizational configurations, transnational religious solidarity, and redefined moral justifications for political violence.

State Terrorism: Terrorism “committed by governments against perceived enemies. State terrorism can be directed externally against adversaries in the international domain or internally against domestic enemies” (Martin, 2016: 31).

Dissident Terrorism: Terrorism “committed by nonstate movements and groups against governments, ethno-national groups, religious groups, and other perceived enemies” (Martin, 2016: 31).

Religious Terrorism: “Terrorism motivated by an absolute belief that an otherworldly power has sanctioned—and commanded—the application of terrorist violence for the greater glory of the faith. Religious terrorism is usually conducted in defense of what believers consider to be the one true faith” (Martin, 2016: 32).

Ideological Terrorism: Terrorism motivated by political systems of belief (ideologies), which champion the self-perceived inherent rights of a particular group or interest in opposition to another group or interest. The system of belief incorporates theoretical and philosophical justifications for violently asserting the rights of the championed group or interest.

International Terrorism: “Terrorism that spills over onto the world’s stage. Targets are selected because of their value as symbols of international interests, either within the home country or across state boundaries” (Martin, 2016: 32).

Criminal Dissident Terrorism: This type of terrorism is solely profit-driven, and can be some combination of profit and politics. For instance, traditional organized criminals accrue profits to fund their criminal activity and for personal interests, while criminal-political enterprises acquire profits to sustain their movement (Martin, 2016: 32).

Gender-Selective Terrorism: Terrorism directed against an enemy population’s men or women because of their gender. Systematic violence is directed against men because of the perceived threat posed by males as potential soldiers or sources of opposition. Systematic violence is directed against women to destroy an enemy group’s cultural identity or terrorize the group into submission.

While these eight typologies strives to provide a comprehensive and contemporary discussion of typologies, it is important to note that this list is not exhaustive or conclusive. That is, terrorism is ever-changing—thus, patterns and the task of categorization is constantly in motion.

THE NEW TERRORISM

A New Terrorism has come to typify the terrorist environment in the modern era (e.g., Lesser et al., 1999; Mockaitis, 2008; Neumann, 2009). It is distinguishable from previous environments because the New Terrorism promotes abstract goals and objectives, engages in mass casualty attacks, seeks to impose extensive social and psychological disorder, and threatens to obtain and wield weapons of mass destruction. The New Terrorism has also adopted creative organizational systems, including independent, non-hierarchical, cell-based networks. Using these core features, modern terrorists regularly engage in
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