The Technology of Terror:
Accounting for the Strategic Use of Terrorism[*]

Christopher K. Butler
The University of New Mexico
and
Scott Gates
Centre for the Study of Civil War, PRIO and
Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

Abstract. To comprehend why a group would intentionally target civilians, we need to understand why other groups do not. In this chapter, we argue that disgruntled groups face three main choices when addressing their dissatisfaction: suffering a disadvantageous peace, engaging in unconventional warfare, or engaging in conventional warfare. We further disaggregate the choice of unconventional warfare into terrorism and guerrilla warfare. By focusing on asymmetrical aspects of the problem and the strategic interactions between the insurgent group, its complicit public, and the superior force of the state, we disentangle the technology of terror.

"The most disadvantageous peace is better than the most just war." Erasmus: Adagia, 1508

"A bad peace is even worse than war." Tacitus: Annals, iii, ca. 110

As the dust settled from the First Gulf War, American troops remained stationed in Saudi Arabia. Osama bin Laden—already exiled for his outspoken dissent regarding the stationing of American troops on Saudi soil even to defend the country against the possibility of Iraqi invasion—decided that he would take on the military might of the United States. Obviously guerrilla tactics—of which terrorism is a part—would be required. Bin Laden had seen the success of such tactics against the Soviet army in Afghanistan. In fact, bin Laden largely achieved his immediate objective when the United States relocated the bulk of its Arabian Peninsula forces to Qatar in 2003. Confidence built on success should not to be overestimated.

Given Osama bin Laden's motivation, experience and resources, it seems patently obvious that he would follow through on his intent. While many question the moral and ethical justification behind al Queda's war against the United States, we turn our attention to the flip side of the question. Why is it that all discontented groups with some ability to hurt their enemies *do not* turn to guerrilla tactics? For a group faced with certain (if eventual) defeat in a conventional war, their leaders must weigh the options of enduring peace on disadvantageous terms and of prosecuting an unconventional war.

In war, the more powerful does not always win. Sometimes the weaker party defeats the side with the bigger and better equipped army. History tells of many cases of Davids defeating Goliaths; in the later half of the twentieth century alone, a number of wars stand out: Indonesian Independence (1946-1954), Indochina (1947-1949), Algeria (1954-1962), Vietnam (1965-1975), Afghanistan (1978-1989), First Chechen (1994-1996) (Mack, 1975; Paul, 1994; Arreguín-Toft,

2001). Military strategists explain this phenomenon by focusing on the strategic adoption of non-conventional tactics and strategies by the weaker side so as to put the conflict on a more even footing. In fact, systematic analysis of wars over time demonstrates that strategic factors play a significant role in determining victory in battle (Stam, 1996; Arreguín-Toft, 2001; Rotte and Schmidt, 2003).

Choices in the face of asymmetry

Guerrilla warfare and terrorism are common methods of overcoming superior troop strength and technology. In this chapter we discuss how terrorism addresses this asymmetry and, more importantly, what the limits of terrorism as an effective strategy may be. We confront this problem in terms of strategic choices in which there are at least three actors: a weak insurgent group fighting for some political purpose, a population that the group is fighting for, and a superior force that the group is fighting against. As we are trying to figure out the choices of the insurgent group, we confine our discussion of the population and the superior force to choices made in reaction to the choices of the insurgent group. These choices, in turn, affect the decision calculus of the insurgent group.

Unconventional warfare takes place when a vastly inferior force compensates for its relative weakness by engaging the superior power in such a way as to minimize the differences in capability. However, the choice to engage in unconventional warfare when the tables are so stacked against the inferior force is but one of many that the insurgent group could take. We simplify the choice set of the weak group to three classes of alternatives: suffering a disadvantageous peace, engaging in unconventional warfare (including terrorism and guerrilla warfare), or engaging in conventional warfare. These alternatives will guide the rest of the

discussion of this chapter. Before delving into them, however, we first discuss the other actors and their choices.

Any insurgent organization fights for and to a large extent derives power from a complicit public. The population the insurgent group is fighting for is presumed to be a heterogeneous group of individuals from which the weak group is comprised. The population is important to the weak group for recruits, material support and shelter, and immaterial legitimacy and public opinion. The choices of individuals within this population with respect to each of these things affects the strength of the group in absolute terms and, indirectly, in relative terms as well. We presume that the weak group is primarily made up of recruits from the heterogeneous population who feel most strongly that peace is disadvantageous and that the leadership of the group have the most intense feelings of all.[1] We also assume that recruits can desert the ranks of the insurgent group as perceptions of the group change within the population.

The superior force—which is often a state—is depicted by at least some in the population as an oppressor imposing a disadvantageous peace. The superior force is not likely to share this perception of itself. Instead, it is likely to perceive itself as the sole legitimate political actor in a territory who is merely trying to govern the best that it can. How the superior force governs affects the opinion of the population toward it. Among the other choices of the superior force is the suppression of rebellion targeted at the insurgent group. While the members of the insurgent group know who they are and the individuals of the public have relatively reliable information regarding who are members of the insurgent group, the superior force is hindered in its suppression efforts by having high uncertainty about who are members and who are not.

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[1] Volunteer recruits would have the strong feelings assumed above. Forced recruits may well be conscripts of convenience who do not (initially) sympathize with group goals (Gates, 2002).

As the concept of a disadvantageous peace is central to our argument, we turn now to a discussion of that. "Unfair" distributions of resources, or at least allocations that are perceived to be unfair across groups, often serve as the basis for conflict. Disparity between groups, or horizontal inequality, in fact, underlies many civil wars (Østby, 2005; Murshed and Gates, 2005).[2] If the superior force knowingly extracts an unfair allocation, one might argue that that it should expect resistance. However, what constitutes fair and unfair is a question open to interpretation. Inequitable distribution of resources does not deterministically lead to armed civil conflict. As Butler, Gates, and Leiby (2005) argue, there may be any number of reasons for collective income being divided unequally *without* conflict. Proportional divisions are often regarded as the "fairest" outcome. "Indeed, this notion is the fundamental principle underlying proportionally representative political systems" (Butler, Gates, and Leiby, 2005: 4).

Another feature of "unfairness" is less tangible and relies on in-group/out-group psychology. The greater the degree of dissimilarity between groups, the easier it is for insurgent leaders to appeal to the complicit public for support (Gates, 2002). This type of ethnic or ideological proximity makes it easier for insurgent leaders to demonize the superior force regarding even small injustices.

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[2] Many studies have attempted to estimate the link between inequality and civil conflict, but have failed to find robust statistical evidence of any relationship. The problem is that inequality in these studies is operationalized at the level of the individual, but insurgency is organized at the level of the group not the individual. Studies of horizontal inequality, in contrast, have found much stronger and robust relationship between this form of inequality and civil conflict.

Logic and limitations of unconventional warfare

In choosing between a disadvantageous peace and unconventional warfare, we assume that that the option of prosecuting a conventional war has already been set aside. This may be due to an inherent inability to engage a significantly superior enemy or due to reverses in a conventional war that make continuing with conventional tactics unreasonable. There are important differences between conventional and unconventional war that highlight the disadvantages of guerrilla tactics.

In conventional war, each side has discernable territory and tactics involve extending one's own territory at the expense of one's enemy. This also implies, however, that each side can provide a degree of defense to its civilians. The absence of territorial demarcation within unconventional warfare implies both that the stronger side cannot guarantee the safety of its civilians and that the guerrillas cannot guarantee the safety of their compatriots. In fact, the superior force can do much to support peace by guaranteeing personal security for the general citizenry even if other aspects of the peace are biased (Gartner and Regan, 1996). It is no accident of history that the Basque in Spain were content to be ruled from Madrid prior to Franco's repression following the Spanish Civil War.

This lack of any provision of defense is a serious drawback to unconventional warfare when compared to conventional warfare and to a disadvantageous peace. In turn, it also affects recruiting and calculating the cost of war. Recruiting is affected in that potential guerrillas must recognize that their families will have an increased risk of harm if they join the war. In a conventional war, potential recruits can be sold on the notion that they are, in fact, defending their families by joining the war effort. By preventing an enemy from invading, one's family is generally spared the direct deprivations of war. In guerrilla war, however, a recruit's family may be intentionally targeted because of his involvement against the superior force. To the extent that the stronger side is

indiscriminate in its violence against sympathetic civilians, the recruit is not significantly increasing the odds of harm befalling them. This may make it easier for the weaker side to recruit (Gartner and Regan 1996; Kalyvas, 2003; Kalyvas, 2006). The more discriminating the stronger side, however, the larger this factor weighs on potential recruits.

There is a critical interaction between perceived inequalities, the actions of the insurgent group, and the reactions of the state. If the inequality is sustained by the state, especially if it is maintained by violence, the job of insurgent leaders is made even easier. "The danger is that itchy generals tire of talking and revert to seeking military solutions, becoming once again the [insurgents'] best recruiting sergeant" (*Economist*, February 17, 2007: 54). Because the superior force has difficulty ascertaining members of the insurgent group from the general public, it may target innocent civilians—inadvertently or intentionally—in its effort to suppress the rebellion. This may have a effect of increasing sympathy for the insurgent group (Gartner and Regan, 1996).

The use of violence against the civilian population is also an essential element of guerrilla warfare. The insurgent leaders target those within the civilian population who are sympathetic to the government side. A village in the proverbial guerrilla combat zone is controlled by government soldiers during the day and by insurgents at night. Non-uniformed and loosely organized, insurgents typically embed themselves in the civilian population, which serves to both sustain their activities as well as make it difficult for them to be detected. Unable to control territory outright (or at least where control of territory is fragmented), the state and insurgent group utilize violence directed at the civilian population. The state engages in violence directed at the civilian population believed to be harboring the insurgents. "Armed groups target civilians as they organize their militaries, solicit resources to sustain the fighting, build bases of popular support, and weaken the support networks of opposing groups" (Weinstein, 2007: 198). On top of such directed violence,

civil war is also associated with episodes of opportunistic violence, in which private revenge, blood feuds, as well as violent criminal activity such as robbery thrive in an environment of widespread violence (Kalyvas, 2003; King, 2004; Kalyvas, 2006; Weinstein, 2007). Instead of assuring the security of the civilians, violence against civilians becomes an inherent element of the conflict between the insurgents and the state.

The calculations of the cost of war are also affected by this lack of human security. The toll on civilian lives can be expected to be significantly greater for both sides when employing guerrilla tactics as compared to either conventional war or a disadvantageous peace.[3] To the extent that leaders care about this factor as opposed to their own agenda, a disadvantageous peace may be the lesser of two evils.

Another difference between conventional and unconventional war is the nature of the chain of command. Command and control is fairly rigid in conventional war. When shifting to guerrilla tactics, however, the chain of command weakens to a point where leaders may not have any real influence over their operational commanders. While the leaders may support a guerrilla war of hit-and-run tactics against explicitly military targets, the operational commanders may decide on their

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[3] Although it should be noted that in the case of conventional war involving the use of aerial bombardment, control of territory alone cannot guarantee security for the citizens. In fact, examining all wars since 1900, the war with the greatest number of battle casualties is the Second World War, followed by the Great War (WW I). Well below these two wars come the Vietnam War, Korean War, and Chinese Civil War. All involved extensive aerial bombardment. The number of casualties increases dramatically for a number of civil wars, if indirect casualties are included, but such indirect figures are largely guess work (Lacina and Gleditsch, 2005; Lacina, Gleditsch, and Russett, 2006).

own to attack softer civilian targets. While such an attack is safer and easier to execute, it has the potential drawback of reducing the legitimacy of the overall movement. Indeed, this type of reasoning may have been central to General Lee's decision not to have his troops disperse into the mountains at the end of the American Civil War (Winik, 2001).[4]

Unconventional war does have the benefit of being able to hurt the superior force perceived as imposing a disadvantageous peace. This approach appeals both to notions of justice and revenge. To the extent that individuals can get away with even small hurting actions without costs to themselves or their families, we should expect to observe them (Scott, 1976; 1985).[5] This then

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[4] The decision by Lee can be appreciated even more, if one keeps in mind that guerrilla warfare had been raging in some theaters, such as in Missouri, throughout the war. To be sure, the atrocities committed in Missouri and Kansas still horrify, and the distinction between terrorist and guerrilla blurs. Indeed, after the raid on Lawrence in which all the men of the town were killed, Kansans began to refer to Quantrill's Bushwackers as "Quantrill's Guerrillas". William T. Anderson, who had been a lieutenant of Quantrill, later formed his own gang, notorious for mutilating their victims (i.e., slicing off male organs and stuffing them in the mouths of those murdered) (Stiles, 2003). While these guerrilla bands occasionally attacked Union troops, they mostly preyed on civilians who sympathized with the Union.

[5] The problem with James Scott and others who adopt the moral economy perspective is that they fail to account for the organization of rebellion. Indeed, they fail to account for how a group of peasants overcome fundamental collective action problems. Without accounting for the fundamental institution for organizing human activity in rebellion (the insurgency group), it is no wonder that Scott fails to account for strategic behavior.

creates an opportunity for recruitment of such individuals into an organized opposition (Popkin, 1979; Lichbach, 1994).

The existence of an organized opposition usually implies motivations beyond hurting a common enemy. Leaders of such groups often have an ambition of taking over the state in its entirety or the secession of some distinct part of the country. Short of such goals, they may demand certain policy concessions that enhance their prestige and authority. As leaders of an armed group engaged in a violent struggle against the state, their primary problem is to recruit enough men to guarantee the viability of the group and to help insure the security of the leaders. To do this, leaders must convince people to join as well to remain within the groups. Through a mix of pecuniary and non-pecuniary incentives and punishment schemes, this can be achieved (Gates, 2002). Non-pecuniary rewards, such as ideology or notions of religious solidarity or common kinship serve as especially power motivations. The nature of this mix will depend largely on the resource endowment of the group (Weinstein, 2007).

Violence against the civilian population plays a critical role in recruitment. Because the insurgent members are often embedded within the civilian population, they posses an information advantage vis-à-vis the state. Given this condition of asymmetric information, one strategy often employed by insurgency groups is to provoke the government's army to engage in indiscriminate violence. The insurgent group can hence appeal to the resultant sense of a transgression of justice and recruit those now charged with a desire to seek revenge. The information asymmetry further plays to the advantage of the insurgent group who are able to target their punishment to individual collaborators rather than engaging in indiscriminate violence.

Choices within unconventional warfare

Kiras (2007: 166-7) argues that a critical difference between guerrilla warfare and terrorism is the ability to win militarily. While both are irregular tactics, guerrillas have sufficient strength that they can win the war outright if they win a pivotal battle or take a significant strategic location. Terrorists, in this argument, can never win their war.

We suggest that a more dynamic approach has to be considered before dismissing the terrorists' chances of winning so quickly. In particular, early local victories for guerrilla forces alter the pattern of recruitment. The side that employed guerrilla tactics and won in prominent wars—the American Revolution, Vietnam, the Cuban Revolution, and the Communist takeover of China in 1949 all come to mind—was a substantially enhanced side at war's end compared to their force strength at the beginning of the war. Indeed, in some of these cases, the war was eventually won on conventional terms. This suggests that insurgent leaders alter their decision regarding warfare strategy as circumstances change.

Terrorist groups that have made headway in their conflicts are, likewise, strengthened by their efforts. The other side of this distinction is what constitutes winning. Terrorist groups can get some of their smaller demands met, without formal bargaining with the target country. Ransoms are often paid, prisoners are sometimes exchanged, and—though rarely—superpowers remove their troops from holy territory. In such protracted conflicts, it is not clear that either side has the capability to completely subdue the other. This feature of warfare works between two territorial states, each of which must administer their territory to maintain their sovereign status. Irregulars of either type are not exercising sovereignty; hence, it cannot be taken away.

In some cases, groups that engage primarily in terrorist tactics can achieve victory. This is especially the case of an insurgency group engaged in conflict where media coverage is open. The

British gave up authority of Palestine partly in response to the terrorist violence of such groups as the Zionist Stern Gang. The British government at the time was not prepared to engage in on-going conflict with the Jewish population of Palestine, especially in the wake of the Holocaust. In this regard, the insurgency group raised the ante, which the occupying power was unwilling to match. Similarly, the British left Cyprus as a result of the EOKA guerrilla activity. Terrorist violence also can be effective more indirectly by maintaining visibility of the cause in the media through the employment of violence. The Provisional Irish Republican Army is not posed to sit in government in Northern Ireland directly because of their terrorist violence, but the violence kept their issues in the media and high on the policymaking agenda, which eventually led to the present state of affairs.

This discussion suggests that the time horizons of insurgent leaders affect their strategic choice of warfare, though how exactly is less than clear. One could argue that General Lee had a very long time horizon when he made his decision to surrender his army to General Grant, but Lee also placed great weight on future Southern lives that would be lost by continued fighting. Another general may have had an equally long time horizon but placed great weight on winning eventually. Insurgent leaders with short time horizons, however, are likely to see any costs and any delays in reaching objectives as equally bad. Such "leaders" are less likely to pursue a long-term ideological struggle and more likely to be criminals pursuing easily attained economic gains. Even this type of leader, however, would seek the advantages of clothing his activities in political terms. This requires that the population perceives their situation as disadvantageous vis-à-vis the state and that they attribute legitimacy to the insurgent "leader". Given such a Robin-Hood effect, the leader may well start out a thief but becomes a hero. If that "hero" eventually wins, however, the public may find that they have helped set up a kleptocracy.

Logic and limitations of terrorism

Defining Terrorism

Terrorism, like murder, is a word laden with extreme pejorative connotations and, hence, is prone to rhetorical abuse. But at least with the case of murder, we can use the more neutral term, homicide—we don't talk about *justifiable murder*, instead we use the term, *justifiable homicide*. Unfortunately, we lack a more neutral term for terrorism. To avoid the tendency for one side's terrorist to be another's freedom fighter and to engage in an analytical discourse about the phenomenon, we must clearly define the term in neutral language. Given the lack of a universally accepted definition of terrorism, we employ the following definition: *Terrorism is a strategy designed to further a political agenda by a system of violence perpetrated by a non-state actor against noncombatant targets thereby instilling fear and intimidation among a wider audience.*

A number of assumptions underlie this definition. First as a strategy, terrorism is viewed to be an act based inherently on intentional choices, subject to the principles of utility maximization. In other words, terrorism is a rational choice. Furthermore, as a strategy, "the ability of one participant to gain his ends is dependent to an important degree on the choices or decisions that the other participant will make" (Schelling, 1960: 5).[6] Accounting for such strategic interaction is the fundamental element of game theory—the method of analysis that lies behind the arguments made

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[6] As a strategy, terrorism is more than a tactic. The specific method in which an act of terrorism is carried out is a tactic. An example of a terrorist tactic would be the taking control of a fully fueled passenger airplane and flying it into a building. Conventional military tactics include frontal assaults, flanking maneuvers, encirclement, use of overwhelming force, trench warfare, ambushes, and myriad others.

in this paper.[7] Military historian, Liddell Hart's definition of military strategy follows in this line, "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy" (Reiter, 1999: 367).

Second, the underlying motivation is political. We thereby rule out sadistically killing people "just for the fun of it". Ideological and religious motivations are subsumed as being fundamentally political. Fundamentally, terrorism is a strategy of coercion. Violence and the threat of violence are employed to coerce political change.

Third, noncombatants are the immediate target. Attacks on military personnel such as al Qaeda's attack on the USS Cole in 2000 or the Hezbollah attacks on the US Marines and French paratroopers in Lebanon in 1983 are not terrorist attacks. The fact that the same groups target vulnerable military targets as well as softer civilian ones is merely indicative of their overall unconventional strategy. However, this distinction in targeting is one that we return to later.

Fourth, a broader audience serves as the ultimate target of terrorism than just the complicit public. This notion of a broader audience presumes a causal logic underlying the motivation, such that the terrorist *act* aimed at the immediate target leads to an *effect* of terrorizing a broader population, ultimately inducing political *change*. By creating a broad psychology of fear, the coercive threat of terrorist violence is made much more effective. In fact, the widespread environment of fear—the *effect* of terrorism—is much more of a threat to a state than the actual costs of the actual terrorist *act*.[8] Indeed, this larger effect belies the central logic of terrorism.[9]

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[7] See Sandler and Arce (2003) for an overview of the applications of game theory to terrorism.

[8] We are indebted to Morten Bergsmo for drawing our attention to the distinction between terrorist *acts* and the *effects* of terrorism.

By and large, these assumptions will not attract too much controversy. What is divisive is the one point remaining in our definition. That is, who is the perpetrator of terrorism? Our definition identifies the actor, as a non-state actor. This is consistent with the mass media and general public use of the term; terrorism is an action committed by a non-state actor with an intention of altering the status quo. In terms of criminal law, the legal definition of terrorism is also typically restricted to non-state actors only.[10]

There is some irony to this convention. In its original usage, terrorism explicitly referred to the actions taken by the state.[11] Etymologically the term derives from the French word, *terrorisme,*

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[9] Kalyvas (2004) distinguishes between indiscriminate and discriminate violence; we do not disagree with the importance of this distinction, but argue that what is important is not the actual act of violence, but the effect. And if the effect of a discriminate form of violence is to create terror in general, the effect is indistinguishable from indiscriminate violence which also leads to general state of terror.

[10] Then again, three defendants in the Nuremberg trials were found guilty of terrorism perpetrated by the Nazi state (Greve, 2003: 82). In fact, in contrast to a neutral definition that we seek to develop for analytical purposes, laws are inherently normative and are designed with the purpose of protecting interests—the political order, the integrity of the state, or the innocent, etc.

[11] Of course states commit acts of terror regularly. In fact, states are more likely to be the perpetrators of violence against civilians than any other political organization. In the twentieth century more people have died at the hands of their own government than have died from attacks from enemy governments (i.e. interstate war) or from terrorism committed by non-state actors (Rummel, 2005).

regarding the Reign of Terror in Revolutionary France (Harper, 2001).[12] Terror as justified by

Robespierre and applied by the Jacobins was used to destroy the old system as an inextricable

aspect of the revolution, through which terror and virtue were coupled (Rapoport 1982: xiii -xiv;

Hoffman, 1998). "*Terrorist* in the modern sense dates to 1947, especially in reference to Jewish

tactics against the British in Palestine—earlier it was used of extremist revolutionaries in Russia in

1866" (Harper, 2001).[13]

Given our definition of terrorism, a terrorist group is thus an organization that engages in

terrorist activities against a state or several nation-states. Hence, a terrorist organization is an

insurgency group engaged in civil conflict, but distinguished by its use of terrorism. Indeed, many

insurgent armies engage in terrorism as one of many strategies and techniques of violence. In this

regard, terrorism is not treated as a separate phenomenon or a distinct form of organized violence,

but rather as a particular strategy of insurgency, a strategy designed to overcome asymmetry.

Differences and similarities between terrorist and guerrilla strategies

Etymologically, guerrilla derives from the Spanish term *guerra* (or war) with the diminutive *-illa*

ending, which can be translated as "small war" (and directly translates to Clausewitz's *kleinkrieg*).

"The actual word 'guerrilla' came from the Spanish insurgency against France in the early 1800s"

(Winik, 2001: 149). We define guerrilla warfare as follows: *a method of unconventional warfare*

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[12] The first use of the word "terrorist" in English is most likely in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1795/1955).

[13] Indeed, the Zionist Stern Gang referred to themselves as "terrorists" much in the way Russian anarchists had done in the late 1800s (Nunberg, 2004).

by which small groups of combatants employ mobile and surprise tactics, such as ambushes, raids, sabotage, etc. in an effort to cripple the state, particularly the military capacity of the state.

Both terrorism and guerrilla warfare constitute two different strategic alternatives of unconventional warfare. Both aim to alter the political order. In its purest forms, terrorism would affect change indirectly through the creation of a state of fear among the general populace. Guerrilla tactics, in contrast, focus more directly on the infrastructure and agents of the state.

Theories of guerrilla warfare have been developed by many different military theorists and revolutionaries over the centuries, though the dominant philosophy has been Maoist. The three phases involve: first gain support of the population through propaganda and attacks on the state; second escalate violence, particularly aiming at the state's military capabilities; third shift to conventional warfare and capture the cities with the goal of seizing control of the country (Mao, 1937). This strategy has been widely adopted. Giap led the Viet Minh army in the Indo-china War against the French following Mao's strategy almost completely; it has also been employed by the Nepalese Maoists, Shining Path in Peru, FARC in Colombia, among others, have all explicitly followed Mao's strategic approach of guerrilla war. Other groups, such as the Naxalites in India present a Maoist political ideology, but have not explicitly followed a Maoist military strategy.

Terror plays a role in guerrilla warfare, but the focus of the strategy is primarily to weaken the capacity of the state. This is the principal difference between a pure terrorist line of attack and a guerrilla strategy. In general the demand on a group's resources will be higher with guerrilla warfare than with a pure terrorist strategy. Guerrilla movements, in general, require more manpower (more recruits), more money and more weapons (and weapons of greater degrees of technical sophistication). Terrorism requires much less.

Limitations of terrorism as an unconventional strategy

According to Richard Betts, "Terrorism is the premier form of asymmetric warfare" (2003: 341).

Asymmetry can stem from *unequal access to resources* with which to devote to the conflict and

unequal military technology. We apply both forms of asymmetry to our analysis.

Insurgent organizations engaged in guerrilla warfare or terrorism fight on behalf of and for

the favor of a broad or narrow public. A group may claim to represent their ethnic kin, or fellow

believers, or the poor and downtrodden in general. These complicit publics, whose support (tacit as

well as active) is critical to the success of their military strategy, play an important role in civil

conflict. Insurgencies are played out in the broader context of how different groups in a society

interact and how resources are distributed between respective groups.

Most analyses of terrorism focus on the decision to employ this tactic. Yet, to comprehend

why a group would intentionally target civilians, we need to understand why some groups do not.

The following case is exemplary. From 1963 to 1970 a radical Quebec nationalist group, *Front de

Libération du Québec* (FLQ), began a campaign of blowing up Canadian public mailboxes.

Colored red and decked with the crown of the Canadian Post Office Department, they served as

good symbols of Anglo-Canada and thus constituted a good target. Other symbolic targets were

also bombed, e.g. anglo-phone McGill and Loyola Universities and the Canadian Army

Recruitment Centre in Montreal. The campaign was reasonably popular. In 1970 the FLQ decided

to get more violent. They kidnapped James Cross (British High Commissioner in Montreal) and

Pierre Laporte (Minister of Labour), who had been negotiating with the FLQ. Laporte was

murdered, which resulted in the imposition of the War Measures Act. Rather than rallying in

support of the FLQ, the general public approved of the enhanced security measures (Gurr and Ross,

1989; Tetley, 2006). The events of October 1970 led to spectacular loss of public support for the

FLQ, which had received reasonably popular in Quebec for nearly ten years. Henceforth, public opinion shifted away from violent action and towards efforts for attaining independence through non-violent political means, mainly involving support for the secessionist *Parti Québécois*. This case demonstrates the critical role played by a complicit public. They supported what many of them regarded as an unfair peace over a violent conflict. Given widespread support by the Quebecois, the government successfully arrested and imprisoned most of the leadership of the PLQ and the group faded away. So it was not the mere fact that PLQ did not get public support that they stopped. The key shift was away from the terrorist group and to the government.[14]

All other things being equal, a group "representing" a sizable or distinct minority and receiving support from this group will be able to sustain terrorist activities even in the face of tremendous military disadvantage. If such a group loses support from its complicit public at the expense of the state, it will lose any advantage that it possessed. Moreover, the more a group is non-proportionally disadvantaged with access to resources, the stronger the support the group will receive; the more indiscriminate violence used by the state, the more support will go to the insurgent group.

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[14] Of course if a group does not care about public opinion, or if it thinks they suffer from "false consciousness", then a complicit public will play no role in the decision to engage in terrorism. But such groups as the Baader Meinhof Gang and the Red Brigade never received widespread public support and had a more difficult time avoiding police detection than a group such as the IRA which always maintained high public support.

Asymmetric access to military technology

Another important element of asymmetric conflict is unequal access to military technology. As a country becomes more economically developed, the state will possess increasingly sophisticated military technology. Coinciding with this advancement in military technology is an increasing asymmetry between the state and any potential insurgent group. Thus we should expect to see insurgent groups in more industrialized societies not to possess the capacity to even wage a guerrilla war against the state, let alone engage in conventional war. Terrorism may be the only military option available to a insurgent group if it should decide to take up arms against the state.

Grossman and Kim (1995) featured the relative advantage of offense and defense.[15] In the normal state of affairs for a rich industrialized society, the military asymmetry between the state and a latent insurgent group using conventional military technologies is so strong that the state can defend against guerrilla tactics. Terrorism, however, alters this equation. As noted by Richard Betts (2003), terrorism offers a way for a insurgent group to deliver the greatest military effect for the least expenditure. This is particularly evident when considering the magnifying role of the attack created by the ensuing terror. By directing attacks against non-combatants, it erases this asymmetric advantage.[16]

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[15] Quite a lively debate centers on whether offensive or defensive strategies dominate. The problem is that the concept is quite slippery (Levy, 1984) and difficult to operationalize.

[16] See Sandler and Enders (2004), Sandler and Arce (2003), and Dunne, et al. (2006) for theoretical analyses of the effectiveness of anti-terrorism policies and the strategic interaction played out between a terrorist group and a government. See Enders and Sandler (1993) for an empirical analysis of the effectiveness of antiterrorism policies.

Guerrilla warfare is a technological response to asymmetric military technology given the group's incapability to engage the state in conventional war with large standing armies. An insurgent group relies on guerrilla tactics as a means of maximizing military effectiveness vis-à-vis the state. Similarly, terrorism is a strategic response to the state's ability to defend or deter guerrilla attacks.

A good example of this is seen in the activities of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. Initially the IRA targeted military targets in Northern Ireland. Such activities strictly speaking were guerrilla. But after the British began to better defend their military installations, the IRA began to target civilians "in Britain, and then to high value commercial targets in the City of London" (Dunne, et al., 2006). Such strategic adaptation of terrorist tactics is also evident in Afghanistan and Iraq the 2000s. Regarding the Taliban's resurgence that began in 2006, Jason Burke reports:

> The new Taliban... is no longer the parochial, traditional militia that seized Kabul almost exactly 10 years ago and was ousted by the American-led coalition in 2001. Tactics, ideology, equipment and organization have all moved on. The use of suicide bombings, roadside bombs and targeted assassinations of those cooperating with Western forces are methods copied from Iraqi insurgents... More than 70 suicide bombings, four times as many as last year, have together killed scores of civilians. In 2001 the tactic was almost unknown among Afghans.

In terms of assuring damage and casualties, suicide bombing has been remarkably effective (Pape, 2003). This effectiveness has not gone unnoticed by insurgency groups. More and more

groups have adopted the tactic. The path of diffusion of this particular type of terrorist technique can be traced, starting with Amal in Lebanon (1981), to Hezbollah (1983), to other Lebanese organizations, to the LTTE in Sri Lanka (1987), to Hamas in Israel (1993), the PKK in Turkey (1996), al Qaeda in Kenya and Tanzania (1998), Lashkar-e-Toiba in Kashmir, India (1999), Chechens in Chechnya, Russia (2001), DHKP in Turkey (2001), Jama'ah Islamiyya in Indonesia (2002), and to Ansar al-Islam in Iraq (2003) (Gambetta, 2005: 288). Other organizations have followed suit in Iraq and now the Taliban have employed this technique in Afghanistan. Given the level of efficiency of this strategy, the diffusion of suicide bombing is not too surprising. Such diffusion also demonstrates the adaptability of different groups as they fight against a far stronger opponent.

Discussion

War is the quintessential strategic activity. It is curious that strategic adaptation is so often missing from rational choice explanations of civil conflict. In the dominant explanation of civil war, Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that the critical factor is state capacity. Hence, civil war occurs in weak and failed states. Their explanation, however, fails to explain civil wars in the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), Spain (the Basque Country), and Israel (Palestine). Ironic, given their rational choice orientation, is that Fearon and Laitin neglect the role of strategy, especially in its use to overcome asymmetry.

The presumption by many rational choice theorists is that for war to be rational, both sides must presume that they have a chance of winning due incomplete information or commitment problems (Fearon, 1995; Reed, 2003). It thus follows that both sides must be fairly well balanced. Otherwise, at least one of the parties will determine that the costs of war exceed the gains, and will

conclude that there is no point in going to war, either having been deterred from initiating armed conflict or capitulating to demands without going to war. Following this reasoning, we should not expect to see unbalanced dyads, yet we often do.

The problem with these analyses is that the strategic question facing the weaker side is not between losing the war and capitulation, but between the options of enduring peace on disadvantageous terms and of prosecuting an unconventional war. In addition, the strategic dilemma for the superior force is two fold. First, as long as there are disgruntled populations, investing in different kinds of military technology merely shifts the strategic response of any insurgent group that seeks to represent this complicit public. Second, making disgruntled populations satisfied may be more difficult and politically costly than prosecuting a "war on terror".

Latent insurgent groups are, by definition, dissatisfied with the existing peace. They perceive that the status quo is disadvantageous to them and their complicit public. Under such a condition, engaging in war against a superior force can be supported by strategic logic as long as the cost of war to the insurgent group are low enough (Butler 2007). The insurgent group's choice of warfare makes the cost of war endogenous. Given asymmetry, the cost of conventional warfare is too high for that option to make sense but the cost of guerrilla warfare may not be. Given extreme asymmetry, the cost of guerrilla warfare may also be too high. The use of terrorist warfare, however, may well make the cost low enough.

This focus on asymmetry and endogenous cost of war for the insurgent group makes the problem of preventing terrorism all the more pernicious for the state. By investing in greater defensive technology, the state is merely making the asymmetry more severe and altering the

strategic calculus of the insurgent group (Rosendorff and Sandler, 2005). This shifts the nature of the violence perpetrated by the insurgent group rather than eliminating it.

Given that the logic of insurgent violence is supported their perception of a disadvantageous peace, it may seem easy for the superior force to quell dissent merely by "being fair". While this may well help (and is a component of counterinsurgency strategies), a number of factors prevent such simple advice from having its intended effect. First, the actions of the state are filtered by the existing perceptions of the public. If the prevailing sentiment of injustice is strong, equally strong actions will be required to overcome such opinions (Kydd, 2005: ch. 7). Such actions are costly for the state and it may reason that suppressing rebellion is the cheaper option.

Second, the insurgent group—harboring the most intense feelings of disadvantage—will require much more costly actions to be reassured of the intentions of the state and will try to counteract any state generosity perceived by its complicit public. Thus, while the state may be able to placate most of the public with some initial reassuring action, placating the insurgent leaders is usually too costly. To the extent that the state placates most of the public, the recruiting base of the insurgent group shrinks. This spurs the insurgent group to take action that makes the state look disingenuous. The combined actions of the Israeli government in the summer of 2005 may well have been of this nature. By forcing settlers to vacate the Gaza Strip, Israel was making a very costly political statement (Lynfield, 2004; *NPR*, . But by continuing with "targeted killings" of Palestinian leaders—that the Palestinians called assassinations—the Israelis lost whatever goodwill may have been engendered (*NPR*, July 17, 2005).

However, persistent goodwill may eventually pay off for the state as it becomes harder for the insurgent group to paint the state as ingenuous. While the core members of ETA remain committed to an independent Basque country, they have largely lost the support of their public.

Similarly, persistent goodwill may alter the calculus of opposition leaders such that a disadvantageous peace is no longer seen as disadvantageous. There is renewed hope for peace in Northern Ireland as Gerry Adams, leader of the political party Sinn Fein, called on allied republican groups to cease engaging in violent activity. Sensing that his goal of a unified Ireland may now be possible through peaceful means, he added, "I do not want to see any other people killed or imprisoned as a result of their activities." (*Reuters*, January 18, 2007) By altering the frame of peace sufficiently, the cost of any mode of warfare may be too high to support violence.

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