Terrorism

'Fervour is the weapon of choice of the impotent.'

FRANZ FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

PREVIEW   Until the 1990s, terrorism was widely considered to be a security concern of the second order, often being ignored by standard text books on international politics. However, the events of 11 September 2001 changed this dramatically, encouraging a major reappraisal of the nature and significance of terrorism. For some, what was variously dubbed 'new' terrorism, 'global' terrorism or 'catastrophic' terrorism had become the principal security threat in the early twenty-first century, reflecting the fact that, in conditions of globalization, non-state actors (in this case terrorist groups) had gained important advantages over states. Beyond this, the inauguration of the 'war on terror' suggested that resurgent terrorism had opened up new fault lines that would define global politics for the foreseeable future. However, terrorism is both a highly contested phenomenon and a deeply controversial concept. Critical theorists, for example, argue that much commonly accepted knowledge about terrorism amounts to stereotypes and misconceptions, with the significance of terrorism often being grossly overstated, usually for ideological reasons. How should terrorism be defined? Why and how have scholars disagreed over the nature of terrorism? Does modern terrorism have a truly global reach and a genuinely catastrophic potential? Disagreements over the nature and significance of terrorism are nevertheless matched by debates about how terrorism should be countered. Not only are there divisions about the effectiveness of different counter-terrorism strategies, but there has also been intense debate about the price that may have to be paid for protecting society from terrorism in terms of the erosion of basic rights and freedoms. Should terrorism be countered through strengthening state security, through military repression or through political deals, and what are the implications of such strategies?

KEY ISSUES
- What is terrorism?
- What are the key perspectives on terrorism?
- Has the nature of terrorism changed in recent years?
- Has terrorism 'gone global'?
- How significant is modern terrorism?
- How can, and should, the threat of terrorism be countered?

UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM

Terrorism is by no means a modern phenomenon. Early examples include the Sicarri ('dagger men'), usually seen as an extreme splinter wing of the Jewish Zealots, who, in the first century, used killings and kidnappings in their campaign against the Romans in Judea and against Jews who collaborated with the Romans. Similarly, the Thugee (or Thugs) in India, a cult which carried out ritual killings supposedly in honour of the goddess Kali, and which came to particular prominence in the nineteenth century, may have emerged as early as the thirteenth century. The term 'terrorist', nevertheless, derives from the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, 1793–94. This witnessed a wave of mass executions, carried out by the Jacobins under the leadership of Robespierre, in which up to 40,000 alleged 'enemies of the revolution' lost their lives.

The first widespread association of western societies with terrorism occurred with the upsurge in clandestine violence by anarchist groups in the late nineteenth century, which reached its peak in the 1890s. Amongst its victims were Tsar Alexander II (1881), Empress Elizabeth of Austria (1898), King Umberto of Italy (1900) and Presidents Carnot (1894) of France and McKinley (1901) of the USA. Anarchist terrorism was a form of 'propaganda by the deed': it used violence as a way of raising political consciousness and stimulating the masses to revolt, sometimes by attacking what were seen as symbols of oppression and exploitation. This was evident in the attack on the Café Terminus in Paris in 1894, which was justified as an assault on 'bourgeois society', and the mysterious incident in the same year in which a man, later identified as a French anarchist, blew himself up in the vicinity of the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, London (the incident that inspired Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent*). A further wave of anarchist violence broke out in the 1960s and 1970s, undertaken by groups such as the Baader-Meinhof Group in West Germany, the Italian Red Brigades, the Japanese Red Army and the Angry Brigade in the UK.

However, in the post-1945 period, terrorism generally had a nationalist orientation. During the 1940s and 1950s it was associated with Third World anticolonial struggles in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, later being taken up by national liberation movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and groups such as Black September. Terrorism was also used by disaffected national or ethnic minorities in developed western societies, notably by the IRA in Northern Ireland and on the UK mainland, by ETA in the Basque region of Spain, and by the FLQ in Quebec. Nevertheless, the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington (see p. 21) convinced many people that terrorism had been reborn in a new and more dangerous form, leading some to conclude that it had become the principal threat to international peace and security. However, before this assertion is addressed, it is necessary to consider the nature of terrorism, the different ways in which terrorism has been understood, and whether terrorism has changed in recent years.

Defining terrorism

The central feature of terrorism is that it is a form of political violence that aims to achieve its objectives through creating a climate of fear and apprehension (Goodin 2006). As such, it uses violence in a very particular way: not primarily

● **State terrorism**: Terrorism carried out by government bodies such as the police, military or intelligence agencies.

to bring about death and destruction, but to create unease and anxiety about possible future acts of death and destruction. Terrorist violence is therefore clandestine and involves an element of surprise, if not arbitrariness, designed to create uncertainty and widening apprehension. Terrorism, therefore, often takes the form of seemingly indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets, although attacks on symbols of power and prestige and the kidnapping or murder of prominent businessmen, senior government officials and political leaders are usually also viewed as acts of terrorism. Nevertheless, the concept of terrorism remains deeply problematical. This applies, in part, because of confusion about the basis on which terrorism should be defined. It can be defined by the nature of:

● The *act* itself: clandestine violence that has a seemingly indiscriminate character. However, the nature of terrorism is not inherent in the violent act itself, because it rests, crucially, on intentions, specifically the desire to intimidate or terrify (Schmid and Jongman 1988). Not only does this mean that terrorism is always a social fact rather than a brutal fact, but the intentions behind acts of terrorism may be complex or uncertain (Jackson 2009).
● Its *victims*: innocent civilians. However, does this mean that attacks on military targets and personnel or the assassination of political leaders cannot be described as terrorism? Some terrorists, moreover, have viewed civilians as 'guilty', on the grounds that they are implicated in, and benefit from, structural oppression that takes place on a national or even global level.
● Its *perpetrators*: non-state bodies that are intent on influencing the actions of governments or international organizations. However, such a focus on what Laqueur (1977) called 'terrorism from below' risks ignoring the much more extensive killing of unarmed civilians through 'terrorism from above', sometimes classified as **state terrorism** or 'state-sponsored' terrorism.

Terrorism, however, is only a meaningful term if it can reliably be distinguished from other forms of political violence. Terrorism differs from conventional warfare in that, as a 'weapon of the weak', it is most often embraced by those who have no realistic possibility of prevailing against their opponents in a conventional armed contest (Crenshaw 1983). Lacking the organizational strength or destructive capacity to engage in open conflict, terrorists rely on strategies of provocation and polarization. Indeed, terrorism can even be thought of as the negation of combat, as its targets are attacked in such a way as to make self-defence difficult or perhaps impossible. Terrorism, nevertheless, shares more in common with guerrilla warfare. Both are examples of asymmetrical warfare, in which tactics and strategies are adopted specifically to compensate for an enemy's greater technological, economic and (conventional) military strength. In addition, both terrorism and guerrilla warfare place an emphasis on corroding an enemy's will to resist by drawing it into a protracted armed struggle. The similarities, indeed, may go further, in that terrorism is often used as part of a guerrilla or insurrectionary war, as demonstrated, for instance, by the Taliban in Afghanistan. In this light, terrorism can perhaps be thought of as either a special kind of 'new' war (as discussed in Chapter 10), or a strategy characteristically employed in 'new' wars.

Nevertheless, terrorism can also be distinguished from guerrilla warfare. In the first place, terrorism is characterized by the disproportionate weight it places

on highly publicized atrocities as a mechanism for shaping the consciousness and behaviour of target audiences (Phillips 2010). This reflects the extent to which terrorists rely on 'propaganda by the deed', high visibility and conscience-shocking acts of violence that are designed to dramatize the impotence of government, to intimidate rival ethnic or religious communities or the public in general, or, in its classic form, to mobilize popular support and stimulate political activism. Second, the essentially covert nature of terrorist activity usually restricts the extent to which terrorists are able to engage in popular activism, by contrast with guerrilla armies which typically rely heavily on a mass base of popular support.

This, however, by no means exhausts the controversies that have emerged over the concept of terrorism. The term terrorism is ideologically contested and emotionally charged; some even refuse to use it on the grounds that it is either hopelessly vague or carries unhelpful pejorative implications. Its negative associations mean that the word is almost always applied to the acts of one's opponents, and almost never to similar acts carried out by one's own group or a group one supports. Terrorism thus tends to be used as a political tool, a means of determining the legitimacy, or illegitimacy, of a group or political movement under consideration. This also raises questions about whether terrorism is evil in itself and beyond moral justification. Whereas mainstream approaches to terrorism usually view it as an attack on civilized or humanitarian values, even as an example of **nihilism**, radical scholars sometimes argue that terrorism and other forms of political violence may advance the cause of political justice and counter other, more widespread forms of violence or abuse, suggesting that they are justifiable (Honderich 1989). Finally, critical theorists have warned against the dangers of 'essentializing' terrorism, treating it as the defining feature of a person's or group's nature. This implies that being a terrorist is an identity, akin to nationality, religion (see p. 191) or ethnicity (see p. 175). Using the same label to describe groups such as al-Qaeda (see p. 295), Hezbollah, the IRA and ETA, obscures or ignores the very different historical, political, social and cultural contexts in which they operate, and the different causes with which they have been associated.

Rise of 'new' terrorism?

Further debates about terrorism have been stimulated by the idea that terrorism comes in various forms and that it can be, or has been, transformed. This tendency was significantly intensified by September 11, which some claimed marked the emergence of an entirely new brand of terrorism. Ignatieff (2004), for instance, distinguished between four types of terrorism, as follows:

- *Insurrectionary* terrorism – this is aimed at the revolutionary overthrow of a state (examples include anarchist and revolutionary communist terrorism).
- *Loner* or *issue* terrorism – this is aimed at the promotion of a single cause (examples include the bombing of abortion clinics in the USA and the 1995 sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway by the religious cult Aum Shinryko).
- *Nationalist* terrorism – this aims to overthrow colonial rule or occupation, often with the goal of gaining independence for an ethnic, religious or

● **Nihilism:** Literally a belief in nothing; the rejection of all conventional moral and political principles.

● The use of the term 'terrorism' assumes that certain forms of political violence can be reliably distinguished from other forms by the fact that they aim to provoke 'terror' rather than simply lead to destruction. However, all forms of political violence or warfare aim, at some level, to strike fear into the wider population. This introduces an arbitrary element into the use of the term, and implies that no conception of terrorism can ever be objective or impartial. Terrorism can thus be thought of as a political or social construct.

Deconstructing . . .

'TERRORISM'

● 'Terrorism' carries deeply pejorative implications, meaning that the term tends to be used as a political weapon, implying that the group or action to which it is attached is immoral and illegitimate. To described a person or group as a 'terrorist' implies that they are the enemy of civilized society, that they are intent on causing death, destruction and fear for their own sake, not for a larger purpose (unlike 'freedom fighters' or 'revolutionaries'), and that they are clandestine, shadowy and sinister.

● In conventional usage, the term is associated only with non-state actors. This can have politically conservative implications. Not only does the fact that states cannot be accused of terrorism imply that state violence is legitimate violence, but it also suggests that attempts to challenge government or overthrow the status quo that involve violence are politically and morally suspect. This may also apply to attempts to challenge the hegemonic or dominant state within the modern international system, specifically the USA.

national group (examples include the FLN in Algeria, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (commonly know as the Tamil Tigers) in Sri Lanka and Hamas and Hezbollah in Israel and the occupied territories).

● *Global* terrorism – this is aimed at inflicting damage and humiliation on a global power or at transforming global civilizational relations (examples include al-Qaeda and other forms of Islamist terrorism).

However, the concept of **'new' terrorism**, suggesting that there has been a revolutionary change in the nature of terrorism, predates the September 11 attacks, interest in it being stimulated by events such as the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo attack on the Tokyo subway system and the 1997 massacre in Luxor, Egypt, which left 62 tourists dead (Laqueur 1996, 1999) . But what is new terrorism, and how new is it? Although new terrorism supposedly has a number of features (Field 2009), its most important, and perhaps defining feature is that religious motivations for terrorism have replaced secular motivations. The secular char-

● **New terrorism**: A form of terrorism that is supposedly more radical and devastating than 'traditional' terrorism because of the nature of its organization, political character, motivations and strategies.

TERRORISM

Realist view

Realist thinking about terrorism tends to place a strong emphasis on the state/non-state dichotomy. Terrorism is usually viewed as a violent challenge to the established order by a non-state group or movement, often as part of a bid for power. The realist emphasis on politics as a realm of power seeking and competition can thus be seen to apply to the behaviour of non-state actors as well as to that of states. From this perspective, the motivations behind terrorism are largely strategic in character. Groups use clandestine violence and focus on civilian targets mainly because they are too weak to challenge the state openly through conventional armed conflict. They attempt to exhaust or weaken the resolve of a government or regime that they cannot destroy. The crucial feature of the realist approach to terrorism is nevertheless that, being an attempt to subvert civil order and overthrow the political system, the state's response to terrorism should be uncompromising. In a political tradition that can be traced back to Machiavelli (see p. 55), this reflects the belief that political leaders should be prepared to contravene conventional morality in order to protect a political community that is under threat. This is often called the problem of 'dirty hands' – because they have wider public responsibilities, political leaders should be prepared to get their hands dirty, and set aside private scruples. Realists therefore tend to be relatively unconcerned about whether counter-terrorist strategies infringe civil liberties; the important matter is whether counter-terrorism works.

Liberal view

Liberals, like realists, tend to view terrorism as an activity primarily engaged in by non-state actors. Insofar as they have different views about the motivations behind terrorism, liberals are more inclined to emphasize the role of ideology rather than simple power seeking. A key factor in explaining terrorism is therefore the influence of a political or religious ideology that creates an exaggerated sense of injustice and hostility, and so blinds the perpetrators of violence to the moral and human costs of their actions. However, liberal thinking about terrorism has tended to be dominated by the ethical dilemmas that are posed by the task of counter-terrorism. On the one hand, liberals typically view terrorism as an attack on the very principles of a liberal-democratic society – openness, choice, debate, toleration and so on. On the other hand, liberals have been anxious to ensure that attempts to counter terrorism are consistent with these same values, and, in particular, that they should not infringe human rights and civil liberties. (For an account of the relationship between counter-terrorism and individual rights and freedoms, see p. 299).

Critical views

There are two main critical perspectives on terrorism. The first reflects the views of radical theorists such as Chomsky (see p. 228) and Falk (1991). In their view, terrorism amounts to the killing of unarmed civilians, and it is something that is engaged in by both states and non-state actors. State terrorism ('wholesale terrorism'), indeed, is much more significant than non-state terrorism ('retail terrorism'), because states have a far greater coercive capacity than any non-state actors. Terrorism is thus largely a mechanism through which states use violence against civilians either to maintain themselves in power or to extend political or economic influence over other states. In this respect, particular attention has focused on its role in promoting US hegemony, the USA being viewed as the world's 'leading terrorist state' (Chomsky 2003).

The alternative critical perspective on terrorism is shaped by constructivist and poststructuralist thinking. It is characterized by the belief that much, and possibly all, commonly accepted knowledge about terrorism amounts to stereotypes and misconceptions. In this view, terrorism is a social or political construct. It is typically used to define certain groups and political causes as non-legitimate, by associating them with the image of immorality and wanton violence. This, in turn, tends to imply that the institutions and political structures against which terrorism is used are rightful and legitimate. Such thinking has been applied in particular to the discourses that have emerged in connection with the 'war on terror' (see p. 223), in which the term 'terrorism' is allegedly used to de-legitimize the enemies of the dominant actors in the modern global system (Dedeoglu 2003).

acter of 'traditional' terrorism derived from the idea that for much of the post-1945 period terrorism was associated with nationalist and particularly separatist movements. The goal of terrorism, in these cases, was narrow and political: the overthrow of foreign rule and the establishment of national self-determination. Insofar as nationalist terrorism was inspired by wider ideological beliefs, these were often rooted in revolutionary Marxism, or Marxism-Leninism. By the 1980s, however, religion had started to become an important motivation for political violence. According to Hoffman (2006), by 1995 almost half of the 56 terrorist groups then believed to be in operation could be classified as religious in character and/or motivation. Al-Qaeda was certainly an example of this trend, being motivated by a broad and radical politico-religious ideology, in the form of Islamism (see p. 199), but it was by no means an isolated example.

Proponents of the idea of new terrorism suggest that because terrorism had become a religious imperative, even a sacred duty, rather than a pragmatically selected political strategy, the nature of terrorist groups and the function of political violence had changed crucially. While traditional terrorists could be satisfied by limited political change or the partial accommodation of their demands, new terrorists could not so easily be bought off, their often amorphous but substantially broader objectives making them inflexible and uncompromising. Similarly, religious belief supposedly altered the moral context in which groups resorted to, and used, violence. Instead of terrorist violence having an essentially strategic character, being a means to an end, violence became increasingly symbolic and was embraced as a manifestation of 'total war'. Insofar as violence had become a cathartic experience, psychological, ethical and political constraints on the use of violence supposedly fell away, making new terrorists more likely to embrace indiscriminate and lethal forms of violence. Such thinking has been used to explain the growing association of terrorism with weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and possibly even nuclear weapons, as well as the increased use of suicide terrorism (see p. 294). Furthermore, changes in the moral parameters within which terrorist violence was undertaken have, allegedly, also been matched by changes in the organizational character of terrorism. Whereas traditional terrorists tended to employ military-style command and control structures, new terrorists tend to operate within more diffuse and amorphous international networks of loosely connected cells and support networks (Wilkinson 2003). Al-Qaeda, for instance, is often portrayed more as an idea than as an organization, its network of cells being so loosely organized that it has been seen as a form of 'leaderless Jihad' (Sageman 2008).

Nevertheless, the notion of new terrorism has also been subject to criticism, many arguing that distinction between new terrorism and traditional terrorism is largely artificial or, at least, much exaggerated (Copeland 2001). For example, religiously inspired terrorism is certainly not an entirely new phenomenon. Apart from more ancient examples, elements within the Muslim Brotherhood, which was formed in 1928, have often been linked to assassinations and other attacks, while nationalist groups, such as the Moro National Liberation Movement (MLF), Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah, have fused religious and political objectives. Similarly, it is possible to find examples of traditional terrorist groups that have been every bit as fanatical and uncompromising in their strategies, and as unrestrained in their use of political violence, as groups classified as new terrorists. This applies, for instance in the case of secular groups

such as the Tamil Tigers, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Finally, the notion of clear organizational differences between new and traditional terrorist groups may also be misleading. Apparently traditional terrorist groups, such as the Provisional IRA and Fatah, the largest faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), often delegated significant autonomy to individual terrorist cells, frequently allowing them to conduct operations independently of any command and control structure.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TERRORISM

Regardless of whether September 11 reflected a change in the *nature* of terrorism, it is widely assumed that it brought about a profound shift in its significance. The threat posed by terrorism was suddenly accorded a historically unprecedented level of importance, based on the belief that terrorism was a manifestation of new fault lines that would define global politics in the twenty-first century. This was reflected, most obviously, in the launch of the 'war on terror' and in the changing shape of world order that occurred in its wake (as discussed in Chapter 9). But how well founded are these assumptions? Has the potency and significance of terrorism dramatically increased, and, if so, how and why has this happened? There are, allegedly, two aspects of this process. The first is that terrorism has acquired a truly global reach, and the second is that its destructive potential has greatly increased.

Terrorism goes global?

There is nothing new about the idea that terrorism has an international, transnational or even global dimension. Late nineteenth-century anarchists, for example, saw themselves as part of an international movement and operated, in Western Europe at least, across national borders. The extreme Leftist groups of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Baader-Meinhof Group, The Japanese Red Army and the Italian Red Brigades, believed that they were engaged in a global struggle, both to overthrow the capitalist system and to expel the US military presence from Western Europe and elsewhere. The birth of what is sometimes classified as 'international' terrorism is often traced back to the advent of aeroplane hijackings in the late 1960s, carried out by groups such as the PLO. However, the development of terrorism into a genuinely transnational, if not global, phenomenon is generally associated with the advance of globalization (see p. 9). Modern terrorism is sometimes, therefore, portrayed as a child of globalization. This has happened for a number of reasons. First, increased cross-border flows of people, goods, money, technology and ideas have generally benefited non-state actors at the expense of states, and terrorist groups have proved to be particularly adept at exploiting this hyper-mobility. Second, increased international migration flows have often helped to sustain terrorist campaigns, as diaspora communities can become an important source of funding, as occurred, for instance, with the Tamil Tigers. Third, globalization has generated pressures that have contributed to a growth in political militancy generally. This has either occurred as a backlash against cultural globalization (see p. 147) and the spread of western goods, ideas and values, or it has been a consequence of

imbalances within the global capitalist system that have impoverished and desta-bilized parts of the global South.

Globalization may have provided a backdrop against which terrorism acquired an increasingly transnational character, but it does not in itself explain the emergence of transnational or global terrorism. This is evident in the case of the form of terrorism that appears to be most clearly transnational: Islamist, or *jihadist*, terrorism. Although Islamist terrorism has been portrayed as a nihilistic movement or as a manifestation of religious revivalism, it is better understood as a violent response to political conditions and crises that have found expres-sion in a politico-religious ideology (Azzam 2008). It emerged from the late 1970s onwards, and was shaped by three major developments. In the first place, a growing number of Muslim states experienced crises of governmental legiti-macy, as popular frustrations mounted against corrupt and autocratic regimes that were thought to have failed to meet their citizens' economic and political aspirations. In the light of the defeat of Arab nationalism, this led to a growing religiously based movement to overthrow what were dubbed 'apostate' (a person who forsakes his or her religion) Muslim leaders in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Pakistan. These leaders and their regimes came to be seen as Islamism's 'near enemy'. Second, coinciding with this, US influence in the Middle East expanded, filling the power vacuum that had been created by the UK's post-1968 withdrawal from military bases to the east of the Suez Canal. The USA thus came to be seen as the 'far enemy', as policies such as implacable support for Israel, the siting of US troops in the Muslim 'holy ground' of Saudi Arabia, and support for 'apostate' Muslim leaders across the region made the USA appear to be a threat to Islam. Third, there was a growth in politically engaged forms of religious fundamentalism (see p. 193) in many parts of the Islamic world, a trend that was radically accelerated by the 1979 Iranian 'Islamic Revolution' (see p. 200). (The origins and development of political Islam are discussed in Chapter 8.)

As far as Islamist terrorism is concerned, however, domestic *jihad* predomi-nated over global *jihad* during the 1970s and 1980s, as hostility to the USA and the idea of a larger struggle against the West provided merely a backdrop for attempts to achieve power on a national level. This only changed from the mid-1990s onwards, and it did so largely through the failure of political Islam to achieve its domestic goals (Kepel 2006). 'Apostate' regimes often proved to be more stable and enduring that had been anticipated, and, in cases such as Egypt and Algeria, military repression was used successfully to quell Islamist insur-gents. In this context, *jihad* went global, as growing elements within the Islamist movement realigned their strategies around the 'far enemy': western, and partic-ularly US, policy in the Middle East and across the Islamic world. In that sense, the rise of global *jihad* was a mark of Islamism's decline, not of its resurgence (Roy 1994). The war in Afghanistan to expel Soviet troops, 1979–89, neverthe-less played an important role in facilitating the shift to globalism. The emergence of a transnational Mujahadeen resistance against the Russians helped to forge a 'corporate' sense of belonging among Islamist groups that often had different backgrounds and sometimes different doctrinal beliefs, strengthening also the belief that domestic struggles are part of a wider global struggle.

These were the circumstances in which al-Qaeda emerged, usually viewed as the clearest example of global terrorism. In what sense does al-Qaeda represent

the global face of Islamist terrorism? Al-Qaeda's goals are transnational, if not civilizational: it seeks to purify and regenerate Muslim society at large, both by overthrowing 'apostate' Muslim leaders and by expelling western, and particularly US, influence, and in engaging in a larger struggle against the moral corruption of what it sees as western 'crusaders'. Moreover, it has been associated with terrorist attacks in states as disparate as Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, the USA, Spain and the UK, and has cells or affiliate organizations across the world. The emergence of transnational or global terrorism therefore appears to be a particularly alarming development. Not only does it seem to be a form of terrorism that may strike anywhere, any time, but, by defining its goals in civilizational terms (the overthrow of secular, liberal society), it appears massively to increase its potential targets.

However, the global character of modern terrorism may be over-stated in at least three respects. First, the Islamist or *jihadist* movement is by no means a single, cohesive entity but encompasses groups with often very different beliefs and goals. Many of them, indeed, are better thought of as religious nationalists, or perhaps pan-Islamic nationalists, rather than as global revolutionaries. To treat attacks such as September 11, the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings, the 2004 Madrid bombing and the 2008 Mumbai bombings as linked events, especially as events with a common inspiration and unified purpose, may therefore be seriously to misunderstand them. Second, although terrorism has affected a broad range of countries, the vast majority of terrorist attacks take place in a relatively small number of the countries that are beset by intense political conflict – such as Israel and the occupied territories, Afghanistan, Iraq, Russia and particularly Chechnya, Pakistan, Kashmir, Algeria and Colombia – leaving much of the world relatively unaffected by terrorism. Third, the image of Islamist terrorism as global terrorism may stem less from its own intrinsic character and more from how others have responded to it. In this view, the establishment of a global 'war on terror' may have done much to create and sustain the idea that there is such a thing as global terrorism.

Catastrophic terrorism?

Apart from the idea that it has acquired a global reach, terrorism is often thought to have become a more significant security threat because its impact has greatly increased. September 11 is usually cited in defence of this view. There is no doubt that the terrorist attacks on the USA in September 2001 were events of profound significance. The assaults on the World Trade Centre, the Pentagon and the crash of United Airlines flight 93, believed to be heading for the White House, resulted in the deaths of around 3,000 people, making this the most costly terrorist attack in history. Its impact was all the greater because its targets were, respectively, symbols of global financial power, global military power and global political power. The psycho-emotional impact of September 11 on the USA has only been matched by Pearl Harbour in 1941, both incidents destroying the myth of US invulnerability. However, September 11 does not in itself demonstrate the global significance of terrorism. The scale of death, for example, was relatively small compared to other forms of warfare. For example, about 1.5 million soldiers were killed during the Battle of the Somme in July and August 1916, and 200,000 died as a result of the Hiroshima atomic attack in August 1945. The significance

GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

The 2002 Bali bombings

Events: In the late evening of 12 October 2002, three bombs were detonated on the Indonesian island of Bali. The first two exploded in or near popular nightclubs in the seaside resort of Kuta. A third, smaller device was set off in nearby Denpasar, the Balinese capital. 202 people died in these bombings, including 88 Australians, 38 Indonesians and 24 UK citizens. The militant Islamist group, Jemaah Islamiah (JI) ('Islamic community') was widely linked to the attacks, although some have doubted whether it had the organizational capacity to carry it out. In 2005, JI's spiritual leader, Abu Bakar Ba'ashyir, was convicted of conspiracy over the 2002 Bali attacks, but he was freed after his conviction was overturned by Indonesia's Supreme Court. In November 2008, three people convicted of carrying out the Bali attacks were executed by a firing squad.

Significance: The 2002 Bali bombings were the worst act of terrorism in Indonesia's history. But the attack was not an isolated incident, other attacks having included the 2000 Jakarta Stock Exchange bombing, the 2003 Marriott Hotel bombing in South Jakarta, the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta, and the 2005 Bali bombings in Jimbara Beach Resort and, again, Kuta. Such incidents have raised questions about both the nature of the terrorist threat in Indonesia, and perhaps in Southeast Asia more widely, and about the effectiveness of Indonesia's response. US sources were especially keen that the Bali bombing be seen in a wider context, highlighting links between Indonesia's militant Muslim groups in general, and Jemaah Islamiah in particular, and al-Qaeda. However, there is very little evidence that JI is the Southeast Asian wing of al-Qaeda, and much less that al-Qaeda had any involvement in planning or carrying out the Bali bombings. Indeed, JI and other militant Indonesian Muslim groups are perhaps better thought of as religious nationalist groups rather than as part of a global Islamist conspiracy. What is more, the terrorist campaign appears to have been a failure, especially in the light of the goal of building a pan-Islamic state across much of Southeast Asia. Although the 2002 Bali bombings injected a new urgency into Indonesia's approach to counter-terrorism (some 300 alleged militants were arrested or killed in the following 5 years), this occurred without a resort to draconian anti-terror measures (as used in Sri Lanka and Iraq) for fear that the Indonesian government might be accused of being 'anti-Islamic'. The net result of this is that, by common consent, groups such as JI are much weaker than they were before 2002.

The Bali bombings also had significant international repercussions, for Indonesia and Australia in particular. In the case of Indonesia, they caused heightened friction in US-Indonesian relations. The USA put considerable pressure on Indonesia to crack down on militant Islamist groups in the country, partly in the hope of drawing Indonesia more clearly into its 'war on terror'. However, as the largest Muslim country in the world (220 million of its 240 million population describe themselves as Muslims), Indonesia was reluctant to be seen to be acting under pressure from the USA or other western states. The Australian reaction to the Bali bombings was nevertheless less equivocal. What was seen as 'Australia's September 11' encouraged John Howard's Liberal-Conservative government to re-dedicate itself to the 'war on terror', citing the bombings as evidence that Australia was not immune to the effects of terrorism. Most controversially, and in line with US policy under George Bush, Howard asserted that, if he had evidence that terrorists were about to attack Australia, he would be prepared to launch a pre-emptive strike (see p. 225). This stance provoked strong criticism at the time from Southeast Asian regional powers, including Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia. The Bali bombings also helped to create the conditions that allowed 2,000 Australian troops and naval units to participate in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

of September 11 is, rather, that it highlighted the emergence of a particularly intractable security threat, one that has the *potential* to wreak almost untold devastation and death and is profoundly difficult to protect against.

Modern terrorism has sometimes been dubbed 'catastrophic terrorism' (Carter *at al.* 1998) or 'hyper-terrorism' (Sprinzak 2001). Why is this form of terrorism so radical and devastating, as well as so difficult to counter? This, arguably, applies for at least three reasons. First, by its nature, terrorism is particularly difficult, and maybe impossible, to defend against. Terrorism is a clandestine activity, often carried out by small groups or even lone individuals who, unlike regular armies, go to considerable lengths to be indistinguishable from the civilian population. Such difficulties have nevertheless been greatly exaggerated by the advent of new terrorist tactics, notably the growth of **suicide terrorism**. How can protection be provided against attackers who are willing to sacrifice their own lives in order to kill others? This contributes to the idea that, although it may be possible to reduce the likelihood of terrorist attacks, the threat can never be eradicated.

Second, the potential scope and scale of terrorism has greatly increased as a result of modern technology and particularly the prospect of WMD falling into the hands of terrorists. Since September 11, governments have been trying to plan for the possibility of terrorist groups using chemical or biological weapons, with the prospect of nuclear terrorism no longer being dismissed as a fanciful idea. Allison (2004) argued that, unless a global alliance could be built to effectively lock down all nuclear materials in the world, a nuclear terrorist attack on the USA during the following decade was likely, and, over a longer time scale, inevitable. This reflects both the greater availability of nuclear materials and technology, in large part due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the fact that the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD), which helped to prevent nuclear war during the superpower era, does not apply to terrorist networks whose identities and locations may be shrouded in mystery. Third, in line with debates over the rise of new terrorism, it is sometimes argued that modern terrorists not only have easier access to WMD but also have a greater willingness to use them. This, allegedly, is because they may be less constrained by moral or humanitarian principles than previous generations of terrorists. In the case of Islamist terrorism, this is supposedly explained by the radical politico-religious ideology which inspires it, in which western society and its associated values are viewed as evil and intrinsically corrupt, the implacable enemy of Islam.

However, there are those who argue that the threat of terrorism, even of new or global terrorism, has been greatly overstated. In the first place, there are doubts about the military effectiveness of terrorism. Although particular terrorist attacks may have a devastating impact, by its nature terrorism consists of a series of sporadic attacks on a variety of targets, which is very different from the concerted, sustained and systematic destruction that is wreaked by mass warfare conducted between states. In fact, the number of casualties caused by terrorist attacks is usually small, with only around twenty attacks since 1968 having resulted in more than 100 fatalities. Terrorism, moreover, cannot overthrow a government (although, through assassination, it can remove political leaders), or destroy a society. Indeed, insofar as terrorism works it is not through its military impact, but through how governments and populations react to the fear and anxiety that it generates. Second, where terrorist campaigns have been success-

● **Suicide terrorism**: A form of terrorism in which the perpetrator (or perpetrators) intends to kill himself or herself in the process of carrying out the attack.

Focus on . . .

Suicide terrorism: religious martyrdom or political strategy?

How can the rise in suicide terrorism best be explained? In particular, are suicide bombings best understood as the fulfilment of a religious quest? Although suicide attacks are nothing new (between 2,800 and 3,900 Japanese pilots died in *kamikaze* ('divine wind') attacks during WWII), there has been a marked increase in suicide attacks in recent years. From an average of three attacks a year in the mid-1980s, these rose to ten attacks a year in the 1990s and over 100 attacks a year since 2000. This trend has commonly been explained in terms of the rise of religiously-inspired martyrdom, as exemplified in particular by Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. In this view, the heightened fervour and absolute dedication that is required to persuade people to kill themselves in the process of carrying out political violence is most likely to arise in a context of fundamentalist religious belief, especially when this is associated with faith in an afterlife. In this respect, particular attention has been given to the impact on Islamist terrorism of the prospect of entering an Islamic paradise in which (according to the Hadith, not the Koran) 70 virgin maidens await each young man who has sacrificed himself for his religion.

However, based on an analysis of all key incidents of suicide terrorism from 1980 to 2003, Pape (2005) concluded there is little evidence of a link between terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism or, for that matter, religion of any kind. Most suicide terrorism has taken place in a context of nationalist or separatist struggles, with the leading exponents of suicide attacks being the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, a nationalist movement subscribing to a secular ideology. In this light, suicide terrorism may be best explained in terms of strategic considerations. The strategic basis for suicide attacks is that, being difficult to protect against, they are an unusually effective form of terrorism. Thus, although in 2007 suicide attacks accounted for just 3 per cent of terrorist attacks worldwide, they led to 18 per cent of deaths in terrorist incidents. This is backed up by the fact that suicide attacks carry enormous moral force, demonstrating the strength of the convictions that inspire them and highlighting the depth of the injustice they seek to protest against.

ful, they have usually been linked to attempts to advance or defend the interests of a national or ethnic group, in which case its goals have enjoyed a significant measure of popular support. This applied to Jewish terrorism before the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the terrorism employed by the African National Congress (ANC) against the apartheid regime in South Africa. Where terrorist campaigns enjoy limited popular support they may well be counter-productive, provoking popular hostility and outrage (instead of fear and apprehension amongst the civilian population), as well as military retaliation from the government. This certainly applied to the anarchist terrorism of the late nineteenth century and the 1960s and 1970s, and it may also explain why, although Islamist terrorism has played a significant role as part of insurrectionary wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, it does not, and cannot, pose a serious threat to western societies.

Third, fears about terrorism may be exaggerated because they are based on questionable assumptions about a civilizational conflict between Islam and the West, sustained particularly by the rhetoric that surfaced around the 'war on

GLOBAL ACTORS . . .

AL-QAEDA

Type: Transnational terrorist network • **Formed:** 1988 • **Size:** 500–1000 members (estimated)

Al-Qaeda (Arabic for 'The Base') was founded in 1988. It emerged in the context of the struggle in Afghanistan after the Soviet intervention of 1979, but it drew on an ideological heritage that can be traced back to Sayyid Qutb (see p. 203) and the Muslim Brotherhood. Like other groups of anti-Soviet fighters, it was supported during this period by US funds and arms supplies. Its leader, Osama bin Laden (born 1957), is a member of the wealthy and influential Saudi bin Laden family, although he is better portrayed as a figurehead of a loosely organized transnational network rather than as an operational leader. Bin Laden's hostility to 'Un-Islamic' Muslim rulers and to western, and particularly US, influence in the Muslim world deepened as a result of the 1991 Gulf War and the siting of US troops in Saudi Arabia, and the rejection, by Saudi Arabia, of his offer of support. The leadership of al-Qaeda was located in the Sudan from 1992 to 1996, before taking refuge in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Since the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, it is believed to have operated from the tribal lands on the Pakistan-Afghan border. In addition to September 11, al-Qaeda has been associated with the 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre, the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing (Saudi Arabia), the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, the 2000 attack on the USS Cole, the 2004 Madrid train bombings and the 2005 London bombings.

Significance: Al-Qaeda is often credited with having redefined the nature of terrorism and, in the process, contributing to a reconfiguration of global power. This has occurred, it has been argued, in at least three respects. In the first place, al-Qaeda has adapted itself to the new conditions of global interconnectedness, operating, for example, as a loose network rather than a command-and-control organization, and making extensive use of modern information and communication technology (mobile phones, satellite television, the Internet and so on). Second, al-Qaeda has developed a series of new and particularly devastating terrorist techniques. These include suicide attacks and the simultaneous bombing of a range of targets. In addition, flexibility in the use of 'weapons' (including passenger airliners) has significantly expanded the level of devastation that terrorism can wreak. Most significantly, the al-Qaeda network has a genuinely global reach, allowing it to operate in the Middle East, Africa, North America, Europe and Asia. Third, al-Qaeda has served as the military wing of the modern Islamist movement, helping to advance the cause of global *jihad*. As such, al-Qaeda has contributed to what has been viewed as a global civilizational struggle between West and Islam, typified by the September 11 and other attacks and by the USA's response in launching the 'war on terror'.

The continuing significance of al-Qaeda is a matter of debate, however. Some have argued that al-Qaeda's role in generating a civilizational struggle between Islam and the West has been greatly over-stated. For example, the USA's motives in launching the 'war on terror' were mixed and complex, some suggesting that al-Qaeda terrorism was used as a pretext for consolidating the USA's geopolitical hold over the oil-rich Middle East. Certainly the idea that al-Qaeda has mobilized the Islamic world in the cause of global *jihad* is open to question, particularly as revulsion against terrorist tactics has encouraged political Islam to become more moderate. Moreover, in a quest for high-profile exposure, al-Qaeda may have made a serious strategic mistake in launching the September 11 attacks, in that the full military and political weight of the USA has been deployed in the attempt to destroy the organization. The 'war on terror' has not only deprived al-Qaeda of a secure base and training grounds in Afghanistan, but it has also resulted in the deaths of many al-Qaeda leaders and fighters, seriously undermining its operational effectiveness. Finally, critical theorists have emphasized the extent to which the 'catastrophic terrorism' that al-Qaeda represents has been constructed less on the basis of the nature and scope of the threat that it represents and more on the basis of how the USA chose to respond to September 11 by demonizing al-Qaeda and transforming it into a global brand.

terror'. Not only are there doubts about the broad idea of an emerging 'clash of civilizations' (see p. 190), but the civilizational interpretation of Islamist terrorism may also not stand up to examination. Rather than being the vanguard of a resurgent Muslim world, Islamism, particularly in its *jihadist* form, is a perverted offshoot of orthodox Islam, which is not firmly rooted in traditional Islamic values and culture. There is little evidence, moreover, that Muslim populations generally are hostile towards 'western' values such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy, albeit not in the form of militarily-imposed 'democracy promotion' (see p. 206). Critical theorists, indeed, have gone further and argued that the 'war on terror', and the exaggerated fears of terrorism on which it is based, serve both to legitimize US attempts to maintain its global hegemony (in particular, helping to justify the USA's presence in the oil-rich Middle East) and to promote a wider 'politics of fear' (Altheide 2006). This latter idea suggests that the 'war on terror' was essentially an ideological construct, which has been created by the USA and other western states in order to generate internal cohesion and a sense of purpose in societies that are no longer afraid of the 'communist threat'. In this view, ruling elites, in democratic as well as authoritarian societies, consolidate their position by creating myths about a threatening or hostile 'other'. In modern circumstances this role may be filled by terrorism, especially when fears about terrorism can be bolstered by linking terrorism to WMD and the spectre of nuclear terrorism.

COUNTERING TERRORISM

Terrorism poses particularly difficult challenges to established societies. Unlike other military threats, terrorists often do not have a conventional base or location and they may be particularly difficult to distinguish from the civilian population at large. Furthermore, it is notoriously difficult to protect against, still less to prevent, kidnappings, armed attacks (which may lead to hostage-taking), vehicle bombs and suicide attacks.

How can terrorism best be countered? What are the possible benefits and the likely costs of different approaches to counter-terrorism? The main counter-terrorism strategies include the following:

- Strengthening state security
- Military repression
- Political deals

Strengthening state security

In states such as Israel, Sri Lanka, Spain and the UK, which have experienced long campaigns of nationalist-based terrorism, tighter state security, often based on emergency legislation, has long been enforced. Nevertheless, September 11 and subsequent terrorist attacks in places such as Bali, Madrid and London have encouraged a much broader range of countries to revise, and strengthen, their arrangements for state security. In many ways, this reflects an attempt to deprive terrorists of the advantages they gain from operating in a context of democracy and globalization. Liberal-democratic societies may be uniquely vulnerable to the threat of terrorism because they protect individual rights and freedoms and

The notion of a 'war on terror' creates confusion about the nature of the enemy ('terror' is an abstract noun, and terrorism is a military tactic, not a group, an ideology or an institution). This introduces an arbitrary element into the choice of the enemy, whilst, at the same time, associating them with evil, immorality and wanton violence by representing them as 'terror'.

The 'war on terror' portrays terrorism as a single phenomenon – 'terror'. As such, the slogan blurs the differences between different types of terrorism and ignores the range of political, ideological or other goals that terrorists may fight for.

Deconstructing . . .

'WAR ON TERROR'

By describing the campaign against terror as a 'war', it implies that terrorism should be, and perhaps can only be, addressed through military means. Such an approach focuses entirely on the manifestations of terrorism and, arguably, ignores its causes. As such, it predetermines the choice of counter-terrorism strategies.

The idea of a 'war on terror' may be seen as counter-productive. From the viewpoint of the general public, it risks exaggerating the threat of terrorism, maybe promoting the very fear and anxiety that terrorists set out to produce. From the viewpoint of decision-makers, it encourages over-reaction and may thereby risk perpetuating terrorism by strengthening disaffection amongst marginalized groups or peoples.

contain checks on government power, while the 'borderless world' that globalization creates affords non-state actors such as terrorist groups considerable scope to organize and exert influence. In the main, state security has been strengthened by extending the legal powers of government. For example, states have reasserted control over global financial flows; immigration arrangements have been made more rigorous, especially during high-alert periods; the surveillance and control of domestic populations, but particularly of members of 'extremist' groups or terrorist sympathizers, has been significantly tightened; and, in many cases, the power to detain terrorist suspects has been strengthened. For instance, UK anti-terrorist measures allow suspected terrorists to be held for up to 28 days without charge, while in the USA the Patriot Act (2001) permits the indefinite detention of immigrants.

In other cases, however, state security measures have had an extra-legal or at best quasi-legal character. In the post-9/11 period, the Bush administration in the USA took this approach furthest, notably by establishing the Guantanamo

Bay detention camp in Cuba, and by practices such as '**extraordinary rendition**'. Terrorist suspects held at Guantanamo Bay were subject to the authority of military courts, which were, until 2008, beyond the jurisdiction of the US Supreme Court, and by refusing to classify them as 'enemy combatants' the Bush administration denied the detainees the protections afforded by the Geneva Conventions. Moreover, interrogation methods were used at Guantanamo Bay, such as 'waterboarding' (a form of suffocation in which water is poured over the face of an immobilized person), which have widely been seen as forms of **torture**.

However, state security responses to terrorism have at least two key drawbacks. First, they endanger the very liberal-democratic freedoms that attempts to combat terrorism are supposedly designed to defend. This results in difficult trade-offs between liberty and security which have provoked impassioned debate in many democratic countries. Second, such measures may be counterproductive insofar as they appear to target particular groups (often young, male Muslims), who thereby become more disaffected and therefore more likely to support, or possibly engage in, terrorist activity. English (2009) thus argued that the most serious danger posed by terrorists is their capacity to provoke ill-judged and sometimes extravagant state responses that, by creating an atmosphere of panic, serve the interests of terrorists themselves. It is notable that, under Obama, distinctive changes have taken place to at least the tone of US counterterrorism policy, reflecting particularly the need to redress the imbalance between liberty and security. This was symbolized by the commitment in January 2009 to close the Guantanamo Bay detention camp within one year (even though this did not occur within the stipulated time span) and to cease using the harsh interrogation techniques that had been employed during the Bush era.

Military repression

Force-based or repressive counter-terrorism has, in recent years, been particularly associated with the 'war on terror'. Military responses to terrorism have been based on two complementary strategies. In the first, attempts have been made to deny terrorists the support or 'sponsorship' of regimes that had formerly given them succour. This was done most clearly through the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, although alleged links to terrorism was also one of the pretexts for the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The second approach is to launch direct attacks on terrorist training camps and terrorist leaders. Thus, US air strikes were launched against terrorist targets in Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998, in retaliation for the bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda leadership were attacked in Afghanistan in late 2001 in their Tora Bora cave complex in Afghanistan, before retreating, much weakened, probably to the Waziristan region of Pakistan; and Israel carried out military strikes against Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon in 2006. Amongst the most concerted attempts to destroy terrorist groups through military might occurred in Chechnya and Sri Lanka. In response to continued separatist agitation and an escalating series of terrorist attacks, Russia launched the Second Chechen War, 1999–2000, which left between 25,000 and 50,000 people dead and devastated the Chechen capital,

● **Extraordinary rendition**: The extra-legal transport of foreign terrorist suspects to third countries for interrogation.

● **Torture:** The infliction of intense physical or mental pain or suffering as a means of punishment or in order to gain information or a confession.

Debating . . .
Does the need to counter terrorism justify restricting human rights and basic freedoms?

Terrorism is an unusual security threat in that it appears to exploit the vulnerabilities of liberal-democratic societies. While some claim that this implies that rights and freedoms must be curtailed if the public is to be protected from terrorism, others argue that such an approach is morally indefensible as well as counter-productive.

YES

The weakness of the strong. Liberal-democratic societies are weak in the sense that rights such as freedom of movement and freedom of association, and legal or constitutional checks on government power, can be exploited by terrorist groups that are covert and often operate in small, loosely-organized cells. In other words, openness, toleration and legality can become their own worst enemy, providing advantages for groups that oppose all these things. Effective counter-terrorism must deprive terrorists of these advantages, and this can only mean selective and appropriate restrictions on individual rights and freedoms.

The lesser evil. Curtailing rights and freedoms may be morally justifiable when the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of an action is judged on the basis of whether it produces the 'greatest good for the greatest number'. Such restrictions may therefore be the 'lesser evil' (Ignatieff 2004) when set against the wider benefits that are derived from protecting society at large. For example, infringing terrorist suspects' rights, even subjecting then to detention without trial, is a lesser moral abuse than violating the most important human freedom, the right to life. Similarly, the greater good may be served if violations on individual and minority rights help to preserve the rights of the majority.

The necessity of 'dirty hands'. The doctrine of 'dirty hands' is based on the belief that public morality is separate from private morality. It may thus be 'right' for political leaders to do 'wrong', if this serves public morality. The classic circumstance in which this applies is when, confronted by a supreme danger, politicians must set aside accepted moral rules in order to ensure the survival of the political community (Walzer 2007). This doctrine may even justify the torture in a so-called 'ticking bomb scenario', when saving the lives of possibly hundreds of people may require that information is extracted from a terrorist suspect, by almost whatever means, about the location of a bomb.

NO

Counter-productive anti-terrorism. In a sense, all terrorism seeks to provoke an over-reaction on the part of government. Terrorism achieves its ends not through violent attacks but through a government's response to violent attacks. By adopting draconian measures, governments are invariably playing into the hands of terrorist groups, which are able to gain support and sympathy, and even increase recruitment, if the groups they claim to support feel stigmatized and resentful. Matters, indeed, get worse if governments are drawn into a cycle of over-reaction, as when repressive measures that fail to eradicate a terrorist threat lead only to the adoption of still more repressive policies.

Freedom as a fundamental value. For supporters of human rights, morality is not a question of trade-offs and calculations about the greater good; it is about the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of certain actions. As human rights are universal, fundamental, absolute and indivisible, actions such as restricting civil liberties or any violation of them is simply wrong, however politically inconvenient this may be. The danger, moreover is greater: once governments start to treat morality in terms of trade-offs, they start to descend a slippery slide towards authoritarianism. Governments become increasingly accustomed to the use of force and de-sensitized to concerns over human rights, and security agencies become more powerful and less accountable.

Moral authority and 'soft' power. Terrorism cannot be combated through robust state security measures alone; in important ways, terrorism is a 'hearts and minds' issue. If a clear ethical line cannot be drawn between terrorism and counter-terrorism, governments lose moral authority, and this undermines their public support at home and abroad. For example, controversial practices associated with the Guantanamo Bay detention camp damaged the USA's 'soft' power and weakened international support for the 'war on terror', particularly, but not only, in Muslim countries. Securing and maintaining the moral high ground, by combating terrorism whilst scrupulously upholding human rights and basic freedoms, therefore makes ethical and political sense.

Grozny. During 2008–09, the Sri Lankan army carried out a major offensive against Tamil Tigers, which effectively destroyed the separatist movement as a fighting force and brought an end to the 26-year armed conflict in Sri Lanka. Estimates of the number of civilian deaths that occurred in this final phase of the conflict range from 7,000 to 20,000.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how terrorism can, in usual cases, be defeated by military approaches alone. For one thing, to wage war on terrorist organizations and groups is, arguably, to attack the *manifestation* of the problem rather than its underlying cause. The record of force-based counter-terrorism has thus been very poor. In cases such as Israel, Northern Ireland, Algeria and Chechnya, the application of massive counter-terrorist violence by the state only resulted in ever greater levels of terrorist violence. Military repression is especially likely to be counter-productive when the conduct of military action against terrorism is seen to be insensitive to human rights and the interests of civilian populations. Exposure, in 2004, of widespread torture and prisoner abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq therefore seriously damaged the image of the USA as a defender of the 'free world' and helped to strengthen anti-Americanism across the Muslim world. Moreover, as terrorism in cases such as Iraq and Afghanistan has been used as part of wider insurgency wars, it is difficult to see how anti-terrorist warfare can be 'winnable' in the conventional sense. Many military commanders therefore argue that terrorism and insurgencies can only ever be reduced to manageable levels, rather than eradicated altogether.

Political deals

Finally, political solutions can be found to terrorist problems. In a sense, most terrorist campaigns have political endings, in that their general ineffectiveness means that, over time, leading figures in terrorist movements tend to gravitate towards respectability and constitutional politics. Nevertheless, governments have also pursued strategies designed specifically to encourage terrorists to abandon political violence by drawing them into a process of negotiation and diplomacy. For example, a willingness to engage politically with the Provisional IRA provided the basis for an end to Republican terrorism in Northern Ireland, a process that led eventually to the 1998 Belfast Agreement (sometimes called the Good Friday Agreement) through which agreement was reached on the status and future of Northern Ireland. Similarly, negotiations conducted during 1990–93 by the South African government under President de Klerk and the African National Congress prepared the way for the end of apartheid and establishment, in 1994, of South Africa as a multi-racial democracy, with the ANC leader, Nelson Mandela, as its president. Political approaches to counter-terrorism involve a 'hearts and minds' strategy that seeks to address the political causes of terrorism and not just its manifestations. They also attempt to convince terrorists that they have more to gain by working within the political process that by working against it. In the case of Islamist terrorism, a political solution would certainly involve progress being made on the 'Palestinian question'. Indeed, the stuttering progress that has been made with the Arab–Israeli conflict (see Key events: the Arab–Israeli conflict, p. 202) is a consequence of a tendency on both sides to favour military solutions over political ones.

Nevertheless, the idea of tackling terrorism by making political deals with terrorists, or by acceding to their demands, has also attracted criticism. In the first place, it is sometimes seen as an example of appeasement, a moral retreat in the face of intimidation and violence, even an unwillingness to stand up for one's beliefs. Whereas military approaches to containing terrorism promise to weaken and possibly destroy terrorist groups, political approaches may strengthen or embolden them, by treating the group and the cause it pursues as legitimate. Moreover, political approaches are most likely to be effective in the case of nationalist terrorism, where deals can be done over matters such as power-sharing, political autonomy and even sovereignty. Islamist terrorism, on the other hand, may simply be beyond the reach of political 'solutions'. What, for instance, would constitute a political solution to forms of terrorism that aim to establish theocratic rule in western societies and overthrow liberal-democratic institutions and principles? Finally, the capacity of political deals to provide a comprehensive solution to large-scale political violence may have been under-mined by links that have become more pronounced since the end of the Cold War between terrorism and insurgency generally and forms of criminality (Cockayne *et al.* 2010). The path of peace and negotiation may seem distinctly unattractive to terrorist groups in places such as Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala and Somalia, which are able to raise enormous amounts of money from drug-running, targeted violence and other illicit activities.

SUMMARY

- Terrorism, broadly, refers to attempts to further political ends by using violence to create a climate of fear, apprehension and uncertainty. Terrorism is nevertheless a deeply controversial term, not least because it is highly pejorative and tends to be used as a political tool. Mainstream, radical and critical perspectives offer quite different views on the nature of terrorism and the value of the concept.

- Proponents of the idea of 'new' terrorism suggest that since the 1990s a more radical and devastating form of terrorism has emerged whose political character, motivations, strategies and organization differs from 'traditional' terrorism, particularly in the growing importance of religious motivation. But serious doubts have been cast on the value of this distinction.

- It is widely assumed that September 11 marked the emergence of a profoundly more significant form of terrorism, which can strike anywhere, any time. However, although many accept that there are important links between modern terrorism and the processes of globalization, many have questioned whether terrorism has genuinely gone global.

- The impact of terrorism has increased supposedly because of the advent of new terrorist tactics and because of easier access to, and a greater willingness to use, WMD. However, critical theorists argue that the threat of terrorism has been greatly overstated, usually through discourses linked to the 'war on terror' and often to promote the 'politics of fear'.

- Key counter-terrorism strategies include the strengthening of state security, the use of military repression and political deals. State security and military approaches have often been counter-productive and have provoked deep controversy about the proper balance between freedom and security.

- Effective solutions to terrorism have usually involved encouraging terrorists to abandon violence by drawing them into a process of negotiation and diplomacy. Although such an approach has sometimes worked in the case of nationalist terrorism, it has been seen as an example of appeasement and as inappropriate to dealing with Islamist terrorism.

Questions for discussion

- How can terrorism be distinguished from other forms of political violence?
- Is there such a thing as 'state terrorism'?
- Are there any circumstances in which terrorism can be justified?
- Has the growing importance of religious motivation transformed the nature of terrorism?
- Did September 11 mark the emergence of a truly global form of terrorism?
- Is nuclear terrorism an 'invented' fear?
- Why is terrorism so rarely effective, and in what circumstances does it work?
- Are restrictions on liberty merely the lesser evil compared with the threat of terrorism?
- Why are military approaches to dealing with terrorism so often counter-productive?
- Should political deals ever be done with terrorists?

Further reading

Bloom, M. *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (2007). A balanced and informative analysis of suicide terrorism and the motivations behind it.

Hoffman, B. *Inside Terrorism* (2006). An excellent general introduction to the nature and development of terrorism, which also considers the challenges facing counter-terrorism.

Jackson, R., M. Smyth, J. Gunning, and L. Jarvis *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction* (2011). An accessible assessment of terrorism and its study which rethinks mainstream assumptions and thinking.

Sageman, M. *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (2008). A thought-provoking study of Islamist terrorism, and particularly al-Qaeda, which emphasizes the need to understand the networks that allow modern terrorism to proliferate.

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Companion Website

Links to relevant web resources can be found on the *Global Politics* website