Terrorism as an alternative form of Political Communication: Implications for International Discourse and Theory

Matthew Todd Bradley, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Political Science
Department of History/Political Science
Indiana University Kokomo
Kokomo, IN 46904
(765) 455-9538
mtbradle@iuk.edu
Abstract
Terrorism has been defined as the use of violence to achieve political, economic and/or social objectives. However, recent empirical studies have begun to tease out definitional nuances which have implications for domestic and international policies for thwarting terrorism. Moreover, such specificities have consequences for theory-building. Thus, this paper seeks to discuss how terrorism as an alternative form of political communication can complement theory-building in domestic as well as international policy formulation.
"Everything that we have so far seen to be true of language points to the fact that it is the most significant and colossal work that the human spirit has evolved -- nothing short of a finished form of expression for all communicable experience. This form may be endlessly varied by the individual without thereby losing its distinctive contours; and it is constantly reshaping itself as is all art. Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations." Edward Sapir (circa 1920)

“The question of language in international relations has been marginalized…. (Fierke 2002, p. 351)

I. Introduction

Terrorism and the inherent nebulous language can be viewed as empirical evidence or simply political opportunism for policymakers. Terrorism is more than a snapshot, or an event that occurs in isolation, it is more than a series of paroxysms of rage. Terrorism or terrorist politics is a type of social movement which shares a common belief system in a cause. Terrorism is a means to an end (e.g., a political, economic, religious, and/or social objective). Terrorism appears to occur more often than not, during periods of hegemonic decline (Bergesen and Lizardo 2004). Terrorism is a form of political communication, which can be viewed as propaganda or rhetoric, just like public diplomacy. That is, even though terrorist acts are overt and violent, the message should be viewed as a way of communicating. Terrorism is a variant of strategic political communication. However, the literature on terrorism offers a myriad of definitions, which further complicates domestic as well as international policy options, while complicating discourse.

Thus, this paper will provide a theoretical argument (Political Process Theory) that terrorism should be viewed as a form of political communication, much like the innocuous civic-engagement activities such as voting, marching and protesting. Moreover, terrorism or terrorist
politics should be viewed as a type of social movement. By seriously considering language and political processes, we can augment our understanding of liberation, or cognitive liberation, as McAdam (1982) has posited.

Terrorism coupled with myriad language usages, further complicates our understanding of terrorist politics, and thus policymaking. Speech and written forms of communication are but two types of communication. Terrorist politics can involve speech, written communication such as jihad or perhaps more important symbolism. Terrorist politics is strategic, notwithstanding critical theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, et al. who challenge the conventional use of language as simply a way of communicating one’s ideas, but also that language can be transformed in varying ways. The use of language in policymaking for Deborah Stone (1988) advances a different model for society - the polis - where community, loyalty, and public interest play important roles in policymaking. For Stone, politics is not an obstacle to good policy; it is "a creative and valuable feature of social existence." Furthermore, there is “…a distinction between the strategic use of language and a communicative use” (Fierke 2002, p. 348). That is, reason and communicative action will minimize (if not resolve) societies’ inequalities and crises. Terrorist politics provides a springboard of direct political action, which has potential payoffs for its adherents. Terrorism is a mode of communicating a message (Stern 2003), be it religious, ideological, economic, or an array of other reasons. Hence, terrorism or terrorist politics has tremendous implications for domestic, regional, and international decision-making.

II. Terrorism: Nebulous Concept, Past and Present

Terrorism is a highly contested concept, as the following definitions illustrate. That is, how
do we decide what is terrorism? As Bonanate (1979, p. 197) indicated “. . . (today much more frequently than some years ago: in 1963 no one defined as ‘terrorist’ the killing of J. F. Kennedy, though it would today be recalled in those terms) (a terrorist action) is more the result of a verdict than the establishing of a fact; the formulating of a social judgment rather than the description of a set of phenomena.” Lodge (1981, p. 5) in his edited book, suggested that terrorism is “an organized pattern of violent behavior designed to influence government policy or intimidate the population for the purpose of influencing government policy”; whereas Krieger (1977, p. 44-57) posits that “terrorism is nongovernmental public violence or a threat performed by an individual or small group and aimed at achieving social or political goals that may be sub national, national, or international”; Friedlander (1981, p. 3) offers “terrorism is the use of force, violence, or threats thereof to attain political goals through fear, intimidation, or coercion”; Lester Sobel’s 1975-edited book insists that “. . . the word terrorism is used today to define almost all illegal acts of violence committed for political purposes by clandestine groups”; the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation’s website (www.fbi.gov) offers its own definition “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives”; and lastly, the United States State Department (2002, p. V) retorts that “the term terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence, perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents usually intended to influence an audience.”

Moreover, should revolutionary, grassroots movements be classified under the rubric of terrorism, even if there is no death and destruction or bloodless change? What about nationalistic, independence movements, should they be classified as terrorist politics? What
about the U.S.’ forced removal of Native Americans from their homelands further westward in America’s early expansion, operating under the model of Jacksonian bellicosity? Furthermore, what about the US dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end Japan’s involvement in World War II? Furthermore, how do we measure quantitatively and qualitatively a terrorist group’s intent, if no acts are carried out? That is, should such groups be automatically designated as terrorist organizations simply because they are challenging the status quo? Lastly, why not classify terrorist groups as Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), unless of course they are state-supported (i.e. more than 50% of financial support), which at that point, we could label them as Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs)?

Schmid and Jongman’s (1988, p. 28) definition of terrorism somewhat approaches a more comprehensive meaning of terrorism vis-a-vis the previous definitions. Schmid and Jongman posit, “Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi) clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat - and violence - based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main target (audience), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.” However, Schmid and Jongman’s (1988) definition lacks a conceptual framework, i.e., it lacks explanatory, evaluative, orientative, and programmatic functions (Ball and Dagger 2002). In addition, their definition lacks questions of revolutionary,
nationalistic, and independence movements. What is more, Schmid and Jongman’s (1988) definition does not address the issue of intent on the part of Nongovernmental organizations, that may or may not engage in violence. Thus, the goal of this paper is to address the question, does it make sense to speak of terrorist politics? Schmid and Jongman’s (1988) definition of terrorism only marginally approaches the question of why does terrorism occur, is it because of “anxiety” or that we only perceive that they engage in terrorist politics because of anger? Moreover, Schmid and Jongman’s definition does not allow us to evaluate, that is, is all terrorism (like war) to be avoided, or are some forms of terrorism morally justifiable (e.g., like justifiable war)? Similarly, Schmid and Jongman’s definition does not provide an orientation or sense of identity, e.g., race, ethnicity, nation (not nation-state), and religion, since most terrorist groups share some majority transparent characteristics or sense of identity. Lastly, Schmid and Jongman’s (1988) definition of terrorism lacks a formidable political program component, i.e., what is the ultimate political objective of terrorist groups? However, Schmid’s (2004) more recent definition of terrorism includes a conceptualization of terrorism. Schmid makes an excellent point that as we attempt to conceptualize terrorism, the very notion is conflated by defining it, and then grappling with nebulous notions of terrorism as an object, concept, or term.

Additionally, terrorism is often in the “eye of the beholder.” For example, the African National Congress (ANC) during apartheid in South Africa once bombed a shopping mall, should it be considered a terrorist organization or simply an NGO fighting for equality, justice and the dismantling of de jure segregation? Certainly, the Apartheid government under P.W. Botha in Pretoria considered the ANC a terrorist organization. What did it mean for Washington, DC and London (the seats of the two powerful Western governments)? Were the
Czech resistance fighters during WWII, who assassinated Heydrich terrorists? They were to the Nazi government. Moreover, was everyone associated with the Central Leadership of Home Resistance (UVOD) terrorists? Once again, they were to the Third Reich. Was it only the escalation to political violence (e.g., assassination) from a campaign of boycotts and public demonstrations that transformed the UVOD into a “terrorist” organization?

Democracies continue to germinate and blossom, so too does the rise in terrorists’ activities. Terrorism has historically provided access or disengagement for marginalized groups. Ironically, conventional, anecdotal conversations suggest that as countries become democratized, threats to national security in the name of terrorism should be mitigated. However, as the number of democracies increased during the twentieth century, many were marred or tempered by terrorists’ activities or at least the threat of terrorism. It has been suggested in the empirical literature (quite convincingly) that terrorism is rational, strategic and has substantive payoffs for adherents. Moreover, most studies on terrorism provide some empirical evidence of the rationality of terrorism (Pape 2003; Bloom 2005); however, none address the overarching or conceptual nature of terrorism, i.e., terrorist politics. Thus, this paper will provide a theoretical argument that terrorism should be viewed as a form of political engagement, much like other civic-engagement activities such as civil disobedience, voting, sit-ins, marches, and letter-writing campaigns. Terrorism is more than a snapshot or detached form of protest. However, terrorism as a politically-engaged construct will inevitably become Hellenic, much like the classic Hamiltonian, Wilsonian, Jacksonian, and Jeffersonian models inherent in US foreign policy decisions. In the next section of this paper, I will demonstrate a very brief overview of the vast literature on terrorism.
Terrorism as a disgruntled form of misguided judgment, especially suicide terrorism, has been long misunderstood and taken for granted by non-academics as well as scholars. However, there has been a plethora of empirical studies which vividly illustrate the salience of terrorism as a political tool that has payoffs. For example, Pape (2003, 2005) and Bloom (2005) have highlighted the importance of viewing terrorism not only as a snapshot of fanatical behavior, but one of logical, coordinated, strategic efforts. Besides, the scholars have demonstrated how terrorism has payoffs for its adherents. Payoffs such as ridding one’s country of occupiers and securing a homeland appear to be the most significant types of payoffs for terrorist groups. Pape (2003, 2005) and Bloom (2005) go beyond the typical explanations as to why people engage in terrorist politics, e.g., so-called elucidations such as socioeconomic factors (Nassar 2005), cultural malfeasance (Huntington 1993), and lack of democratic rights such as civil liberties and civil rights (Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens 2005). However, such typical explanations only address potential superficial reasons why terrorist politics exist. I argue that terrorist politics needs to be examined more conceptually, i.e., in a theoretical fashion so as to capture the underlying stimulus or foundational rationale as to why terrorists’ organizations engage in such surreptitious activities, as opposed to expressing their views via innocuous avenues, e.g., voting and lobbying. Can their views get heard (and possibly acted on) much faster by resorting to terrorism or is terrorism simply a way to draw attention to their “plight” and more unobjectionable paths will eventually be utilized?

I ideological rationale plays a tremendous role in why groups (and states) at times engage in terrorist politics. Recent empirical evidence has been made transparent with several countries participating in prudent precautions and acts of terrorism against an encroaching Soviet Red
Army or perceived Soviet threat during the Cold War era (Ganser 2005). Right-wing terrorist Vincenzo Vinciguerra when on trial for the car bomb killing of three members of the Italian paramilitary police in 1972 in the village of Peteano, stated “. . . the military and civilian intelligence services accepted the ideological reasoning behind the attack” (O’Shaughnessy 1972). Countries as politically diverse as the United States, Britain, Italy, France, Spain, Germany and Sweden all participated in terrorist activities either directly or indirectly in their efforts at thwarting Soviet aggression. The clandestine groups were euphemistically labeled as “stay-behind” groups and served as secret armed networks beholden to NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and their respective countries (Ganser 2005). Procommunist governments, leftist governments, or those individuals who appeared to have communist inclinations were the targets of these “stay-behind” groups (Ganser 2005). In fact, any government or government official who was sympathetic or perceived as sympathetic to the Soviet Union in the post-World War II era was deemed a possible threat to Western Europe’s advocacy of democratic rule. The supporting casts, including the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency, Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service and NATO’s actions were often condoned by local police, state officials and other agents of the local, state and federal government. In the next section of this paper, I will discuss the conceptualization of terrorist politics as an alternative form of political communication.

In international relations, there tends to be shortsightedness when it comes to viewing alternative theoretical frameworks. That is, theoretical blinders are rampant, most of the international relations literature focuses on state-centric conceptualizations. The state-centered (and occasionally hybrid) theories are dominated by realism, neo-realism, institutionalism, neo-
institutionalism and components of constructivism. Fortunately, there are a few major exceptions to the state-centric approach scholars such as Hedley Bull (1977), Robert Keohane (1984), and Susan Strange (1996) are notable exceptions to state-prone politics. Hence, this paper examines terrorism from a group-oriented perspective, not a state-centric position. Moreover, this paper views terrorist organizations as a type of Non-governmental Organization (although some funding may come from the state). Thus, there is a need to view terrorism or terrorist politics not from the usual state-centric ideology, but from group consciousness (i.e., ideologically bound) operating within an international sphere or public domain of politics. This group orientation, which is ideologically driven, emanates from a genuine belief that terrorist tactics can change the state’s actions (or inactions) or policies. Moreover, we might consider the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (aka the Whorf Hypothesis), i.e., different languages determine or shape the ways in which their users view the world. Therein lays the classic Prisoners’ Dilemma, whose language, whose meaning will prevail in international discourse and political communication involving terrorism? And what “accepted” language will be used to distinguish political processes which enable political actors to gain some level of legitimacy?

III. Political Process Theory

The theory of political process emphasizes the impact endogenous political institutions (e.g., legislatures, heads of government, courts) and processes (e.g., political exclusion, internal organization, and political opportunity structures) have on political actors or groups, including non-state actors. That is, the major assumption of the theory of political process is that conflict is inherent and that power structures are the main determinants of domestic conflicts (Jenkins and Schock 1992). Terrorist politics ultimately involves a direct challenge to the existing status
quo and is disruptive, just like rebellions as Gurr (1989) has suggested. Groups such as HAMAS, Hezbollah, the FARC, the ANC, and even the PKK have political wings that attempt to engage in domestic politics. Moreover, in the cases of HAMAS, Hezbollah and the ANC, members have served in government, and are part of the political process even while other elements engage in violent activities. Likewise, the IRA and Sinn Fein eventually engaged in mainstream political processes in the British parliament. So, what political processes would enable terrorist organizations to be more engaged, and feel less marginalized? Political processes or actions suggest that social movements (e.g., increased use of terrorist politics to bring greater attention to one’s cause) result when there is an expansion of political opportunities which are seized by groups (e.g., terrorist groups). Moreover, the groups “… are formally or informally organized, aggrieved, and optimistic that they can successfully redress their grievances” (Goodwin and Jasper 1999, p. 42). However, Goodwin and Jasper, et al. do not include terrorist politics as a form of social movements. Nevertheless, the theory is a good starting point to conceptualize the role of terrorist politics and the discourse of the language which can enrich more robust domestic and international policies to address terrorist group grievances.

The alternative political communication, i.e. terrorist politics, and the language or discourse plays a role in the political processes. In this sense, this paper argues for a poststructuralist paradigm, that is, language as interpretation and representation, whose approach to language is salient? Thus, an objective world for terrorist organizations is in the “eye of the beholder,” like beauty. The logics that are embedded in the grammar of the context is most important, rather than a comparative analysis of an abstracted logic with the world (Fierke 2002). Here are a
couple of examples why language in terrorist politics’ (or any contentious event for that matter) discourse is critical when creating domestic and international policies that address terrorism.

During the spring of 2001, the United States and Chinese governments attempted to resolve the conflict involving the downing of a U.S. spy plane by a Chinese military fighter jet off the coast of the island of Hainan (China’s southernmost province). The Chinese government demanded for weeks an explanation and an apology by the U.S. government for violating Chinese sovereignty and the death of a Chinese pilot, while at the same time the U.S. demanded an apology detention of the spy plane’s crew for eleven days. Ultimately, the U.S. government was only willing to express “regret” over the death of the Chinese pilot. As Fierke (2002, p. 347) suggests, “that something significant was at stake in using this term (“regret”) as opposed to the stronger language of apology.” Fierke (p. 347) goes on to say, “to actually admit responsibility for an act, through an apology, commits one to some form of reparation.” Should the late Saddam Hussein’s massacre of 148 Shiites in the 1980s, be considered terrorism by the state, or genocide by a dictator? Additionally, the Clinton Administration during the 1990s was reluctant to use the word genocide in relation to the massacres in Rwanda, because if the administration labeled such horrific acts as such, the administration “…would be beholden to intervene in a way that they would not so long as the conflict was understood to be a case of local tribal warfare” (McNulty 1999).

Thus, establishing norms of language, whether it deals with human rights, terrorism or other overt forms of communication is essential for creating more transparent causal relationships. And as Fierke (2002, p. 348) suggests “…NGOs may mobilize these norms as a way of pressuring states to act in various ways.” And as I argue in this paper, terrorist organizations are
a type of NGO with an alternative form of political communication, which involves processes of grassroots organization, political elites and frameworks.

IV. Terrorist Politics as an alternative form of Political Communication

So, how does conceiving terrorism or terrorist politics as an alternative form of political communication yield new and invaluable insights to Political Process Theory? The ordinary practice of innocuous forms of political engagement such as voting, lobbying, and protesting are quite evident and accepted as modern forms of participatory politics. These activities occur within a domestic sphere of action that offers a plethora of opportunities for inclusive participation and at least some form of representation within most forms of government. At the domestic level of politics, this sphere of influence is anchored in territoriality (e.g., districts, provinces), attributing to certain rights, privileges, and citizen obligations to those participants within the domestic sphere. Conversely, at the international level of politics, states engage in public diplomacy (Manheim 1994; Leonard 2002), that is, “public diplomacy is a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies” (Manheim, p. 5).

The public sphere in world politics would be synonymous to Bohman’s (1999) domestic sphere notion. That is, the modern public space is differentiated by its role as a space for social and cultural critiques, and as a unique form of communication across various audiences (i.e., countries in terrorism’s case). However, the “boundedness” in domestic politics (Samhat 2005) is lacking in world politics. The “boundedness” in world politics would be the ever-transparency of potential and real terrorist activities. The audience in terrorist politics would be the
transnational civil society, participants of governments, elected (or appointed) government officials, and ordinary citizens. The power of terrorist politics is found not in its ability to instill fear in people and inflict massive harm, but the ability of terrorism to forge new capacities to build solidarity and bring attention to their cause amongst a diverse set of actors who perhaps might have similar gripes with the state(s). The paradigmatic shift that terrorism is viewed as a form of political engagement much like unobjectionable civically-engaged activities provides a new springboard for understanding why terrorists engage in violence as an attention-getting tool to achieve some political objective. However, unlike the domestic sphere of governance, whereby institutionalization is less unwieldy vis-a-vis supranational governance (e.g., European Union), terrorist politics follows not from domestic constraints, rules, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms, but from its maintenance through deliberation of growing acceptance by marginalized groups. That is, as tangential groups (e.g., stateless Palestinians, Russia’s Chechens, Basque independence in Spain) increase, they may feel that their concerns may only be heard (and perhaps realized) by their terrorist activities. Continued growth and solidarity will be the keys to ever-increasing terrorism. Therefore, this new form of political engagement forges a desperate “community” and potentially reconfigures domestic, regional and international decision-making.

Terrorist politics as a theoretical paradigm should be considered in the same context as health security and human rights security (as is the case in Canada and Denmark). In fact, Canada and Denmark have clearly enumerated such concerns in their national foreign policies. Thus, accountability in the global public sphere should not only include issues of mitigating the spread of infectious diseases like Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and Ebola, but also
there must be accountability via direct, indirect and mediated cooperation between countries. Such cooperation has the capacity to foster not only long-term health and human rights relationships, but also security relations. The “ideal of a universal communication community” (Linklater 1998) has promise in that it helps create a world sphere “whereby all voices have the opportunity to be heard and where dialogic engagement permits an expanding range of difference to be incorporated into discussions” (Samhat 2005, p. 182).

V. Terrorist Groups as NGOs: The UN’s role, Framing Issues, Political Opportunities, and Mobilizing Structures

An investigation of Joachim’s (2003) work on Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations’ (UN) agenda-setting reveals possibilities for terrorist politics as a framing mechanism. Framing refers to “the conscious, strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (McAdam, et al. 1996, p. 6). Terrorist organizations perhaps should be viewed as an alternative type of Non-governmental Organization. Moreover, since the UN is the quintessential international marketplace of public discourse, what better place to approach for one’s demands.

Non-governmental Organizations have been quite active in gaining access to the United Nations’ platform (Baumgartner and Jones 1991) as a forum in their (NGOs) attempts to galvanize international state support for concerns such as the environment and women’s rights issues. Moreover, the UN is a good forum because as Claude (1966) has suggested, the UN’s General Assembly agendas provide a “collective legitimation function.” That is, the agendas provide a cue to states (and nations as subgroups of states) which issues and actions are
considered worthy for the international “community.”

The framing phase in the terrorist politics conceptualization is the stage whereby problems, solutions and motives of the terrorist organization occur. The framing phase ultimately leads to UN agenda setting, that is, the UN brings the issue to the international or world politics sphere for discussion and action (or inaction). Framing processes “render events or occurrences meaningful” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, p. 17). For terrorist NGOs this means that the issues and actions (the end), not the means (the terrorist act) can be publicized from an international platform (the UN’s General Assembly) and possible bilateral and multilateral solutions could perhaps emanate from such discourse. Furthermore, the framing stage in the diagram presupposes a dyadic relationship with the political opportunity (institutional context) and mobilizing (networks of civil society actors) structures. That is, each phase directly impacts the other phase. There is a “give and take” scenario whereby framing becomes dependent on the political and mobilizing structures, and vice versa. The foundational stimulus for the framing to take place, and ultimately the fruition of the UN’s role occurs in the political opportunity and mobilizing structures.

**Political Opportunity as a Foundational Stimulus for the Political Objective**

The political opportunity structure encapsulates the institutional context which prescribes barriers on and provides opportunities for civil society actors like terrorist organizations engaged in framing processes (McAdam et al. 1996). Critical to the political opportunity stage are three factors: “… access, allies, political alignments or conflict” (Joachim 2003, p. 251). Access is the most critical component in the political opportunity stage. Gaining allies or coalitions and creating long-term alignments are glamorous and critical in linking frames and mobilizing.
however gaining insider status is the quintessential feature in getting one’s voice heard. Ultimately, getting on the UN General Assembly’s agenda is perhaps a major goal for the terrorist organization. For example, the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s (PLO) late leader, Yasser Arafat’s address to the UN General Assembly in 1974 is a good case study in terms of the above goal. After Arafat’s address, we saw a movement in Palestinian objectives away from liberation of Palestine into gradual acceptance of a peaceful settlement with Israel based on a two-state solution. However, such a solution has yet to come to fruition. Nevertheless, the conflict was quelled to a brief extent (in part) because of the PLO’s voice getting an international public platform to voice its concerns.

In domestic politics, access is critical in attempting to influence decision-makers. Likewise, access is salient in terrorist organizations’ ability to influence public policy in the international sphere. That is terrorists act like “. . . political crises such as the end of the Cold War which placed existing policies into question or international meetings such as UN conferences which provide opportunities for lobbying and interaction” (Joachim 2003, p. 251) are catalysts or a means to a political objective.

**Mobilization as a Foundational Stimulus for the Political Objective**

The networks of NGOs (Joachim 2003), terrorist group coalitions in this case, are the mobilizing actors. The actors assume full responsibility for the deliberate actions of its agenda, including its political communication and engagement with the United Nations. The mobilizing structures (networks) are the source of ideas, like a political party. That is, mobilizing structures are voluntary associations (McAdam, et al. 1996), that is, members of terrorist organizations willing join. But, there are probably some unwilling participants, involuntary participants who
are coerced into joining such organizations for various reasons. The individuals that actually carry-out the terrorist acts are beholden to the group’s agenda, but so too are the top echelon of leaders. If there is major deviation from the organization’s agenda, accountability must be taken seriously, so as not to create division within the ranks. Moreover, organizational entrepreneurs (Joachim 2003) are a necessary component of the mobilizing networks. The organizational entrepreneurs are also salient in the mobilization of a diverse international constituency (Smith, et al. 1997) of other adherents of the terrorist ideology. Additionally, the mobilizing structure of the terrorist organization would utilize “epistemic communities” (Haas 1992) (e.g., experts such as scientists and academics) to help act as liaisons to the United Nations’ General Assembly.

In sum, the frames (Joachim 2003) are the reflections of the terrorist groups’ mobilizing structure and the political opportunity structure within which they operate. And since the United Nations is considered the quintessential international public sphere, what better place to get one’s agenda heard or at least noticed. Unfortunately, there are no case studies to test this proposition for the purposes of this article. However, I believe that this article provides a baseline theoretical framework for future research in the area of terrorist politics as an alternative form of political communication.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, terrorism should be considered as terrorist politics. That is, terrorism should be viewed as an alternative form of political communication. Norms of communication, whether it is conventional or alternative (i.e., terrorist politics) help establish “rules of the game” which in turn provide a conceptualization and meaning for all actors. Moreover, terrorist politics as a theoretical framework allows students of terrorism to strategically and critically analyze
terrorism from a much more interesting and revealing angle. Terrorism is a means (like voting and protesting) to an end. The United Nations could provide the international public space for terrorist organizations, just as other Non-governmental Organizations have in recent years in the utilization of the UN’s General Assembly as a springboard for their concerns. By viewing terrorism from a theoretical construct, we will be more equipped to distinguish what is terrorism and what is not terrorism.

Terrorist politics as an alternative form of political communication is certainly not the most civil form of political participation, but it nevertheless gets publicity, and has potential payoffs. Historically, terrorism has been more successful when coupled with other forms of political engagement (Bonanate 1979). Thus, terrorist politics may not “win” all the battles, but it does get results, especially when coupled with innocuous forms of political participation. Therefore, terrorism should be critically analyzed under the rubric of terrorist politics and as a theoretical paradigm, like other ideologies, e.g., liberalism, conservatism, communism, and socialism. Inchoate democracies as well as nascent non-democracies should begin to view terrorist politics as a conceptual framework whereby varieties of actors like terrorist organizations are taken more seriously. Besides, by taking more seriously terrorist politics as a theoretical paradigm we can begin to ascertain terrorist organizations’ political and mobilizing structures. And by having a better comprehension of the terrorist organizations’ internal infrastructure, states working in tandem may be able to mitigate terrorist activities. Additionally, by viewing terrorist organizations as more than just ad hoc nuisances, and more as viable, alternative Non-governmental Organizations, supranational organizations like the United Nations can perhaps be a liaison for states and marginalized groups. Lastly, understanding the essence of what
genuinely motivates leftist, right-winged and jihadi (e.g., al-Qaeda) terrorist organizations, will perhaps allow an opportunity to bring marginalized groups into the foray of democratic discourse, while at the same time fulfill the ultimate goal of attenuating terrorism.
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