

**Terrorism and Social Movements**  
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**Abstract**

In spite of a proliferation of empirical research, scholarship on terrorism remains theoretically fragmented and often inconclusive on even basic issues. In this chapter, we detail how terrorism can be incorporated into the social movements and collective action scholars' portfolio of research through a review of several of the most widely debated topics in current terrorism research: 1) how terrorism is defined; 2) dynamics of radicalization for individuals and groups; 3) intensity and targets of violence; 4) organizational diversification; and 5) the context of terrorist action. Taking a problem-centered approach, we detail how prior insights from scholarship on social movements and collective action can theoretically and substantively advance terrorism research.

Over the past 25 years, research on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of terrorism has largely evolved parallel to research on social movements and collective action. In spite of efforts to situate movements like the 1960s' Civil Rights Movement and terrorist groups like Italy's Red Brigade within the same theoretical space (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), and work highlighting the contributions of social movement theory to the study of terrorism (Beck 2008; Bosi and Giugni 2012; Gunning 2009), dialogue between the literatures on terrorism and social movements has been slow and fragmented. Yet, recent research on terrorism that integrates concepts from the literatures on social movements and collective action demonstrates the utility of bridging this gap (Alimi, Demetriou, and Bosi 2015; Beck 2015; Goodwin 2006; Kurzman 2011; Olzak 2016; Schoon 2015; Wiktorowicz 2005).

Rather than articulate, once again, the utility of social movement theory for the terrorism researcher, here we flip the appeal on its head. We argue that the theoretical poverty of terrorism studies provides an opportunity for the social movements' scholar. Were researchers to take terrorism seriously as a case of mobilization, both subfields would benefit. This places sociologists in an unfamiliar position. Instead of setting up camp alongside the road and waiting for a distant empire to require tribute, as Abbott (2001) has it, sociologists of movements have the chance to make another field a tributary. This chapter provides a map for this effort.

Specifically, we outline several central questions in current research on terrorism. First, how should terrorism be defined? Second, why do individuals and organizations turn to terrorism? Next, what conditions impact the levels and types of violence caused by actors engaged in terrorism? Fourth, what is distinct about terrorist organizations and how they grow, expand, and evolve? Finally, how do social context and relationships shape the behaviors of organizations engaged in terrorism? Addressing each of these questions in turn, this chapter proceeds by reviewing relevant contemporary research on terrorism and then discusses how scholarship on social movements and collective action can contribute, or already has, to seemingly intractable challenges. We conclude by detailing specific intersections between research on terrorism and scholarship on social movements that may provide new answers to these long-standing questions.

### **Defining Terrorism and Terrorists**

While building a cumulative body of research on any topic requires some shared understanding of the thing being studied, scholars have yet to arrive at a

conclusive definition of terrorism. As early as the 1980s, Schmid and Jongman (1988) identified 109 different definitions of terrorism that had as many as 22 elements in common. This has “resulted in an elusive pursuit for a single definition of terrorism that appears to be unattainable and potentially counterproductive” (Young and Findley 2011:414). Many political scientists and sociologists have weighed in, emphasizing motivations, outcomes, symbolism, intensity, targets, asymmetry and so on (Crenshaw 1981; Enders and Sandler 2002; Hoffman 1998; Lizardo 2008; Tilly 2004; Young and Findley 2011). However, efforts to offer precise, clearly specified definitions are often criticized as overly-narrow, whereas broader definitions fail to provide analytic clarity, leading to “the road of obscurantism” (Gibbs 1989:329).

The process of legally identifying terrorist groups is similarly inconsistent (Perry 2003). For example, in their analysis of formal terrorism designations by the United States, United Kingdom, and the European Union, Beck and Miner (2013) find that the institutional designation of terrorism hinges on specific markers, such as targeting aviation or having an Islamic ideological foundation. Extending the idea that terrorist designation is contingent on specific group-level markers, Chou (2015) finds that the more a violent organization exhibits state-like features (i.e., effective, representative, and secular) the less likely they are to be designated a terrorist organization.

In an effort to productively address these definitional inconsistencies, Young and Findley (2011) suggest that scholars embrace the diversity in definitions of terrorism. Highlighting the growth of databases that record various acts of political violence, they recommend establishing a firm minimal definition, then working to identify empirical regularities among recorded terrorist events to develop basic typologies that would allow researchers to better account for variation. However, Young and Findley’s (2011) focus on inductive analysis does not culminate in a proposed definition. Nor does it provide a clear way to assess the definitions offered by others.

We contend that a more fruitful approach for moving beyond the definitional debate can emerge from the literature on social movements. By placing terrorism within the theoretical spectrum of other phenomena widely studied by scholars of social movements, researchers can eschew problematic efforts to define a heterogeneous class of activities within a homogeneously bounded definition, and instead situate it within the broader study of contentious politics (e.g., Alimi et al. 2015; Beck 2015; McAdam et al. 2001). In essence, this involves a wholesale shift away from attempting to establish a single, all-encompassing definition of terrorism.

Instead, a focus on the scope conditions for the study of terrorism would delimit the universe of comparable phenomena. As such, researchers should study terrorism as a repertoire of contention, terrorism as a tactic, terrorism as an organizational attribute, terrorism as a category of violence, and so forth. To some extent, this is the strategy already employed by social movements scholars when they consider the phenomenon (Alimi et al. 2015; Beck 2015; Della Porta 1995; Goodwin 2006; Olzak 2016; Tilly 2004). Building on this work may help articulate a more systematic agenda for the study of terrorism and provide entree for broader comparative research. The distinct advantage of this approach lies in the theoretical bridge between terrorism and other types of political behavior. This accounts for the diversity of definitions and provides a foundation for more nuanced interrogation of terrorism.

### **Radicalization of Individuals and Groups**

A key issue in terrorism studies is how an individual, organization, or movement turns to terrorism. In essence, the question is radicalization. Under what conditions do individuals and groups radicalize? What processes make violence a more likely strategy? Can these processes be interrupted in some fashion? We draw a distinction here, not always explicit in the research, between the radicalization of individuals and the radicalization of groups. While there may be commonalities between the two, social movement research suggests that scholars should examine them differently.

#### *Dynamics of Individual Radicalization*

An increasingly critical question in research on terrorism is how we evaluate the motives of individuals who are inspired by a larger terrorist organization versus actors who are directed by those organizations. A common approach is to find similar conditions motivating independent actors who engage in terrorism (e.g., Bakker and de Graaf 2011; Moskalenko and McCauley 2011; Phillips 2015; Spaaij 2010). While some researchers have drawn comparisons between non-organizational ideological violence versus organizations involved in terrorism, these efforts have largely focused on differences in activity (i.e., lethality) rather than differences in motivation (Phillips 2015). Instead, the majority of research in this area has typically compared independent terrorists with perpetrators of other types of violent crime and non-violent participants in extremist groups to understand how individual-level characteristics differ.

For example, in their study of right-wing extremist terrorism, Gruenewald, Chermak and Freilich (2013) find that violent “loners” are more likely to live alone than others with far-right ideologies, are more likely to have a history of mental illness, and were actually less involved in right-wing movement activities--such as attending protests--than other far-rightists. However, a report by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in The Hague, Netherlands (Bakker and De Graaf 2010), highlights that, in spite of often being uninvolved in broader movement activities, independent terrorists are ideologically active and “often distribute their ideas and manifestos to the outside world” (p. 4). Consistent with this finding, Berntzen and Sandberg (2014) show that the ideological motivations espoused by lone-wolf terrorists should be seen as “acting from rhetoric embedded in larger social movements” (p. 1).

This research on independent actors suggests points of intervention for the social movements scholar via the literature on networks and framing. Regarding the role of networks, researchers have shown that people are more likely to join a movement if they have or forge network ties with other activists (McAdam 1988; Munson 2010; Snow et al. 1980). This is also the case for movements that employ terrorism. For instance, Wiktorowicz (2005) documents how an Islamist organization makes use of personal contact to socialize into increasing acceptance of violence as a political tool. This suggests that basic social movements research on recruitment and joining could further illuminate the process for radical organizations. Further, Abrahms (2008) argues that individual terrorists develop emotional ties and solidarity with a group that explain seemingly irrational uses of violence. Della Porta (1995) notes a similar process among members of small 1970s radical organizations. By contrast, independent actors--especially right-wing terrorists in the United States (Gruenewald et al. 2013)--appear to often have some relationship to broader movement networks. However, existing evidence suggests that they may not be deeply embedded or hyper-active in these networks. Instead, individual actors appear to be ideologically extreme but moderately involved. These findings parallel the social movements literature on identity in activism that sees solidarity and identification with a group both as a resource for mobilization and a goal of some mobilization efforts (e.g., Bernstein 1997; Polletta 1998) .

With the advent of independent, individual terrorist violence, attention has turned to the media and internet presence of radical groups, highlighting the productive potential of examining the role of online networks. Lewis, Gray and Meierhenrich (2014) provide an example of this type of research with their

examination of the network structure of online activism in general. Consistent with the idea that many actors may sympathize with a movement but few will become actively involved, they find more than two hundred thousand “weak components” wherein all members could directly or indirectly reach one another but were fully disconnected from all other components. Within each of these components, the probability of participation beyond initially “liking” the page was higher for those who joined a Facebook group without being recruited, with the networks centering around a small number of highly active participants. The possibility that a similar dynamic exists for radical activism could be explored fruitfully.

Another way of understanding individual radicalization is through analyses of framing. From a social movements perspective, media--whether social or not--is analyzable from a framing perspective (Benford and Snow 2000). Radical appeals often involve frame alignment and bridging processes, and frame articulation and elaboration is one way to motivate violent behavior (Snow and Byrd 2007). Given the growing interest in content analysis of social media posts and discussions, it is striking that frame analysis has not been commonly employed. In our view, there are whole dissertations waiting to be written from this perspective.

#### *Dynamics of Group Radicalization*

Terrorism researchers have long considered when and why groups turn to terrorism to achieve political aims. These researchers, similar to those who study social movements, have mostly discarded economic grievances and relative deprivation as an explanation of terrorism (Krueger and Maleckova 2003; Piazza 2006). Attention, instead, focuses on group level decisions to employ terrorism, often with a presumption of rational actors (Bloom 2005; Kydd and Walter 2006; Pape 2005). Carter (2016) notes that violent tactics are carefully selected in an effort to shape state responses, providing evidence that terrorism is used instead of guerilla tactics when groups aim to avoid forceful state responses. Similarly, Findley and Young (2015) argue that terrorism is used to spoil peace agreements during civil war, providing a power position to otherwise weaker actors. Addressing the paradox of why actors use terrorism even when it is counterproductive, Kalyvas (2004) argues that the choice to engage in indiscriminate violence is typically driven by the fact that it is cheaper than selective violence. While rational action is an underlying assumption in existing explanations of the decision to employ terrorism, researchers usually indicate that it is bounded (e.g., Simon 1991; see also Carter 2016).

A movements counterpoint to this research lies in theories of protest cycles (Tarrow 1989). Della Porta (1995) argues that radical left-wing violence in Europe was part and parcel of the 1960s-70s protest cycle. Relatedly, terrorism could be seen as a case of tactical innovation (McAdam 1983). New tactics, or activation of old ones, create an advantage for its user as elites and states do not have the capability to counter them as readily. Turning from common political actions to terrorism may thus create a tactical opportunity for an organization in the short run.

Terrorism may also represent a special case of the repression-protest paradox. Violence and radicalization is one possible outcome of repression as moderates leave a movement and opportunities for nonviolent engagement are decreased (Beck 2015; Della Porta 1995; Piazza 2006; Shellman, Levey, and Young 2013). This is a common finding among terrorism researchers, even as they fail to make the theoretical connection. It seems likely, that in some cases, terrorism is a case of there being “no other way out” of a political dilemma, just as it is for some revolutions (Goodwin 2001).

### **Intensity and Targets of Violence**

Consistent with the centrality of violence to our understanding of terrorism, a growing body of research has sought to understand what factors influence both the intensity of violence used by terrorists and the targets they choose (Asal and Phillips 2015; Asal and Rethemeyer 2008; Berman 2009; Cronin 2009; Kydd and Walter 2006; Olzak 2016; Sandler 2014; Valentino 2014). While research examining definitions of terrorism and the dynamics of radicalization have necessarily relied more on small-N and qualitative research (see Young and Findley 2011), research on lethality and target choice is dominated by large-N statistical analyses that rely on the growing corpus of terrorism data.

As Olzak (2016) highlights, research to date has found a variety of factors that appear to influence terrorist groups’ levels of lethality, ranging from an organization’s rivalries to their network position. However, the most consistent finding in the literature to date is that religious or ethnic ideologies are associated with higher levels of violence (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008; Berman 2009; Piazza 2009). These findings are typically explained via one of two causal mechanisms. Following economic club models, the first mechanism assumes that religious and ethnic groups are better able to establish insular communities that increase members commitment and willingness to use violence (Berman 2009; Berman and Laitin 2008). The second assumes that religious and ethnic groups are more successful at

defining themselves in opposition to a coherent and inferior “other”, making extreme violence less problematic in the eyes of individual perpetrators (see Asal and Rethemeyer 2008). In each case, the underlying assumption is that organizational ideologies are drivers of commitment, and commitment in turn increases capacity and decreases risks associated with inflicting physical damage.

In an excellent example of the kind of interdisciplinary work that we advocate here, Susan Olzak (2016) builds on social movements research and organizational theory to challenge and advance these existing explanations. She argues that being able to easily associate an organization with a single, recognizable belief structure will enhance the organization’s appeal to their audience. This appeal fosters greater legitimacy, better matching between adherents and organizations, and lower coordination costs, all of which positively influence lethality and longevity. Yet Schoon (2014, 2015) argues that it is easier to identify illegitimacy than it is legitimacy. Illegitimacy can come with specific strategic benefits in light of the social constraints associated with legitimate norms. From this perspective, organizational illegitimacy is as important a problem for exploration as that of legitimation processes

Contrary to the focus on organizational features highlighted in the literature on lethality, other scholars have emphasized the importance of a violent organizations’ target in shaping their broader strategies. Kydd and Walter (2006) argue that features of a targeted government (e.g., power, resolve, trustworthiness) shape the extent to which government can or will grant concessions to an organization. They also argue that the choice of target (i.e., the World Trade Center in 2001 versus the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000) is shaped by an organization’s goals and audience. Beck (2015) goes so far as to suggest that regime type by itself predicts the type of political violence and contention that is most likely. Young and Findley (2011) also highlight that differences in target reflect an organization’s operational capacity.

### *Towards a Configurational Approach*

While target choice and the determinants of lethality have largely been treated as parallel but distinct questions in research on terrorism, research by social movements scholars suggests that these concerns may be causally connected. In their research on violence in collective action, Martin and colleagues (2009) show that a linear relationship between the composition of a protest and the escalation of violence cannot be assumed. Instead, different compositions of protest have variable



effects when violence is disaggregated into attacks on authorities, attacks on civilians, public property damage and private property damage. This has implications for linking organizational composition, target choice, and lethality and suggests a more complex configurational logic than is typically recognized in existing research on terrorism.

This is a dynamic that social movement scholars know well. Tactics do not occur in a vacuum, and can be determined by the target of contention. For instance, mobilizing public opinion takes a different form than targeting elites (Burstein and Linton 2002; McCarthy and Zald 1977). In fact, targets are often implicitly bundled with particular repertoires: boycotts may be effective against corporations but are senseless against governments (King 2008). Tactics are also dependent on organizational form (Staggenborg 1988) and groups may acquire preferences for particular strategies and actions (Jasper 1997), what Lichterman and Eliasoph (2003; 2014) term group styles. The key point here is that discussion of tactical choice and effects in terrorism studies could be on much firmer footing if it incorporated the longstanding insights of social movements research.

### **Organizational Expansion and Operational Diversification**

A growing body of scholarship has sought to understand the organizational expansion and operational diversification of groups that engage in terrorism. The United States Government's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations includes organizations that support legal political parties, publish newspapers, run TV stations, provide a variety of social services (such as healthcare and educational programs), produce/refine/sell drugs, and traffic or sell cigarettes, antiquities, oil, weapons, and people, among other things (Felbab-Brown 2010; Greenland et al. 2016; Mampilly 2011; Marcus 2007; Williams and Felbab-Brown 2012). These illicit activities represent only a fraction of the observed operations of violent groups. The diversity challenges widespread assumptions in research on terrorism.

#### *The Crime-Terror Nexus*

Early studies of terrorism tended to focus primarily on violent organizations that claimed to represent some sort of higher cause (Hoffman 1998; see also Wang 2010). These organizations were supposedly motivated by the need to "right an injustice or redress a grievance" (Asal, Milward, and Schoon 2015:112; see also Abadinsky 1994; Morselli, Giguère, and Petit 2007). Yet, the end of the Cold War significantly curtailed state funding for violent non-state actors, and a growing

number of violent organizations began participating in criminal operations to finance their activities (Makarenko 2004). This evolution challenged the ideal-typical separation between ideologically driven terrorist organizations and “greed” driven rebel groups, as conceptualized in the literature on economic motivations for civil war (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler 1998; Metz 2012; Snow 1996). Terrorism researchers treated criminal activity as purely profit driven and non-ideological (Cilluffo 2000; Hejnova 2010). Consequently, ideologically-driven organizations’ decisions to participate in crime presented a paradox for research attempting to distinguish terrorist organizations from other types of covert and illegal groups (for a review, see Asal et al. 2015).

As a growing number of organizations collect an increasingly large proportion of their resources from criminal activities, a body of scholarship has emerged examining the nexus between crime and terrorism (Hutchinson and O’malley 2007; Wang 2010). Dominated by small-N analyses, this research worked to conceptualize the variable relationships between criminal organizations and terrorist organizations, and develop theoretical frameworks to help distinguish between these two realms of activity. Makarenko (2004) reviews existing literature on organizations involved in both activities in an effort to map the continuum between crime and terrorism. She argues that “organised crime and terrorism exist on the same plane, and thus are theoretically capable of converging at a central point” (p. 131). She develops a typology for situating the different types of intersection between crime and terrorism, condensing the various points on the continuum from pure-crime to pure-terrorism into distinct categories.

Subsequent scholarship has directed more attention to institutional and organizational dynamics that might shape the way crime and terrorism intersect. Morselli and colleagues (2007) highlight the tradeoff between efficiency and security, arguing that criminal networks need to prioritize efficiency, as their primary goal is to increase profit, whereas terrorist organizations’ ideological focus results in an effort to prioritize security and secrecy. Consistent with earlier research that highlights differences between networks in public management versus the utility of networks in covert and illegal activities (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Raab and Milward 2003), Morselli et al. (2007) compare network data on a criminal enterprise and a terrorist organization. They show how these distinct organizational imperatives result in divergent relational structures among actors in each type of group. These findings add nuance to Dishman’s (2005) assertion that the increasingly networked structure of terrorist organizations undermines the capacity for a central authority to manage

operational activities, thereby increasing the risk that cells in a violent network will pursue other activities of their own initiative. Following from these initial theoretical developments, subsequent research has examined organizational features that shape participation in crime, showing, for example, that ethnopolitical groups and groups with large numbers of alliances are more likely to participate in crime (Asal, et al. 2015).

For the social movements scholar, a key way of thinking about the crime-terror nexus can come from the resource mobilization tradition (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Terrorist groups are, after all, organizations. In our view, the expansion of activities into non-terrorism realms is a case of the organizational imperative. Once established, organizations seek persistence, and the resources that black market activities and kidnapping for ransom allows a group to continue even when the chances of political success are diminished. It could also be useful to consider terrorism as akin to a social movement sector comprising multiple social movement industries (Zald and McCarthy 1980). A terrorism movement sector could easily be said to comprise industries of political violence, illicit businesses, ransoming, etc. Notably, Gambetta (1996) concludes that there is a similar dynamic among criminal mafias in Italy. From this perspective, the diversity of groups and organizational activities is not a surprise, but rather to be expected.

#### *Violent Non-State Actors as Civil Society Organizations*

Beyond a particular focus on crime, other scholars have sought to make sense of violent organizations' provision of social services and other public goods. This is a longstanding feature of work on religious terrorist organizations (e.g., Wickham 2002; Wiktorowicz 2004). For example, Davis and Robinson (2012) argue that religious groups attempt to bypass the state and take over civil society to build their power. This allows for an organization to avoid direct confrontations with state power and create a mobilizing base of supporters. Researchers on the variety of Islamic activism have thus noted that the success of this strategy is dependent on the power and legitimacy of the state itself (Beck 2009; Moaddel 2002; Schwedler 2006; Starrett 1998).

Secular organizations also try to provide public goods as a way to enhance their legitimacy and act as de facto states to a population (see Mampilly 2011). Adopting an explicitly rational-choice framework, Berman and Laitin (2008) argue that the creation of economic "clubs" through the provision of local public goods helps groups weed out potential defectors and increase their capacity. As discussed

above, this has been associated with higher degrees of lethality and longevity (see Olzak 2016).

Felbab-Brown (2010) also argues that service provision and community involvement contributes to the cultivation of political capital among local populations (see also Marcus 2007). Through detailed comparisons of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the Shining Path in Peru, she demonstrates how, under certain local economic and social conditions, participation in the illicit drug economy can help violent organizations to cultivate or maintain local economic opportunities and provide much-needed local resources. This, in turn, helps them build legitimacy.

As outlined above, resource mobilization theory would expect such organizational expansion and goal evolution. A second movements approach to thinking about diversity in terrorist group activities is to consider the difference between initiator and spin-off movements (see McAdam 1995). Initiating movements tend to have a structural advantage, while spin-offs are more likely to see failure. Such failure, as in protest cycles research, lends itself to diversification strategies as the collective group struggles to maintain its purpose. Operational changes here may be similar to abeyance structures for movements (Taylor 1989). While terrorism researchers have considered how and why groups split-off from one another (Cronin 2009), a social movements perspective would view these transformations as natural evolutions of contentious organizations.

### **Interactional Dynamic with Actors and Contexts**

A growing body of research on terrorism has turned attention to how terrorist activities and patterns of behavior are shaped by the interactional dynamics between actors and their social context. By focusing on the relationships between actors and their contexts, these efforts help to specify important scope conditions for theories seeking to explain terrorist violence, thereby providing a foundation for improved case comparison and theory development.

In her book, *Dying to Kill*, Bloom (2005) argues that the decision for terrorist organizations to use suicide missions is not reflective of particular ideologies or ideological goals, and is instead shaped by a process of competitive outbidding in an effort to appeal to local actors. As mentioned above, Kydd and Walter (2006) apply this type of conjunctural logic to the study of terrorist strategies. They argue that terrorist violence is “a form of costly signaling” (p. 5), and that the type of activities that groups using terrorism will engage are shaped by the target they are signaling

(i.e., an external enemy versus a local population) and what needs to be signaled (i.e., power, resolve, trustworthiness). Similarly, in her work on the link between terrorism and democracy, Chenoweth (2013) tackles the assumption that democracy is the ultimate bulwark against terrorism. Using historical data, she shows that terrorism was more common in democracies than authoritarian regimes by the end of the twentieth century. In addition, democracies do not generally have high levels of chronic terrorism unless they engaged in military intervention or occupation (see also Pape 2005), or are poor and experiencing territorial conflicts. Moreover, moderately wealthy and transitioning democracies are at higher risk of domestic terrorism.

From a movements perspective, these findings are not surprising. Regime type and social context affect the various political opportunities available to any political group, and so it is self-evident that differing contexts would lead to differing strategies, terrorism among them. As we discussed above, curbed opportunities for political participation may make political violence the only option for some groups. And democracies themselves may be particularly vulnerable to the theatrical dimensions of symbolic violence (see Juergensmeyer 2001).

Terrorism researchers also have not yet caught up to the insights of relational sociology, where the dyad is considered the fundamental analytical unit. Alimi, Demetriou, and Bosi (2014) draw on the dynamics of contention paradigm (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) to theorize the interactional aspects of terrorism. Using case studies on the Red Brigades, Cypriot independence movement, and Al-Qaeda, Alimi et al. argue that relational mechanisms govern radicalization. Interactional partners for militant groups can vary, ranging from within a movement, counter-movements, and the state. The key point is that the use of violence does not occur in a vacuum but within the social context that the group is located.

More broadly, it could be useful to think of terrorism as part of a strategic action field (Fligstein and McAdam 2012). From this view, terrorist organizations usually would be challengers to incumbents who have the support of a governance unit that enforces norms of political participation. Rather than focus on the rationality or irrationality of the use of terrorism, the researcher could analyze the “social skill” that lies behind the strategic calculations of militants. This would bring in considerations of information resources and leadership (see Ganz 2000). Causes of terrorism could be due to exogenous shocks that rupture the field, but terrorism itself might be such a shock that creates a new episode of contention, as in the events following September 11th. And instead of looking to how different groups end, the researcher would examine the “settlements” of episodes of contention. This

is a subtle distinction, but a noteworthy one. Terrorism might persist but be incorporated into the routine expectations of a newly stable field, much as we see with what military strategists call the “Long War” against contemporary international terrorism.

The point here is that social movement theory has much more nuanced and more sophisticated ways of thinking about the interactional dynamics of terrorism than what is currently found in terrorism studies. And in this poverty lies great opportunity for a more robust theory of terrorism.

### **Conclusions**

In this brief review, we have highlighted five different areas of current terrorism research in which we believe the social movements scholar could intervene fruitfully. This is not novel. Others have suggested for some time that the study of terrorism would benefit from a large dose of movement theory (Beck 2008; Bosi and Giugni 2012; Gunning 2009). But we make a different appeal here. Rather than see social movement theory be cursorily appropriated by terrorism researchers, we think that social movements scholars should appropriate terrorism research. Our argument is simple--terrorism is a type of social movement activity. And it should be analyzed as such.

To summarize our observations, we suggest that a social movement view of terrorism could:

- 1) Redefine terrorism as one form of contentious politics, moving past the definitional debates of the field.
- 2) Analyze individual radicalization as a case of activist social network recruitment, biographical availability, and identity formation.
- 3) Consider terrorist propaganda and social media use through the lens of framing.
- 4) Place group-level radicalization within the wider context of political activity, including tactical innovation, protest cycles, and the repression-protest paradox.
- 5) Treat the lethality of terrorist groups and tactics as a product of organizational characteristics and repertoires of contention.
- 6) See organizational growth and diversification as a case of resource mobilization dynamics.

- 7) Emphasize the relational aspects of terrorist actors with other actors and the environment, including political opportunities and the terrorism strategic action field.

We view these suggestions merely as a starting point for a serious social movements exploration of terrorism. Yet the question remains, why would a social movements scholar want to take terrorism seriously? Of course, we could point to the lives lost and altered, the amount of public and government attention, the billions of dollars spent in its prevention, and so on, that all create terrorism as a pressing contemporary social problem. But we think a sustained study of terrorism is useful on purely intellectual grounds, as well.

Social movements researchers have long recognized that our field is potentially limited by its ideal-typical model of 1960s equality movements (McAdam et al. 2005). And some have lamented the lack of research outside of contemporary western democracies (Johnston 2006). In our view, terrorism provides a necessary antidote to these limitations and an opportunity. Terrorist groups are not mass-based movements that seek to influence elites and democratic governments on behalf of a marginalized population. In fact, activism in a truly repressive setting may often turn towards political violence. Many, and many of the most prominent, terrorist organizations develop in non-western settings. One of the solutions to their field's blind spots, then, should entail a focused consideration of terrorism.

Social movements scholar also need not fret about their ability to conduct empirical studies of terrorism. The extant toolkit of social movement studies already provides the necessary skills. We are skilled at analyzing large scale event data, case studies, organizational dynamics, and undertaking content analysis.

In short, the continued relevance of terrorism in terms of attention, policy formation, and grant-making suggests that we should not miss this opportunity. Terrorists are activists. Terrorism is contention. It is time for social movements scholars to research and theorize accordingly.

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