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**TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM:
A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF INTERNAL
COHESION IN TERRORIST GROUPS
AND THE NEGATIVE DYNAMIC OF VIOLENCE**

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TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM: A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF INTERNAL COHESION IN TERRORIST GROUPS AND THE NEGATIVE DYNAMIC OF VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism, like other forms of political violence, has an organizational context. Few studies, however, have considered the influence of organizational life upon the outward behavior of terrorist groups. This paper explores the possibility that terrorism, in addition to its political context, reflects the internal dynamics of the terrorist group. Assuming that action is what binds the terrorist group together, the use of violence may oftentimes be dictated more by the need to satisfy the internal goal of group survival than to directly further the group's external political agenda. Focusing upon internal cohesion as the critical mediating variable for group survival, this paper examines how the terrorist group's efforts to maintain itself drives violent behavior that transcends political considerations and operational prudence. When external and internal requirements become contradictory, the terrorist group faces a dilemma. Caught in a vicious cycle of reacting to strategic failure with more violent action in order to maintain itself, the terrorist group generates a negative dynamic of violence that not only undermines its chances of achieving stated long-term goals but also accelerates its decline.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Terrorism has an organizational context. Terrorist groups, constituting a special category of autonomous political organization, face the same types of organizational challenges as open, conventional groups. One such challenge is maintaining the group as a minimum prerequisite for enabling it to work towards stated political goals. The prevailing wisdom treats the terrorist group as a collective, strategic actor focused directly on its ultimate political objectives. Recognizing group maintenance as an intermediate path in this process, however, there is an alternative, yet complementary approach which treats the terrorist group as a dynamic actor whose behavior can also be explained by efforts to maintain itself as a cohesive entity. Terrorism is as much, if not more, a reflection of the internal organizational dynamics of the terrorist group as it is a manifestation of stated political objectives.

This thesis focuses on internal cohesion as the critical mediating variable in terrorist group survival. It examines the major forces that affect that cohesion and how the group's efforts to maintain itself can escalate violent behavior to a point that transcends political considerations and operational prudence. The uniquely rigid internal and external constraints of the terrorist environment make the maintenance of cohesion severely problematic over the life-cycle of the terrorist group. The oppressive hardships of

clandestine life and consistent failure in making demonstrable progress towards their ultimate objectives put the legitimacy and cohesion of terrorist groups in constant jeopardy. When internal and external requirements become contradictory, the terrorist group faces a dilemma. The use of violence to maintain the group's identity and cohesion, regardless of the strategic or operational risks, pits the short-term survival of the group against its prospects for long-term success.

From a strategic standpoint, terrorism rarely succeeds. By definition, terrorists must *terrorize* in order to achieve their ultimate objectives. Without a commitment to violence, terrorist groups lose their *raison d'être*. Every violent act, however, carries with it considerable risks to the terrorist group that far outweigh its strategic returns. Despite constant failure to achieve ultimate objectives through violent action, the terrorist group remains bound to it as a means of self-preservation. The result is a vicious cycle of reacting to the objective failures of terrorist action with more violent action in order to reestablish the group's credibility with its membership. The opposite and unintended effect is that such group-oriented acts of violence only breed more failure, taking the terrorists farther and farther away from their ultimate goals. In the end, any logical link between the group's violent acts and its ultimate, stated objectives is a matter of pure

coincidence. This negative dynamic of violence not only undermines the terrorist group's chances of achieving its long-term objectives but also accelerates its decline.

I. INTRODUCTION

> Each terrorist organization has within itself a seed for future counterrevolution and, consequently, also for possible destruction.[1]

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

Terrorism remains a widely recognized but largely misunderstood phenomenon. Even the term is ambiguous, pejorative in application and controversial in definition. More often than not its meaning is subject to the parochial concerns of the academic perspective from which it is being studied. A substantial portion of the existing literature on terrorism and terrorist groups is devoted to definitions, historical accounts, psychological profiles, case studies, order-of-battle information, typologies, and ideologies. Unfortunately, the functional significance of the information contained in many of these studies is unclear in the absence of a general theoretical framework designed not only to further the understanding of how and why terrorism occurs, but also to develop a basis for useful comparative studies of diverse terrorist groups and to formulate balanced, reasonable and selective counter-terrorist policy judgments.

It is fair to say that we understand relatively little about individual terrorists and even less about the internal processes of the organizations to which they belong.

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[1] J.K. Zawodny, "Internal Organizational Problems and the Sources of Tensions of Terrorist Movements as Catalysts of Violence," *Terrorism: An International Journal* 1, No. 3/4 (1978): 282.

Terrorism, like other forms of political violence, has an organizational context, yet few studies undertaken have considered the influence of organizational life upon the external behavior of the terrorist group. Accepting the premise that terrorist groups constitute a special category of autonomous political organization, it follows that they will face the same organizational challenges as open, conventional groups.

Regardless of their nature or origins, all organizations act to achieve some specific goal and, consequently, to coordinate the skill and energies of their membership towards that end. One problem that affects the ability of groups to achieve their stated goals over time is that of developing and maintaining cohesion in the face of dynamic internal and external challenges. The dilemma for terrorist groups is how to stay together for the long-term despite consistent failure to succeed in the short-term. This paper examines the question of what factors most affect terrorist group cohesion and how these factors, coupled with a rigid commitment to violence, ultimately affect the survivability of the group. The proposition is that terrorist groups, by virtue of their unique existence, face internal and environmental constraints which make the maintenance of group cohesion significantly more problematic than for open, conventional groups. Paradoxically, the terrorist group's efforts to preserve

itself through violent action undermines its ability to meet external requirements and may, in fact, hasten its demise.

B. FRAMEWORK FOR THE ARGUMENT AND ASSUMPTIONS

From a strategic standpoint, terrorist groups rarely, if ever, succeed. Figure 1 outlines the schematic framework for arguing that a terrorist group's need to preserve itself and its legitimate identity continue to generate externally violent behavior despite the failure of this course of action to achieve the group's ultimate goals.

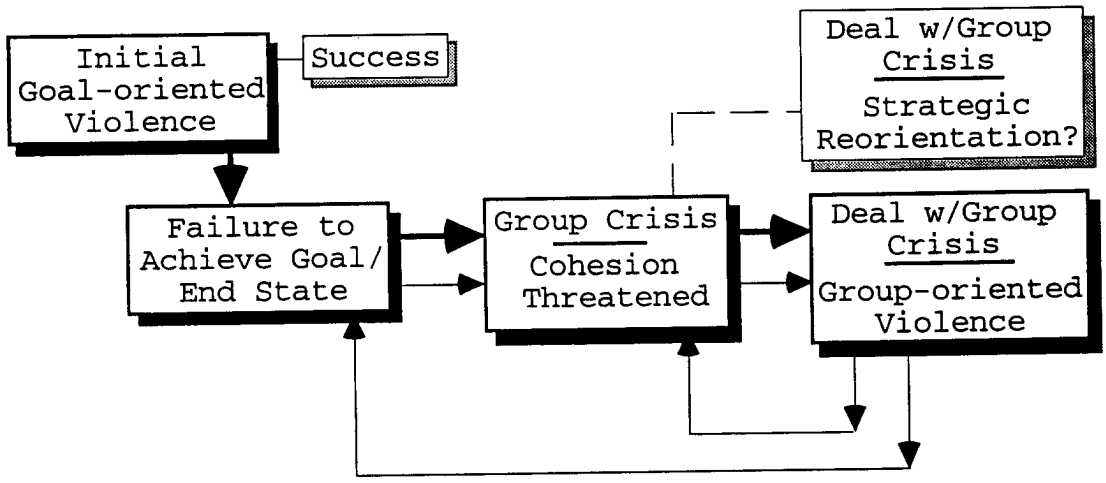

Figure 1. The Negative Dynamic of Terrorist Group Violence.

The prevailing wisdom argues that terrorist groups act to fulfill external goals. As such, their pursuit of an initial course of action depends upon the ultimate success or failure of that action in helping the terrorist group achieve its ultimate goals or end state. Assuming that terrorist groups rarely, if ever, succeed, how then does one account for the persistence of terrorist activity? An alternative

and complementary proposition suggests that one must go beyond treating the terrorist group as a strategic "black box" and consider the dynamics internal to the "black box" that may be driving terrorist behavior. The existence of the group and its continued survival cannot be taken for granted, particularly when the group consistently fails to realize its external goals or when operational prudence dictates that action is too risky for the security of the group. Failure of an initial course of action eventually creates a crisis between a terrorist group's need to maintain internal cohesion and to satisfy its external agenda. When this occurs, these two seemingly complementary goals become contradictory.[2] Even though violent action fails to achieve external goals, its remains critical to the core identity, legitimacy and cohesion of the terrorist group. Therefore, even if a strategic reorientation is needed, i.e., to moderate or disband, the terrorist group continues to exercise violence in order to satisfy its intermediate internal maintenance goals. The act of maintaining the group and reestablishing its identity, in this respect, generates a

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[2] Hannan and Freeman assert the "the modern world favors collective actors that demonstrate or reasonably claim a capacity for reliable performance and can account rationally for their actions...Unreliability and failure of accountability at any stage...threatens the organization's ability to maintain the commitment of members and clients...." See Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman, Structural Inertia and Organizational Change," *American Sociological Review* 49, (April 1984): 154.

negative, downward dynamic of violence that breeds more failure and takes the terrorist group even farther away from achieving its ultimate goal.

For terrorist groups that are committed to violent behavior, maintaining cohesion as a minimum requirement for survival can oftentimes restrict their flexibility and cause them to repeat past mistakes. Their legitimacy at stake, terrorist groups act more furiously to survive, only to find themselves caught in a vicious cycle of violence that only leads them further and faster along the path of decline. Studies on organizational decline offer the following insights to this destructive process. According to Cummings:

> One of the most thoroughly documented reactions to decline and threat of failure is a combination of denial, resistance, and struggle focused on the "enemy" versus diagnosis of the problem. All of these efforts to prevent decline generate counterforces, making the symptoms and by-products of decline even more painful. These actions and reactions, culminating in a downward cycle of dysfunctional rigidity, are well documented across several areas of knowledge in organizational behavior.[3]

Another study by Staw asserts:

> ...committing additional resources to a losing decisional alternative can...turn into a negative cyclical process. That is, due to a need to justify prior behavior, a decision maker may increase his commitment in the face of negative

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[3] Larry L. Cummings, "Organizational Decline from the Individual Perspective," In *Readings in Organizational Decline: Frameworks, Research and Perceptions*. eds. Kim S. Cameron, Robert I. Sutton and David A. Whetten (Cambridge, Mass: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1988): 422.

> consequences, and this higher level of commitment may, in turn, lead to further negative consequences.[4]

There are two assumptions that are critical to this paper. First, whatever else they stand for, the predominant concern of most groups is their own survival. Terrorist groups are no exception. As noted in a study by the Rand Corporation:

> Organizations are dedicated to survival. They do not voluntarily go out of business. Right now, the immediate objective of many of the world's hard-pressed terrorist groups is the same as the immediate objective of many of the world's hard-pressed corporations -- that is, to continue operations.[5]

Second, the purpose of terrorism is to terrorize. The opportunity for action is an integral part of an individual's reason for joining and remaining in a terrorist group. Therefore, as Crenshaw suggests, pressures to take violent action are intensified by internal group politics to the point where the group must make the choice between "action as survival" and "inaction as the death of resistance."[6] Action

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[4] Barry M. Staw, "Knee-Deep in the Big Muddy: A Study of Commitment to a Chosen Course of Action," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 16, (1976): 29.

[5] Bonnie Cordes et al., *Trends in International Terrorism*, 1982 and 1983 (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 1984), p. 29.

[6] Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, No.4 (July 1981): 389.

is, in essence, the glue that holds the terrorist group together.

C. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to provide an alternative, yet complementary, explanation to the goals approach for terrorist group behavior. Reflecting the internal dynamics of the terrorist group, this behavior is predicated upon the need to fulfill internal goals and requirements, the foremost of which is ensuring the effective survival of the group. This paper examines cohesion as the critical mediating variable for group survival.

Using elements of conventional organization theory as a conceptual framework for analysis, this paper will examine the major forces that likely to affect the internal cohesion of terrorist groups and, consequently, their ability to pursue stated, political goals. The relative paucity of studies devoted to internal organizational processes in voluntary and political organizations necessitated drawing upon findings from the larger body of general organizational literature. The study of organizational behavior deals with so many types of groups and therefore implies that there is a body of principles common to all groups. Despite the obvious differences between open, conventional groups and terrorist groups, one can assume there are enough similarities in the behavioral dimension such that research on one type yields similar results in another.

Chapter II reviews the two predominant theories on terrorist group behavior and illustrates the need to consider the effects of internal group dynamics, in addition to stated strategic goals, on terrorist behavior. Chapter III provides a overview of group cohesion in organizational theory and proposes a working definition of cohesion that highlights its role in effective group survival. Chapter IV provides a universal focus on the nature of the terrorist milieu and the uniquely restrictive challenges it presents for the maintenance of terrorist groups. Chapter V draws upon the concepts of group cohesion and the challenges of the terrorist environment to provide a critical analysis of the forces that affect the internal cohesion of terrorist groups and their outward behavior. The ultimate intent is to argue that, despite consistent failure to meet external goals through violence, a terrorist group's rigid commitment to the course of violent action as a means to satisfy the internal requirement of group maintenance has the opposite, unintended effect of accelerating the group's decline and undermining its chances to achieve long-term goals.

II. A REVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR TERRORIST GROUP BEHAVIOR: GROUP GOALS AND VIOLENCE

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the two predominant theoretical frameworks for the analysis of terrorist group behavior: the strategic actor model and the organizational dynamics approach.[7] Juxtaposing these two causal theories highlights the need to avoid the trap of what Peter Merkl refers to as "monocausal explanations"[8] for terrorism. It also cautions against adopting overly rationalistic or strategic interpretations of terrorism which exclude the possibility that terrorist violence is as much, if not more, a manifestation of internal dynamics as it is a face value reflection of the group's stated political doctrine and goals.

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[7] Others which will not be covered specifically in this paper are the psychological and structural approaches. For background on psychological theory of terrorism, see Jerold M. Post, M.D., "Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces," In *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press, 1990): pp. 25-42. For structural theory, see Jeffrey Ian Ross, "Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model," *Journal of Peace Research* 30, No.3 (1993): 317-29.

[8] Peter Merkl, "Political Socialization of West German Terrorists," In *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 199.

Instead of analyzing terrorist groups as purely strategic "black box" actors focused only on their ultimate political goals, this paper argues that they be interpreted as dynamic actors whose intermediate objective is maintaining the group. Terrorist leaders cannot simply assume the existence of the group. The group must constantly be aware of itself, for without it there is no chance of ever achieving the ultimate strategic objective. The path from the terrorist group's initial violent act to its ultimate objective is not a direct one. Instead, the group may be forced to pursue alternate paths to the same end point. Viewing group maintenance as a necessary intermediate means to a strategic end, one must consider that there are dynamics internal to the group that are also driving terrorist behavior. Although the group continues to work towards its ultimate goal, it may become thrown off track by efforts to maintain itself as a cohesive entity through violent action. To neglect cohesiveness and group survival is to forego any realistic hope of achieving the group's ultimate objective. Therefore, much of the terrorist group's planning and activity is concerned with the fundamental goal of perpetuating itself.

B. THE STRATEGIC ACTOR MODEL

The strategic actor model assumes that a terrorist group acts as a collective unit according to a rational, strategic logic, i.e., it starts with a political goal and a collective

set of values, recognizes operational limitations and external stimuli and constraints, evaluates possible outcomes, and ultimately chooses an appropriate course of action which maximizes reward, minimizes cost, and is *believed* to be consistent with the desired outcome. In her discussion of the "instrumental" (strategic) approach, Martha Crenshaw describes terrorism as "a deliberate choice of a political actor," and as such, a logical means to a political end.[9] Organizations derive a great deal of their meaning and legitimacy from at least maintaining the appearance of rationality. It is important to understand that rationality in this context is not intended as a judgment of sanity or acceptability of the goals of the terrorist group. As Kent Layne Oots explains:

> Rationality implies only that an actor has a reason for his action and that he believes the action to be useful in obtaining his goals...It is the action in accord with the belief that is important.[10]

The strategic actor model assumes that a terrorist group's success or failure is measured in terms of its ability to attain its stated political ends.[11] From a purely

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[9] Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches," In *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, ed. David C. Rappaport (London: Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1988), p. 13.

[10] Kent Layne Oots, "Bargaining With Terrorists: Organizational Considerations," *Terrorism: An International Journal* 13 (1990): 146.

[11] Crenshaw, "Theories," p. 15.

rational, strategic standpoint, the more costly it becomes for a terrorist group to succeed, the less likely it is that the group will attempt action. Frustration from external stimuli in seeking its political objectives renders the group vulnerable to physical defeat through capture or losses in the field, factionalism, or disbanding of its own accord. While their is a grain of truth to such an argument, it cannot explain why many terrorist groups have survived and remain faithful to their cause despite imprisonment of leadership and cadre, severe attrition and widespread public opposition. Such diverse groups as the IRA Provisionals, the Japanese Red Army (JRA), the Red Brigades, the Red Army Faction (RAF), the Basque ETA and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) have come nowhere close to achieving their ultimate, stated goals, yet they persist. One cannot completely reconcile a strategically-based theory of terrorist activity with the persistence of a phenomenon that rarely, if ever, succeeds beyond the tactical level.

C. THE ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS APPROACH

Treating the terrorist group as a goal-oriented, strategic "black box," the major limitation of the strategic actor model is its level of analysis does not satisfactorily incorporate the role of the individual in shaping group activities. According to Philip Selznick's theory of organizations:

> The needs of the individuals do not permit a single-minded attention to the stated goals of the system within which they have been assigned. Many of these interests and goals do not always coincide with the goals of the formal system.[12]

Applying this logic to terrorist groups, Crenshaw states:

> The organizational approach to interpreting terrorist behavior assumes a complexity of motivation well beyond the strategy of challenging governments to effect radical change. It proposes that leaders of terrorist organizations struggle to maintain a viable organization. The incentives they offer members may require actions against the government regardless of the cost, if that cost is short of complete destruction of the organization.[13]

Most rational, self-interested individuals are not motivated to join established groups, much less terrorist groups, for the hope of fulfilling purposive or political goals alone. Furthermore, individual commitment to the group cannot be taken for granted. Exchange theories of interest group behavior suggest that considerable ideological variance may exist within a particular political organization. Actors may join a group whose purposive goals[14] they oppose or are indifferent to simply because the selective benefits of membership, unobtainable outside the group, outweigh the cost

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[12] Philip Selznick, "Foundations of the Theory of Organization," *American Sociological Review* 13, (1948): 27.

[13] Martha Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism," *Orbis* 29, No.3 (Fall 1985): 487.

[14] Within this context, political goals are considered to take the form of "collective goods."

of participation.[15] For the terrorist, such personal needs may include comradeship with kindred spirits, acceptance and a need to belong, social status, excitement and the opportunity for *action*. Crenshaw and Oots both stress how "selective incentives" are tied to the viability of terrorist groups and, as Crenshaw indicates, images of the stereotypical terrorist motivated by deep political convictions "obscures a more complex reality."[16] Applying what is referred to as the "free-rider" problem to terrorism, Oots states that if the goal of the terrorist group takes the form of collective goods, it would not be rational for an individual to join without other inducements since he would share in the outcome with or without participation.[17] Not everyone committed to an ideological or political cause becomes a terrorist.

Selznick asserts that organizations never succeed in "conquering the non-rational dimensions of organizational behavior"[18] which could be considered the unintended outcome

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[15] See Norman Frohlich, Joe A. Oppenheimer and Orin R. Young, *Political Leadership and Collective Goods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) and Frohlich et al., "Individual Contributions for Collective Goods: Alternative Models," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 19, No.2 (June 1975): 310-329.

[16] Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach," p. 474.

[17] Kent Layne Oots, A Political Organizational Approach to Transnational Terrorism, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986): pp. 139-40.

of the various social and psychological forces which go along with membership in a collective. The implication is that in addition to its strategic dimension, group behavior also reflects a frequently overriding concern for motivating and maintaining membership. This may help explain why terrorism persists despite its consistent political failure. As Harvey Waterman writes:

> ...the coherence and effectiveness of the collectivity as an organization constitutes one of the resources to be considered as it makes its choices for or against particular collective actions.[19]

A central theme in James Q. Wilson's *Political Organizations* (1973) is that the behavior of persons who lead or speak for an organization is best understood in terms of their efforts to maintain and enhance the organization as well as their position in it. In a similar vein, the internal organizational approach to terrorism attributes this phenomenon to an organization's struggle to survive. It suggests that terrorist groups may be strengthened or weakened as much by internal dynamics as by external stimuli. Crenshaw asserts:

> ...focusing on organizational processes offers a way of integrating the variables of ideology, individual motivation, and social conditions into explanations of how terrorist campaigns get started and why they continue despite the deployment of the

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[18] Ibid., p. 25.

[19] Harvey Waterman, "Reasons and Reason: Collective Political Activity in Comparative and Historical Perspective," *World Politics* (July 1981): 557.

> government's superior power of coercion against them.[20]

As such, action taken in the interests of internal cohesion and solidarity can develop a dynamic of its own. Terrorism, in such circumstances, becomes an end in itself.

D. CONCLUSIONS

Organizational dynamics theory, like the strategic actor model, is not a panacea for explaining the causes of terrorist activity. However, it does allow the possibility that terrorist group violence is more than a manifestation of strategic logic: it may simultaneously or exclusively reflect attempts to confront internal organizational challenges such as interpersonal rivalry, leadership struggle, divergent expectations, and questions of legitimacy. This is what Thomas Perry Thornton refers to as the "proximate objectives of terrorism." As Thornton states:

> An economically-minded insurgent group will attempt to make each act affect as many objectives as possible, and, conversely, the analyst of an act of terrorism should not be mislead into thinking that each act can have only one objective.[21]

It may prove difficult to discern whether or not a specific terrorist act is internally-directed. However, it will benefit both the analyst and the policy maker to at least

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[20] Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach," p. 472.

[21] Thomas Perry Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," In *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, ed. Harry Eckstein (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1964), p. 82.

consider that the intended target may not always be the government or society at-large. This is particularly relevant for terrorist actions which appear either strategically and politically inconsistent or unusually risky for the group in question. The lesson is that one cannot assume a terrorist group's intent by its actions alone.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF GROUP COHESION IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

A. INTRODUCTION

The existence of the group and its survival cannot be taken for granted. Focusing on the internal dynamics of groups as an alternative explanation for group behavior, cohesion is a significant mediating variable to group survival. Without cohesion, groups may exist physically but cease to maintain themselves as cooperative, goal-oriented systems.

Cohesion has been a significant subject of group dynamics research since the early 1950s. Unfortunately, the copious research devoted to the concept has not yielded a commensurate degree consensus on its definition and methods of operationalization. Many researchers have investigated and described group cohesion without defining exactly what it is. Most definitions are considered either too narrow, too broad, or too abstract to be of use for sound empirical research. One study summarizes the problem best: "...there is little cohesion in the cohesion research."[22] As a result, the true meaning of group cohesion remains an enigma.

Despite the difficulties of definition, there is general agreement as to what cohesion means to a group, the predominant assumptions being that it is vital to group

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[22] William E. Piper et al., "Cohesion as a Basic Bond in Groups," *Human Relations* 36, No.2 (1983): 94.

survival[23] and represents a sort of barometer of group performance. Research on group cohesion also rests on the assumption that members of highly cohesive groups are more cooperative and more responsive to group influence, tending to work more efficiently towards group goals and deriving higher satisfaction from doing so. Cohesion is often cited as a significant factor in various group processes including membership continuity, conformity, productivity, behavioral change, and goal achievement. For example, one study characterizes a successful group as follows:

> The definition of a successful group is a group with high cohesion and high productivity, in which objectives, role differentiation, values and norms, and membership criteria are clear and agreed upon, and in which communication is open and full.[24]

Another study offers the following:

> We think...of a group that has a strong feeling of 'we-ness',...We think, too, of a group where everyone is friendly or where loyalty to fellow members is high. A cohesive group might be characterized as one in which the members all work together for a common goal, or one where everyone is ready to take responsibility for group choices. The willingness to endure pain or frustration for the group is yet another indication of its cohesiveness. Finally, we may conceive of a

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[23] A certain amount of cohesiveness or integrating force is necessary for a group to exist at all. Unless a certain critical strength of force toward remaining in the group applies to all members, the group will disrupt and cease to be. See John Thibaut, "An Experimental Study of the Cohesiveness of Underprivileged Groups," *Human Relations* 3, (1950): 251.

[24] C.R. Shephard, *Small Groups* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1964), p. 118.

cohesive group as one which its members will defend against external criticism or attack.[25]

The ambiguity surrounding group cohesion is unfortunate considering its assumed criticality to group process and outcome in all varieties of group settings. Certainly, there is no shortage of theorists willing to express ideas regarding what characterizes a *cohesive group*. Unfortunately, these characterizations taken singularly fall short of specifying variables which contribute to the creation of a cohesive group.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the predominant theories on group cohesion in highlight the problems in defining the concept and separating it from other group concepts and processes. Given that no all-inclusive definitions or operational measures of group cohesion are available, a consolidated, multi-dimensional working definition from the existing literature will be developed. Finally, some of the problems in relating group cohesion with group effectiveness and survival will be presented.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROMINENT THEORIES

Evans and Jarvis point out in their review of the research on group cohesion that the lack of consensus on a nominal definition has resulted in a number of imprecise

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[25] Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory* (Evanston: Row, Peterson and Co., 1953), p. 276.

measurement techniques and has made it difficult to build upon previous research.[26] Most of the problems have been identified but still plague the literature today. A review of the literature reveals that there appear to be two major schools of thought on the concept of group cohesion, neither of which has bridged the gap completely between recognizing it as a group phenomenon and defining it as such.

1. Cohesion as Attraction-to-Group

One of the first widely accepted nominal definitions of cohesion was developed by Festinger (1950); he defined cohesion as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group."[27] Festinger operationalized this definition by focusing on indexes friendship and attraction to other group members. Festinger and others to follow placed emphasis on the individuals' desires for membership based upon the attractiveness, or *valence*, of the group. For example, Cartwright and Zander limit the concept of cohesiveness to the phenomenon of attraction-to-group as a function of group properties (e.g. goals, size, type, and position in the community) and individual needs (e.g.

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[26] Nancy J. Evans and Paul a. Jarvis, "Group Cohesion: A Review and Reevaluation," *Small Group Behavior* 11, No.4 (November 1980): 365. This article provides a useful overview of the major theories on group cohesion since the early 1950s.

[27] Leon Festinger, "Group Attraction and Membership," In *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory*, eds. Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander (Evanston: Row, Peterson, and Co., 1953).

affiliation, recognition and security). Therefore, a reduction in the ability of the group to meet these needs decreases the attractiveness, and thereby, the cohesion of the group.[28]

Identification and direct measurement of the "total field of forces" proved difficult if not impossible, and the focus on individual attraction-to-group had blurred the concept of cohesion as a group phenomenon. It suggested that group cohesion can be quantified as a total sum or average of individual levels of attraction and, as Evans and Jarvis note, such an approach fails to consider the variability in attraction among group members.[29] It could also be suggested that this approach assumes attraction to other members of the group will translate into attraction to the group as a whole.

Gross and Martin (1952) criticized Festinger's operationalization of the "total field of forces," suggesting instead that what should be measured is the "resultant of the total field of forces" derived from asking members how attractive the group is to them in general terms.[30] Gross and Martin rejected the additive conception of cohesion and stated:

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[28] See Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, eds., *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory* (Evanston: Row, Peterson, and Co., 1960), pp. 69-74.

[29] Evans and Jarvis, p. 359.

[30] Ibid., p. 361.

> a group may be highly attractive to all members but still show a very low degree of sticking-togetherness as a group.[31]

Rather than focusing on individual perceptions, Gross and Martin preferred placing emphasis upon *relational bonds* between and among group members under varying conditions and crises in order to derive a definition for cohesion. The result was an alternative nominal definition referred to as the "resistance conception of cohesion" wherein cohesion becomes a measure of how strong or weak a disruptive force is required before a group begins to break apart. According to the definition proposed by Gross and Martin:

> If one views cohesiveness as "sticking-togetherness" or, the resistance of a group to disruptive forces, then it is immediately apparent that the attractiveness of a group for its members could be viewed as a variable that might be related to the resistance of a group to disruptive forces.[32]

Despite their criticism of Festinger, Gross and Martin similarly offered no plan for operationalization. However, they did stress the group force quality of cohesion of which individual needs are but one variable.

Another study which touches upon the group nature of cohesion is one conducted by Van Bergen and Koekebakker (1959) in which cohesion is defined as "the degree of

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[31] Neal Gross and William E. Martin, On Group Cohesiveness," *The American Journal of Sociology* 57, (1952): 554.

[32] Ibid., pp. 553-4.

unification of the group field." This theory relates to "closeness" among group members, similarity in perception of events, and bonding in response to the outside world. By this definition, all members of a cohesive group would tend to perceive the group similarly and respond to questions concerning the group in the same way.[33]

2. Cohesion as a Bonding Force

Another approach to cohesion essentially regards it as a "organizing force" which prevents the group from "scattering like a heap of billiard balls." From the group's perspective, internal and external disorder are viewed as "disruptive forces." Group cohesion is defined as the opposing force to pressure and agitation which stems from the need of loyal members to maintain the orderly existence of the group. This approach assumes that the forces involved are dynamic and measurable, and that their respective ratios may determine group effectiveness over a specific period of time.[34]

In another study, Piper, et al. (1983) support the narrow definition of cohesion as "a basic bond or uniting force" and entertain the possibility that several types of bonds ("cohesions") exist within a group, i.e., member-

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[33] A. Van Bergen and J. Koekebakker, "'Group Cohesiveness' in Laboratory Experiments," *Acta Psychologica* 16, (1959): 85, and Evans and Jarvis, pp. 363-6.

[34] Berne, p. 72-80.

member, member-leader, and member-group. The strength of one or more of these bonds determines whether or not a member remains in the group.[35] In contrast to the attraction-to-group theorists, Piper, et al. indicate that the term cohesion, as defined, does not necessarily imply that group members regard the group as attractive. It suggests only that the members find themselves bound to it. Therefore, a "cohesive group" is defined as:

> a group where the various bonds in the group are strong, e.g., where a majority of the participants possess a commitment to the group, to each other and to the leader.

Placing the different types of individual bonds within a group context, Piper et al. define "group cohesion" as the "group property that emerges from the set of cohesions (bonds) that exists in a group."[36]

C. WORKING DEFINITION OF GROUP COHESION

Evans and Jarvis asserted that the lack of an agreed upon definition and measurement technique for cohesion does not mean that investigation of the phenomenon in groups should be avoided. Rather, they suggest it is more beneficial to begin reevaluating and investigating cohesion based upon "a sound conceptualization" and "research effort directed at understanding the determinants and effects of the

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[35] William E. Piper, et al., "Cohesion as a Basic Bond in Groups," *Human Relations* 36, No.2 (1983): 95.

[36] Ibid., p. 106.

variable."[37] To accomplish this with the intent of applying a coherent theory to behavior in terrorist groups, the author feels it is necessary to develop a more specific working definition of group cohesion. With the aforementioned theories as a basis, the proposed definition represents a multi-dimensional conceptualization of group cohesion focused more precisely upon the bonds, or forces, which hold a group together, both structurally and conceptually. The working definition is as follows: *Group cohesion is the group-level manifestation of the strength, or resiliency, of the centripetal bonds (structural and conceptual[38]), which pull members towards conformity with the group, against dynamic internal and external pressures that threaten to weaken them.*

Both the nature of the group and the motivations of the individuals within it must be considered in order to adequately conceptualize group cohesion. The working definition presented suggests that group cohesion is a leadership problem whose solution lies in the ability to forge and maintain direct linkages to the members that are stronger than or impenetrable to forces and secondary

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[37] Evans and Jarvis, p. 365.

[38] The inspiration for the division of centripetal bonds into these two general types comes from Bruce Stanley's research on fragmentation in national liberation movements. Stanley, however, uses the term *dimensional* vice *structural* bonds. See Bruce Stanley, "Fragmentation and National Liberation Movements: The PLO," *Orbis* 22, No.4 (Winter 1979): 1033-1555.

linkages which divert energies away from goal attainment. A group unable to forge such links is one whose legitimacy is constantly in question and whose energy is concentrated almost exclusively upon survival itself.

1. Definitions of the Centripetal Bonds

Both types of centripetal bonds help buffer the terrorist group by establishing a framework within which cohesion can develop amidst tense and ever-changing internal and external group environments. Structural (dimensional) bonds comprise the inherent characteristics or properties of the group whose clarity and pervasiveness affect an individual's ability to act in accordance with the group, develop affiliations, and judge his or her performance relative to others. Stanley defines these bonds as "characteristics of the movement that maintain the parameters within which affiliations and cohesion can develop."[39] They include group structures and boundaries, role differentiation, command and control mechanisms, goals, professionalism and homogeneity of membership, in-group/out-group awareness, and the nature of leadership. As a group develops, recurrent procedural and relational patterns emerge. Ideally, all group members embrace and are influenced by these patterns whether they are conscious of it or not. Certain shared expectations and assumptions emerge

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[39] Ibid., p. 1035.

regarding what constitutes appropriate and meaningful group behavior, i.e., unwritten, informal guidelines that members internalize without realizing it. Structural bonds can be included under the category of group *norms*, a generalized term for all types of shared expectations held by members that define appropriate and inappropriate behavior under a given set of circumstances. Norms are determined by such factors as the types of individuals involved, experience, patterns of interaction among individuals, training and operating environments, and the nature of the problem.[40] Cohesion is an outcome of the way group members interact.

Conceptual bonds influence an individual's conception of the group and his or her affiliation with it as a whole. Stanley defines them as "explicit linkages that the member experiences as influential in his own understanding of affiliation with the movement."[41] Conceptual bonds include a shared sense of identity, ideological and value fulfillment beliefs, incentives, coercive incentives, situational and personal relationships, and cultural/kinship linkages.[42] In some cases, these bonds may be easier to manipulate *ad hoc* in time of crisis or sudden change than are structural bonds. The grounds or norms upon which a group or movement is

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[40] Shephard, p. 102-4.

[41] Stanley, p. 1036.

[42] Ibid., pp. 1035-7.

founded, however, may limit the extent to which certain bonds can be manipulated to maintain cohesion. The problem for the group is to ensure that the primary direction of linkage for these conceptual bonds remains toward the group rather than individuals and sub-groups.

2. Problems of Measurement

The proposed working definition for cohesion is as limited as the predominant organizational theories in its ability to suggest a methodology for measuring group cohesion. Perhaps it is impossible to quantify with any precision or certainty. Therefore, rather than considering group cohesion an additive phenomenon, it may prove more useful at this stage to consider it more in terms of degrees. This of course assumes that a group exhibiting strong structural and conceptual bonds would be considered a highly cohesive group; a group that is weak in both categories would be considered a highly non-cohesive group. The problem is how to evaluate the area in between these two extremes. Perhaps future research could establish a rough hierarchy of bonds or variables according to their relative impact on group cohesion to allow groups to be measured on some continuum depending upon the type of group and its operational constraints.

It is outside the scope of this paper to measure cohesion in terrorist groups or to propose methods for doing so. Given the infancy of comparable empirical research on

this phenomenon in the conventional organizational field, this is not an unreasonable disclaimer. Instead, the intent is to establish a preliminary framework from which assumptions and comparisons can be made concerning terrorist group behavior. Therefore, a working definition, an identification of the major bonds contributing to group cohesion, and an analysis of the forces working for or against them in terrorist's environment will suffice for the purposes of this paper.

D. THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF COHESION

For the purposes of the present study, it is instructive to point out how cohesion can be a necessary good and as well as an unintended evil for the group. It is easy to assume that the more cohesive a group is, the better it will function. It seems only logical that an effective group must be cohesive. However, it is important to keep in mind that the converse of this statement is not always true. Cohesion may, in fact, have a negative effect depending upon its direction and source relative to the group. Therefore, it cannot be taken for granted that the relationship between cohesion and group effectiveness is necessarily a positive one.[43]

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[43] Results of several empirical research studies have found that no definite relationship exists between cohesiveness and group productivity/effectiveness. See Schacter, et al., "An Experimental Study of Cohesiveness and Productivity," *Human Relations* 4, (1951): 229-38 and Stephen

As suggested earlier, a *cohesive group* is one whose centripetal bonds with its membership are at least powerful enough to neutralize forces, bonds and loyalties which are opposite or tangential to the direction of the group and its goals. This implies that group cohesion is but one aspect of group development--it is not guaranteed. Over the life-cycle of a group, dystonic "cohesions" may emerge at the individual level, either to sub-groups or other members, whose characteristics are determined largely by members' motivations for joining, group type, and group environment. Unless such individual proclivities can be eliminated or channeled, the result may be a group which exhibits a high degree of "cohesiveness" among members yet, for all intents and purposes, is ineffective.

Just as too little centripetal bonding is hazardous to a group, too much of it under certain circumstances can lead a group down a similarly destructive path. Under what Irving L. Janis terms "Groupthink," a group under pressure may take unnecessary risks when it becomes essentially a victim of its own norms.[44] While such a group is highly cohesive in the group sense, its introversion and isolation from reality may

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J. Zaccaro and Charles A. Lowe, "Cohesiveness and Performance on the Additive Task: Evidence for Multidimensionality," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 128, No.4 (1988): 547-58.

[44] Irving L. Janis, "Groupthink," *Psychology Today* 5, (November 1971): 43-48.

cause it to lose sight of the purpose for which it exists. In this context, group cohesion becomes a liability.

As a final note on cohesion before proceeding to a discussion of terrorist groups, it is worth suggesting that the long-term health of a group depends upon the predominant source of its cohesion, i.e., to what degree is bonding to the group an internalized process by its membership and to what degree is it coercive or imposed upon its members? It would seem that a group whose membership willingly reinforces bonds to it is much more stable in the long-run than a group forced to create extrinsic bonds to keep its members in line with the group.

IV. THE NATURE OF TERRORIST GROUPS: CHALLENGES TO SURVIVAL

> All that is needed is to begin, to act. To begin is strategy and to continue, tactics. The rebel must persist to preserve the dream and, if fortunate, escalate to achieve it. To do so the rebel enters a secret world that is inherently inefficient-- a world where there are no solutions, only the amelioration of immediate problems.[45]

A. INTRODUCTION

One cannot completely understand the behavior of an organization without considering the world in which it operates. Even in the most permissive environments, organizations inevitably encounter problems that threaten their path to success or, worst case, their survival. At issue here are the additional demands clandestine, underground[46] life makes upon the dynamics of terrorist groups. The hypothesis of this paper is that terrorist groups, by virtue of their unique and exclusive nature, face internal and environmental constraints which make the maintenance of group cohesion significantly more problematic than for open, conventional groups. Terrorist groups bear many structural similarities to their conventional

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[45] J. Bowyer Bell, "The Armed Struggle and Underground Intelligence: An Overview," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 17, (1994): 116.

[46] Use of the general term "underground" assumes only that a group's chosen actions and tactics are illegal, forcing it to operate clandestinely in order to escape repression and reprisal from security forces. However, it is important to recognize that some groups operate underground full-time; others may do so on a more part-time basis, allowing their members to lead double lives.

counterparts such as collectively defined goals and objectives, recognized leadership, more or less defined decision-making mechanisms, and differentiated roles. However, for all of these similarities, the nature of the terrorist cause and environment necessitates forging group bonds that increase the intensity of individual commitment beyond that which would be expected of members in conventional groups in order to ensure cohesion and efficiency of action. This chapter discusses the unique nature of the terrorist group and the advantages and disadvantages inherent in its operating environment. A universal view of the terrorist underground milieu will be presented. This is not intended to deny or understate the idiosyncratic differences that exist among and within the various types of terrorist groups. Instead, the goal is to focus upon the concerns, dynamics and basic characteristics that are more or less common to all groups committed to the armed struggle. Motives, traditions, and methods of recruitment, indoctrination and training may differ, but the similarities among these groups help lay the foundation for examining the bonds that affect terrorist group cohesion.

B. VIOLENCE: THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

Whatever their differences, the common thread that distinguishes all terrorist groups from other political organizations is the commitment to specialized violence as a primary means to influence policy and to bring about radical

change. As Crenshaw states, it is this commitment that relegates terrorist groups to illegality and clandesticity.[47] Once committed to violence, a terrorist group cannot easily abandon it without jeopardizing its very *raison d'être*. According to Wilson:

> However violence begins, its continuance is easier to explain, for in many cases it becomes a self-sustaining process fed by its own conspiratorial lifestyle and its appeal to certain kinds of potential recruits.[48]

In the words of one IRA member:

> The use of force is a dilemma which the movement can never solve. The guns, the excitement, and the secrecy attract new members thirsting for adventure. The guns go off and the authorities act. Take away the guns and the excitement and how do you offer a credible possibility of achieving the IRA's objectives and so attract new members.[49]

By definition, action is an obligation and not merely an option for the terrorist group. Violence becomes a necessary evil that both reinforces the group image and places the group in a constant fight for survival against forces within and without.

C. THE OPERATIONAL LIMITATIONS OF CLANDESTINE LIFE

The constant threat facing terrorist groups makes secrecy at once a necessity and a liability. Even during

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[47] Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach," p. 466.

[48] James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 300.

[49] Cited in Wilson, p. 301.

"normal" periods, the fear of reprisals, imprisonment and betrayal dictates that clandesticity be maintained at a significant cost to operational efficiency. . Regarding the "inherent inefficiency" of clandestine life J. Bowyer Bell writes, "Nothing is easy underground, however it seems to the threatened."[50] Unlike their conventional counterparts, terrorist groups rarely if ever enjoy the benefits of open, unobstructed advertisement of their cause, operational flexibility, pre-established transportation and communication networks, and resources. In the absence of tangible assets, nothing is easy and everything poses a risk, such as recruitment, communications, command and control, and propaganda. Overall, any tactical advantages gained in the clandestine environment, particularly the element of surprise and the ability to disappear into society at-large, do not adequately offset the long-term disadvantages for the group.

1. The "Catch 22" of Action

For groups placing a premium on secrecy, anonymity and security, action becomes a critical cost-benefit proposition. The problem is only magnified in terrorist groups that justify their existence on violent action. Herein lies the "Catch 22": a terrorist group needs action, but action risks exposure. As Bell states:

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[50] Bell, p. 138.

> A few for a time may appear invulnerable in closed terrorist cells or in the outback, but these too must act, must operate, and so become prey.[51]

Clandestine organizations, therefore, must continually reevaluate their operating environment in order to strike a balance, albeit delicate, between the needs for secrecy and action. The key to such a dilemma lies in precision and economy of action with the hope of minimizing losses and maximizing gains--"Those in command must protect their assets for the morrow but risk them today."[52]

2. Group Size and Structure

Terrorist groups tend to be small. A combination of factors including extraordinary security concerns, problems of underground management, detachment from mainstream society, and extremist policies and methods not only limit the effective membership capacity of terrorist groups but also narrow their potential recruitment pool. Size is not a particularly reliable indicator of terrorist group capability or survivability. While extremist groups falling under the umbrellas of larger organizations such as the PLO, the Basque ETA and the IRA may have the ability to amass more resources and to exploit stable recruitment bases, the smaller, more autonomous groups may enjoy greater operational freedom, flexibility and control in times of crisis. One must also

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[51] Bell, p. 119.

[52] Ibid., p. 120.

consider that actual membership figures for most terrorist groups are either unknown or, at best, estimates. Even groups claiming memberships numbering in the hundreds or thousands may only have a dedicated core of less than fifty. Crenshaw notes that even in large organizations the actual decision-making occurs in small, primary groups to maximize operational security and efficiency.[53]

Terrorist group structures also vary. Nonetheless, clandesticity and secrecy dictate that many groups develop cellular, compartmentalized infrastructures that are difficult to defeat but equally difficult to control. Cells are the basic operational units of terrorist groups.[54] They are typically very small, often specialized, autonomous units that are mobile and relatively immune to penetration. The cells more than likely are informed on a need-to-know basis, with only the cell leader maintaining contact with other cells and the group or organizational leadership core. In many cases, contact between cells may be eliminated altogether to minimize communications and risk of exposure.

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[53] Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach," p. 466-7.

[54] Larger, broad-based movements such as the Tupamoros in Uruguay use columns of 50-300 members to facilitate and coordinate the logistical tasks of the clandestine cells. The columns are not decision-making bodies. See John B. Wolf, "Organization and Management Practices of Urban Terrorist Groups," *Terrorism: An International Journal* 1, No.2 (1978): 173-4.

Dispersal and anonymity between cells combined with the need for strict, disciplined communications make coordinated operations difficult at best, particularly in the larger, segmented groups. Consequently, conflict between individual units and the central leadership are not uncommon. Under such circumstances, terrorist groups do not possess the degrees of discipline and control one might imagine. As with any group, increased complexity breeds increased inefficiency. The key for terrorist groups is to find a suitable middle ground between completely rigid, centralized control and purely autonomous operating cells. The former provides an ideal mechanism for leader-to-subordinate discipline but hampers the operational flexibility of the local cells and exceeds capabilities of the underground support system. The latter scenario, while maximizing operational flexibility in a hostile environment, poses a risk to the unity and security of the group as a whole. In a similar discussion on sect development, Bryan R. Wilson asserts that some sort of centralized organization, however minimal, is necessary in order to develop a "centripetal tendency" towards the group and to help prevent schism.[55] It is incumbent upon the terrorist leader to convey his centrality to group purpose and guidance, maintaining his

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[55] Bryan R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," *American Sociological Review* 24, (1959): 9-10.

image as the ultimate decision-maker, rationalizer and motivator.

3. Communications

Command and control in any organization is dependent upon the ability to communicate information, intelligence and decision-making up and down the chain-of-command. The greater the ability to communicate, the more effective operations and internal discipline will be. However, the need for security amid the unremitting threat of the underground makes the communications process extremely difficult and inefficient. The key is to strike a dynamic balance between security concerns and operational paralysis. Even under the best possible circumstances, the inherent risk of surveillance and intercept of intragroup communications severely impairs the terrorist group's ability to pursue the struggle. A complete absence of communications is ideal from a security standpoint, but is operationally unfeasible if a clandestine group hopes to remain a viable, cohesive force. Therefore, denied or degraded access to secure communication channels must be taken as a symptomatic disadvantage of the clandestine environment under most circumstances. particularly during crisis periods, communications tend to be few in number and limited in scope, containing minimum essential one-way, task-oriented guidance and operational orders from the leadership to peripheral operational units. Many groups are forced to develop innovative yet fragile

networks of communication via couriers, special codes, false identifications, front groups and friendly third parties in order to circumvent the use of open channels. It is common for terrorists not to know the true identities of comrades inside or outside of their specific units.

4. The Recruitment Dilemma

Recruitment is problematic for conventional groups and even more so for terrorist groups. Periodic recruitment is necessary to compensate for loss of membership through arrest, death or aging membership. Without it, the group faces a slow death by attrition. However, group survival ultimately depends upon selectivity and patience in bringing new blood to the movement. Contrary to popular belief, the terrorist group fears the maniac and fanatic just as much as any other group that values its own survival. Careless recruiting methods risk exposure to incompatible or hostile elements who threaten internal security and the fragile equilibrium with the outside world. Through exhaustive screening mechanisms the group tries to ensure that potential members possess the maximum possible degree of ideological, technical and personal compatibility with the group as well as the ability to withstand the pressures and constraints of underground life.

D. THE TERRORIST SUBCULTURE: A FACADE OF CONTROL AMID CHAOS

> Those in the secret army are at the gravitational center of a galaxy of the faithful.[56]

As stated previously, a terrorist group's commitment to violence relegates it to life within a precarious, clandestine niche that is distinct from, but dangerously vulnerable to, the outside world. Committed to underground life and its concomitant pressures, the terrorist group must continually manipulate perceptions of its purpose and its relationship to the outside environment in order to maintain the commitment of individual members. The terrorist subculture provides the vehicle for such manipulation: it creates an alternative, detached reality for the terrorist intended to filter out chaos and external seeds of moral dissension that threaten the will to pursue the armed struggle. Life in the underground is hard and, for better or worse, the survival of the terrorist group rests upon the extent to which individual members are convinced that their only chance for physical and spiritual survival resides in the group and not in the traditional external setting. As Klaus Wasmund asserts, the terrorists are not "lone wolves"--only the group enables the individual to endure life in the underground.[57] This section examines the individual's move

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[56] Bell, p. 116.

from the mainstream to the "galaxy of the faithful," specifically focusing on the major elements of the indoctrination process that characterize the terrorist group subculture. Terrorist groups are virtually powerless to effect change upon their hostile environment. Therefore, all that remains between life and death is their ability to control how this environment is perceived inside the groups.

1. Commitment and Dissociation

At some point the individual member's commitment to the terrorist group must be total. Such a commitment entails total surrender of self-identity, individual judgment, and perception of outside reality to the group. As Peter Merkl suggests, "[t]he group becomes their ego and superego writ large."[58] Crenshaw suggests that terrorist groups often resemble religious cults that require absolute commitment of members to a rigid belief system dividing the world into the sacred and the damned. They totally reject society, offering instead the intimacy of a like-minded group.[59] Incorporation into the sacred means detachment from all that is defined by the group as the enemy. As exclusive organizations drawing their membership from those with heavy initial commitment to

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[57] Klaus Wasmund, "The Political Socialization of Terrorist Groups in West Germany," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 11, (Fall 1983): 225.

[58] Peter H. Merkl, *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 367.

[59] Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach," p. 479.

the cause, terrorist groups hope to be less susceptible to the influence of competing values and attitudes that might cause members to switch rather than fight. However, to ensure this happens the group must extensively permeate all aspects of the members' lives, including their activities with non-members.[60]

The decision to go underground and the process of dissociation are gradual.[61] Every act of membership requires some sacrifice of autonomy and self. Therefore, the group must engender the belief that lost personal power is regained through collective action -- power emanates from the group cause and nothing else matters. Ideally, group members eventually accept and internalize their commitment to the point where group membership is no longer considered a sacrifice but a privilege. In his study of social movements Hans Toch suggests:

> Although there are other factors involved, the progression is somewhat like the path from the first martini to confirmed alcoholism.[62]

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[60] See Mayer N. Zald and Robert Ash, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change," *Social Forces* 44, (March 1966): 331.

[61] Klaus Wasmund describes four stages of dissociation: questioning social and emotional ties, alienation, total negation of pre-existing life, and total break with existing social milieu. See Wasmund, "The Political Socialization of West German Terrorists," In *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 204.

One should not assume that the individual's role in the dissociation process is a passive or helpless one. The decision to drop out and seek membership in a terrorist group is voluntary, and it is a step that the majority of people will never take regardless of where their ideological or political sympathies lie. Not everyone with a cause chooses terrorism as his vehicle of expression. This idea refers back to the "free-rider" problem mentioned in Chapter I. As Crenshaw asks:

> Why should a rational person become a terrorist, given the high cost associated with violent resistance and the expectation that everyone who supports the cause will benefit whether he or she participates or not?[63]

The specific factors motivating individuals to become terrorists vary. However, it is logical to conclude that the potential terrorist at least possesses a peculiar will or predisposition even to consider entering a world where one must be prepared to kill and to be killed. This, it would seem, makes the *initial* process of dissociation an easy one. The problem for the terrorist group over time, however, is to justify and reinforce this dissociation and to convince its members that the group remains their only sanctuary. One

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[62] Hans Toch, *The Social Psychology of Social Movements*, (Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1965), p. 132.

[63] Martha Crenshaw, " The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice," In *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 8.

author refers to a "heavy door" through which an individual passes upon joining such a group; he must be certain that there is nothing left for him on the other side.[64] This is no easy task as the glamourous illusions and initial excitement give way to the often unpleasant reality of the terrorist world.

2. Maintaining the Aura of Legitimacy

Always conscious of its precarious image vis-à-vis the outside world, the terrorist group must be able to justify its cause favorably as a minimum prerequisite for attracting and maintaining support. A manipulated perspective of the world is critical to group legitimacy since violence is difficult to reconcile with the idealism and moral outrage espoused by the group, particularly within democratic or open systems where moderate alternatives do exist. A broad-based group ideology gives the outward appearance of legitimacy and the inner means of rationalization for group members. As Wasmund points out, group ideology is the "moral mainstay" for terrorists. It not only justifies violation of social norms and laws but makes it a moral duty.[65] Group ideology gives a purely criminal act the illusion of a higher,

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[64] Louis Jolyon West, "Cults, Liberty, and Mind Control," In *The Rationalization of Terrorism*, ed. David C. Rappaport and Yonah Alexander (Frederick, Maryland: Alethese Books/University Publications of America, 1982), p. 111.

[65] Wasmund, "The Political Socialization of West German Terrorists," pp. 218-9.

political purpose. Internalizing this illusion allows the terrorist to operate unhesitatingly with a clear conscience. Through *gesinnungsethik* (ethics of conviction), the terrorist does not feel responsible for the consequences of his actions in accordance with the idea that the ends justifies the means.[66]

Terrorist groups claim the moral high ground by claiming to act out of purely altruistic motives. Characterizing the terrorist group's alleged "revolutionary subject" as its *raison d'être*, Wasmund relates how Germany's Red Army Faction initially portrayed itself as the vanguard of the working class, but later claimed to represent adolescents, marginal groups, and ultimately suppressed Third World groups such as the Palestinian diaspora.[67] All that matters is the belief that one is a member of the vanguard for a just cause. As James Q. Wilson suggests, a commitment to purpose, however exaggerated or misguided, allows a group to deny that it is self-seeking and to assume an aura of legitimacy it would otherwise lack.[68]

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[66] Ibid., pp. 224-5.

[67] Ibid., p. 221.

[68] Wilson, p. 51.

3. Waging the "Fantasy War"

Isolated underground, terrorists slowly become divorced from reality, descending into what Franco Ferracuti terms the "fantasy war":

> Terrorism...is fantasy war, real only in the mind of the terrorist. Fantasy war, of course, is only partial war, real for only one of the contestants who then adopts war values, norms and behaviors against another, generally larger group...A fantasy war is neither accepted nor acknowledged by the other group who, in effect, tends to deny it.[69]

Through indoctrination to "friend-foe demonology"[70] terrorists find themselves drawn into a total war with society, a society defined in terms of black and white. As one author states:

> Shades of gray are not conducive to terrorism, for the level of urgency falls off as the admixture of white increases.[71]

Stereotyping out-groups and denying them their human qualities facilitates and legitimates heinous actions in the eyes and minds of the group. What society at large thinks is immaterial. Further isolation of the group only tends to escalate the problem. Bell adds:

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[69] Franco Ferracuti, "Sociopsychiatric Interpretation of Terrorism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 463, (September 1982): 137.

[70] Merkl, p. 367.

[71] Thomas Pery Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," In *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, ed. Harry Eckstein (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1964), p. 76.

> The underground is consumed with the struggle. It is easy for the rebel to imagine intrigues and cunning stratagems--easy, in fact, to focus on nothing but perceived threats. In rebel perception, operations become tactical maneuvers in a great strategic confrontation with an omnipresent enemy.[72]

The terrorist's world is a house of cards. The more antithetical it is to reality, the more fragile it becomes and the harder it is to support without delicate but strict control of information reaching the group. The reality, as Merkl indicates, is that terrorists become "reclusive prisoners of their own outlaw life, far from the sense of community they talk about."[73] Because theirs is a one-sided war in which the avowed masses rarely if ever exist, the terrorists' firm belief in a greater cause, while a source of strength and critical to survival, is a great source of weakness.

> The underground ideas of reality -- honed, refined, elevated, reiterated in private -- increasingly warped what was already a skewed vision.[74]

E. CONCLUSION

The terrorist's world is defined by the need for extremely high commitment, solidarity and discipline. It is driven by the reality it creates. Isolated, yet constantly exposed to real and perceived uncertainties, fear and

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[72] Bell, p. 129.

[73] Merkl, p. 352.

[74] Bell, p. 127.

confusion, there is no room for the lukewarm. The realities of life in the terrorist underground defy fiction, and probably do not often match the expectations of those who joined it. The desire for action is only intermittently fulfilled. The long periods of time in between actions involve the stress and boredom of waiting and living day-to-day. Konrad Kellen states:

> According to terrorists, almost anything [they] do produces great pressures on them; risky action or nerve-racking non-action; constant hiding-out in "safe" houses; ideological controversies; disputes over strategy and tactics; group interaction.[75]

The irony is that the terrorist who was willing to drop out of society may also find himself ready to drop out of the terrorist realm as well when pressures mount and expectations go unfulfilled. It is with this tendency that the terrorist group must contend in order to ensure its survival.

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[75] Konrad Kellen, *On Terrorists and Terrorism*, RAND Note N-1942-RC (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, December 1982), p. 41.

V. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FORCES AFFECTING TERRORIST GROUP COHESION

A. INTRODUCTION

Having provided a working definition of group cohesion and an overview of the terrorist environment, the following discussion links the two concepts with an analysis of the major internal and external forces affecting terrorist group cohesion. To the degree that any terrorist group is able to achieve cohesion over its life-cycle, maintaining it is difficult at best in the face of ever-present pressures that exacerbate inherent organizational problems. How the group reacts to these internal problems in order to ensure survival within the rigid ideological and physical confines of its environment has implications for its outward behavior.

Cohesion is a dynamic group property which is a function of group environment and its temporal effects upon the predominant bonds that hold a group together. Therefore, neither the existence of the group itself nor cohesion can be taken for granted. Groups exist in changing internal and external environments to which they must adapt through adjustment or reprioritization of group goals and manipulation of the internal dynamics of the group. Concerning political organizations James Q. Wilson states:

> An organization may be formed in a burst of member enthusiasm or purposive commitment, but enthusiasm tends to wane and commitments to falter. Finding new sources of zeal is difficult and coordinating the activities of zealots is even harder.

> Furthermore, few organizations attain their objectives quickly, and some never attain them at all. Therefore, officers must seek ways of maintaining the group at a lower pitch of enthusiasm and of providing services and some sense of accomplishment in the face of slow, if any, progress toward major objectives.[76]

Similarly, terrorist groups may enjoy a relatively easy period of ascent and growth owing to zealous rhetoric and early operational successes. At some point, however, they reach a plateau where successes are few and far between, continued violent action loses its initial shock value, or counter-terrorist efforts render violent action too risky a proposition. This coupled with the incessant pressures of life underground leads members to reevaluate their confidence in the group as well as their future affiliation with it. Group structure and a leadership core mean little if the rank and file do not share the desire to continue the group or if new members cannot be attracted. In a sense, the terrorist group disintegrates from the inside even as it attempts to buffer itself against external influences.

Terrorist groups are ridden with organizational weaknesses that inhibit their ability to adapt. In time, these weaknesses may lead to internal collapse regardless of government intervention. The ongoing problem for terrorist groups is being able to support their strong rhetoric with chronically inefficient and ineffective organizational

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[76] Wilson, p. 225.

structures and processes. Their ability to survive and adapt to changing circumstances is inhibited by virtue of the exclusive and rigid nature of founding ideologies, belief systems and methods. As the initial period of enthusiasm, growth and innovation gives way to conservatism and imperatives for group survival, group cohesion that is initially based on ideological zeal, expectations for success, and value fulfillment is jeopardized by members' impatience and disillusionment with the group, its purposes, and underground life. Internal organizational pressures for change in strategy and leadership have significant implications for the group's cohesion, behavior and effectiveness over time. In particular, they may force group leaders to compensate for organizational shortcomings and the unfulfilled expectations of members by undertaking risky violent action for the sole purpose of reinforcing bonds and ensuring group maintenance as a necessary intermediate step towards achieving political goals. Ironically, the distinct goals, norms, ideologies and group boundaries that initially bind terrorist groups together may be their ultimate source of undoing unless some compromise is reached between members' changing expectations and strategic imperatives. If such a compromise cannot be reached, the groups face further threats to their cohesion as members' seek alternatives to the *status quo*.

This chapter discusses the major internal and external forces affecting terrorist group cohesion. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive list, but merely an examination of the most characteristic factors that emerge as terrorist groups attempt to reach some sort of equilibrium with their environment. The analysis specifically considers the roles played by group inertia and in generating and regulating these forces over the life-cycle of the group. In addition, the analysis suggests how the imperative of group maintenance can affect terrorist behavior. The discussion begins by introducing the concept of group inertia so that the various forces affecting group cohesion can be analyzed within a broader, dynamic context.

B. GROUP INERTIA THEORY AND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

As rational actors, groups monitor external and internal conditions and adopt strategies in response to environmental changes, threats and opportunities. There is a relatively recent school of organizational literature which acknowledges groups' adaptive behavior, but suggests that their adaptive capabilities are limited by strong inertial pressures arising from external constraints and internal structural arrangements. External constraints include legal and other barriers to entry and exit from the group's realm of activity, external linkages and relations with other organizations, threats to legitimacy, and loss of support. Internal factors include materiel and personnel investments,

resource allocation, lines of authority, information flow, organizational complexity and constraints imposed by the group's founding and history. The tendency for these factors to set normative precedents for group behavior increases the cost of change and thereby inhibits serious consideration of alternatives. Claiming that groups are subject to inertial forces is not to say that groups never change or that the rational choice and structural inertia theories are mutually exclusive. Rather, it implies that they respond sluggishly to threats and opportunities, even when faced with extinction, because inertial forces narrow the circumstances under which strategic change can occur without compromising the legitimacy of the group.[77] The debate is not which theory is correct, but under what conditions one better describes group behavior than the other.

Thompson and McEwen argue that because goal-setting is essentially a problem of defining desired relationships between an organization and its environment, changes in

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[77] Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman, "The Population Ecology of Organizations," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, No.5 (1977): 930-1 and Hannan and Freeman, "Structural Inertia and Organizational Change," 149-51. See also, John R. Kimberley, "Issues in the Creation of Organizations: Initiation, Innovation, and Institutionalization," *Academy of Management Journal* 22, No.3 (1979): 437-57; Danny Miller and Peter H. Friesen, "Momentum and Revolution in Organizational Adaptation," *Academy of Management Journal* 23, No.4 (1980): 591-614; and, Warren Boeker, "Strategic Change: The Effects of Founding and History," *Academy of Management Journal* 32, No.3 (1989): 489-515.

either require a reappraisal and perhaps an alteration of goals. They note that this process of reappraisal is nearly constant in unstable environments and is more difficult when the ultimate goals of the group seem intangible and immeasurable.[78] Once groups overcome the problem of getting off the ground, they require strategies for long-run growth and survival that balance impetuses for change against the need to preserve at least the essence of the goals and norms upon which their legitimacy and bonds to the membership rest. According to one study:

> Organizations evolve consistently in accordance with a perspective, strategy, ideology, and mission of their own; concepts that are manifested by an integral alignment or gestalt among environmental, organizational, and strategic variables. To reverse the trend and abandon this orientation in the face of every problem would be exceedingly costly and would result in many discrepancies and imbalances.[79]

Not the least among the imbalances resulting from strategic change is the delegitimization of the group by what appears to be an admission of past failure.[80] Therefore, groups have a tendency to preserve strategy rather than radically change or abandon it. In his review, Warren Boeker notes that

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[78] James T. Thompson and William J. McEwen, "Organizational Goals and Environment: Goal-Setting as an Interaction Process," *American Sociological Review* 23, (1958): 23-4.

[79] Miller and Friesen, p. 612.

[80] Ibid., p. 592.

theoretical literature from a broad range of perspectives supports the idea that adoption of a dominant initial strategy leads to little subsequent change in that strategy. Similarly, literature on the individual level of analysis indicates that strong early commitment to a particular course of action makes subsequent change more difficult.[81]

Inertia can be considered both an asset and a liability as it relates to group cohesion. Groups probably encounter minimal internal pressure for change when things are going well, regardless of changing external circumstances. Provided they are able to perform reliably and account for actions rationally, groups can maintain relatively strong bonds with their members. Nevertheless, the group must be prepared for the eventuality that earlier appeals to rationality will be insufficient to hold it together when the tide turns. As such, complacency in a changing or hostile environment may cause inherent vulnerabilities and limitations to be overlooked until the only options left are to either react or die under less than favorable circumstances. Certainly, inertia may be a significant asset for bridging tactical or leadership gaps during sudden crises. On the other hand, too much inertia over long periods of decline or lackluster performance may become a liability as frustration and uncertainty lead members to

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[81] Boeker, p. 493.

disrupt the group from within, search for alternatives, or abandon the cause altogether.

C. MAJOR FORCES AFFECTING TERRORIST GROUPS

By virtue of their rigid founding principles and oppressive operational environment, terrorist groups inherit malformations at birth that make the maintenance of internal cohesion against internal and external threats especially problematic. Acutely conscious of their need for legitimacy, most of these groups display minimal flexibility concerning objectives and tend to attract only those individuals who are willing to surrender themselves completely to the cause. Therefore, when changes are considered or actually occur, they do so at a heavy price in terms of intra group conflict and uncertain individual commitments. Occupying such a dangerously isolated, secretive and resource-scarce niche, terrorist groups have little margin for error when it comes to matters of group survival, of which internal cohesion is a crucial element. The following discussion examines some of the major forces that affect the internal cohesion of terrorist groups by applying concepts derived from conventional organizational theory. Since cohesion, or a lack thereof, impacts strongly upon group behavior, it is useful to consider forces that affect it positively and negatively.

1. Membership Homogeneity and Professionalism

Membership homogeneity is considered a strong positive force for cohesion. There is general consensus in the literature that the greater the degree of commonality in the socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicity, politics, prior affiliations, values and goals that individuals bring to the group, the greater will be the expected degree of group cohesion. Although there are certainly no guarantees, greater membership homogeneity possibly reduces the variation in members' commitment to the group and amount of energy the group needs to expend on group maintenance and internal control. Selective recruitment and compatibility screening are the group's primary mechanisms for ensuring homogeneity. Even for conventional groups, recruitment involves the risk of exposure to incompatible or harmful elements, but it is a risk that must be taken in order to compensate at least for normal losses due to attrition, aging, etc. The risk only increases during crisis periods of extreme blood-letting when groups may forego the usual screening processes just to break even with their losses.

Related to homogeneity is the matter of group size. Although most studies dealing with the effects of group size on cohesion are inconclusive, a larger group is more likely to exhibit more ideological diversity and require a wider range of incentives to attract and maintain its members. Consequently, a larger group may expend more energy on group

maintenance than a smaller one does. In addition, increased group size may lead to bureaucratization and weaker individual bonds to the group core. The increased probability of membership heterogeneity combined with structural complexity and weaker intra group bonds tend to increase the chances of subgroup division and internal power struggles.

Chapter IV discussed the problem of recruitment in terrorist groups and how carelessness in this area poses a threat to their internal security and professionalism. Most groups employ exhaustive screening methods to maximize compatibility between the group and potential recruits. Above all else, terrorists groups seek out individuals they believe will be the most committed. According to an interview with an IRA Command member:

> We realize the need for volunteers to have a stable, committed background. We try to pick people who'll last the distance, we recruit the over-twenties for preference -- an eighteen-year-old might be inclined to marry and give up, maybe joining out of a sense of identity and local status, but he mightn't have the commitment.[82]

The experience of Italy's Red Brigades (*Brigatte Rosse*, BR) illustrates how slack recruiting procedures, even during relative boom periods, can endanger group cohesion. After the Aldo Moro kidnapping and murder in March 1978, the BR was

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[82] Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA: A History* (Niwot, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1994), p. 366.

at its peak with seven functional columns and over 300 regular and non-regular members. The large numbers of revolutionary youths who sought membership in BR and *Prima Linea*, the most prominent BR splinter group, was considered to be a "mixed blessing" as the influx led to a noticeable decline in discipline and efficiency.[83] In general, exclusive membership requirements reduce the already limited potential terrorist recruitment pool and, consequently, the chances of attracting too many psychological and ideological outliers who could compromise the integrity of the group by involving it in spates of uncontrolled violence. Nonetheless, even the seemingly more homogeneous groups such as those fitting roughly into the nationalist-separatist category (e.g. the IRA, the Basque ETA and the various PLO factions) reach some point where it is difficult to screen recruits or to detect pathological changes in members once they have joined.[84] Compensation for improper screening depends largely upon the indoctrination, socialization and internal policing mechanisms that are in place to direct individuals towards conformity with the group norms and standards. Just as the potential terrorist lacks perfect information about the terrorist group he or she enters, terrorist groups, despite

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[83] Daniela Salvioni and Anders Stephanson, "Reflections on the Red Brigades," *Orbis* 29, No.3 (Fall 1985): 500.

[84] Zawodny, p. 282.

their best efforts, have no guarantees as to the future loyalties or intentions of their recruits. In either case, the wrong decision has implications for group cohesion and behavior designed to bring membership in line.

2. Superordinate Group Goal and Ideology

Cohesion is likely to increase if there is some kind of superordinate group goal to which most of the members subscribe, particularly when their lives or reputations are at stake. Ideally, this overarching goal overrides individual self-interests and conflicts, and directs loyalties toward the group. Group goals, constituting one element of the set of structural bonds that develop between the group and its members, define and direct the group's overall purpose and are often espoused within the context of legitimizing ideologies or group canons. One study describes organizational ideologies as "constellations of shared beliefs that bind values to actions." They bind people together and explain the world in terms of cause-and-effect relations. The study also notes that this causation is circular:

> ...ideologies also shape their adherents' worlds. They legitimize certain actions, render other actions heretical, and create meanings for events that have yet to occur.[85]

Regarding terrorist groups, Wasmund states the following:

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[85] Alan D. Meyer, "Adapting to Environmental Jolts," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 27, (1982): 522.

> Group ideology is a decisive factor in group cohesion. It welds the individuals into a tightly knit community. Those in doubt or resigned to their fate are remotivated by the call to the common belief system and the superior aim. Ideology, as well as acting as the cement that binds the group, is also an instrument for internal discipline. Isolated from the outside world and its intellectual influences, a process of permanent political indoctrination among the members of the group takes place. In fact, the indoctrination and the continual surveillance of members to ensure the "right level of consciousness" is maintained is essential for the cohesion of the group.[86]

Realizing, however, that individuals join terrorist groups for more than political reasons, ideology is not a panacea for problems of group cohesion. Rather, ideology is a minimum prerequisite for terrorist group legitimacy and survival. Its long-term impact depends largely upon the degree to which group members value and internalize it. The case of the Japanese Red Army's (JRA) Kozo Okamoto is an example of the superficial importance specific ideologies and group goals hold for some terrorists.[87] Interviews with Okamoto reveal that he cared little for the finer points of ideology espoused by the JRA; the idea of being an active revolutionary was the main attraction for him. Okamoto was not concerned about specific political rationale "so long as it encompassed his general political frustrations and his

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[86] Wasmund, "The Political Socialization of West German Terrorists," p. 219-20.

[87] Kozo Okamoto is the sole surviving JRA member of the May 30, 1972 Lod Airport massacre in Israel. He was tried and imprisoned in Israel.

concern about environmental pollution." Apparently there are also indications that Okamoto may have joined the JRA to see his brother Takeshi, who had urged him to establish contact with the group in 1970.[88] As another example, a number of the young men who joined the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) apparently did so because they needed money and, if deemed politically loyal, were offered scholarships of up to 500 dollars per month to study in Europe.[89]

Often cited in terrorist literature is Wilson's conclusion that all secret or conspiratorial organizations tend over time to substitute group solidarity for political purposes as the dominant incentive for members. They are "brought together by common goals but held together by common fears."[90] Incorporating this idea, Crenshaw states:

> Organizations are much more responsive to the environment during their inception than in the course of subsequent operations. The older the organization, the more its behavior is explained by organizational imperatives.[91]

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[88] Patricia G. Steinhoff, Portrait of a Terrorist: An Interview with Kozo Okamoto," *Asian Survey* 16, No.9 (Sept 1976): 834. See also, Konrad Kellen, *Terrorists--What Are They Like? How Some Terrorists Describe Their World and Actions*, RAND Note N-1300-SL (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, November 1979), p. 26.

[89] Patrick Seale, *Abu Nidal: A Gun For Hire* (New York: Random House, 1992), pp. 191-2.

[90] Wilson, p. 50.

[91] Crenshaw, "Theories," p. 21.

As a terrorist group progressively isolates itself from normal society, it becomes increasingly difficult for individual members to keep sight of progress the group's goal and how their involvement factors into achieving it. The group leaders realize eventually that founding ideologies and symbols alone, while necessary, may be insufficient to sustain the group for the long term. The leaders must attempt to satisfy members' needs and to demonstrate the importance of the group through a variety of incentives and actions. The level and type of activity undertaken by terrorist groups may, therefore, reflect the need to manipulate intra group bonds, e.g. robberies to provide purely material rewards or dramatic and symbolic acts to fulfill personal needs attached to serving a worthwhile cause.[92]

Ideology is a positive force for the internal cohesion of terrorist groups in that it provides the core justification and legitimization for terrorist activity. The amount of input required to maintain a group is closely related to the legitimacy that the group holds in the eyes of its members. Because this legitimacy is so difficult to achieve, the stated goals and ideologies are unlikely to undergo significant, uncontrolled change without disruption to the cohesion of the group. Groups such as the Weather

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[92] See Wilson, pp. 31-35.

Underground and the Symbionese Liberation Army perhaps changed their cause too often and were unable to sustain themselves as legitimate entities. However, the rigidity of group ideology can also affect group cohesion negatively and lead to factionalism if left open to divisive interpretation. This idea will be developed within the context of internal threats to group cohesion later in this chapter.

3. Perceptions of Success and Failure

A large number of studies conclude that actual or perceived success in achieving defined goals and confronting outside challenges positively affects group cohesion. Any operational success, no matter how slight, gives the group at least the illusion of progressing towards its ultimate goal while strengthening individuals' faith in the group's ability to fulfill their value-oriented, "belongingness" or material needs as members. A corollary effect of success is legitimization or improvement of the group's status relative to others, thus reinforcing the in-group/out-group awareness that helps bond members to the group. In a sense, success validates an individual's choice to join or remain in a particular group. On the other hand, few studies have concluded that failure leads to greater cohesion. One study argues that the increased focus on in-group processes in cases of sustained or clear-cut failure only serves to

exacerbate inherent group weaknesses.[93] One possible exception to this involves self-sacrifice groups in which members readily accept failures and setbacks as a matter of due course.[94]

Terrorist groups are no exception when it comes to the need for action and success to ensure survival. Their dilemma, however, is balancing the risk of reprisal against the risk of losing members. Since the opportunity for action is probably what drives individuals to choose terrorism over passive, non-violent means, inaction and the collective perception of failure can be the death knell for terrorist groups. As Merkl states:

> Terrorism, after all, is a politics of action, not words...For the "heroic" deed speaks for itself, at least to minds attuned chiefly to this language and to no other.[95]

A terrorist group ceases to be a terrorist group if it does not commit violent acts. In the words of Andreas Baader, "The Guerrilla's LANGUAGE is action."[96] Without action the group cannot hope to succeed as a legitimate actor in the "fantasy war" against society. Regardless of the

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[93] Staw, et al., p. 508.

[94] Benjamin B. Wolman, "Impact of Failure on Group Cohesiveness," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 51, (1960): 410.

[95] Merkl, p. 367.

[96] Michael Baumann, "The Mind of a German Terrorist," *Encounter* 1, No.3 (September 1978): 86.

circumstances, no terrorist group can afford to remain inactive for too long without sacrificing morale and *esprit de corps* within the ranks, particularly among more peripheral members of the group.

One thing most terrorist groups have in common is the experience of failure. This is not only because terror as a protracted primary strategy reaps diminishing political returns, but because *success* becomes progressively difficult to define. From the rational group's perspective, the intermediate definition of success becomes survival against a hostile environment, making operational prudence a minimum prerequisite for achieving its ultimate goals. If left to the scrutiny of the rank and file, however, operational conservatism may be interpreted simply as a sign of failure and diminished hope that their goals and those of the group can be achieved. This disillusionment combined with the stressful boredom of the underground poses a volatile threat to group unity. An interview with Michael "Baummi" Baumann of Germany's Second of June Movement illustrates the situation:

> Q: Is it a fact that such groups produce just the kind of tension that has to be discharged in action?
>
> A: Exactly. Outside pressure forces us together, and action is the objective that holds us together. But in between the tension is often intolerable.

> Once we came to blows about where to go for breakfast.[97]

Jerold M. Post notes that the perceptive terrorist leader will sense the group's need for action, and "direct the group to attack before its members attack him."[98]

Satisfying the primary requirement for group survival means that terrorist leaders face a continual dilemma of having to take incremental risks in order to restore the group's purpose, diffuse internal tension and reap greater gains in group cohesion. Aggression targeted against the enemy outside the group quells the enemy within. Fighting is more than a means to victory for the terrorist group; it is also a means of survival. The paradox is that action undertaken to reverse failure breeds more failure. One organizational study offers the following:

> ...organizations facing bad times will follow riskier and riskier strategies, thus simultaneously increasing their chances of survival and reducing their life expectancy. Choices that seek to reverse a decline, for example, may not maximize expected value. As a consequence, for those that do not survive, efforts to survive will have speeded up the process of failure.[99]

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[97] Ibid., p. 84.

[98] Jerold M. Post, M.D., "Notes on a Psychodynamic Theory of Terrorist behavior," *Terrorism: An International Journal* 7, No.3 (1984): 253.

[99] James G. March, "Footnotes on Organizational Change," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 26, (1981): 563-597.

4. External Threat: Creating a Common Enemy

Linked to the concepts of the group goal and the collective perception of success or failure is the identification of a common enemy. It is generally accepted that an external threat draws group members together and increases group cohesion by increasing the salience of intra group bonds and core values as a source of security. The assumption is that even a group that appears weak under ordinary circumstances may in time of danger be capable of mobilizing against a threat if the group feels strongly that it has something to lose. The increase in cohesion is a function of the magnitude of the threat and continues until the threat is removed. If high cohesiveness precedes the threat, hostility may automatically develop. In groups where cohesion is lacking, leaders may be compelled to exaggerate an existing threat or create a new one in order to bind the group together.[100] This constitutes part of the what one study refers to as the "shared interpretive scheme" organizations use to draw membership together, provide them with a shared sense of belonging, engender commitment, and shape the problems to be faced. The interpretive schemes operate as shared, fundamental assumptions about why events happen as they do and how individuals should react.[101]

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[100] Elton T. Reeves, *The Dynamics of Group Behavior* (American Management Association, 1970), pp. 108-9.

a. The "Fantasy War" Against Legitimate Authority

Wilson's discussion of political organizations suggests that threat is more important than opportunity in explaining organizational maintenance and behavior. Of political organizations in general one author writes:

> Threat is probably a universal component of collective political activity...Groups not firmly established in the polity perceive a continuing threat to their present or continued welfare....[102]

As such, threat from legitimate authority is essentially part of the terrorist group's charter. Reinforcing the illusion of danger is an acute problem for terrorist groups because without an enemy there is no one to fight and, therefore, no reason to exist. Post indicates that underground groups isolated from society develop cohesion in response to "shared danger." He adds:

> Terrorist groups require enemies in order to cope with their own internal tensions, and if such enemies do not exist they create them. For if they cannot act against an outside enemy, they will tear themselves apart.[103]

It is important to remember that terrorists, deliberately isolated from the mainstream, view the external

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[101] Jean M. Bartunek, "Changing Interpretive Schemes and Organizational Restructuring: The Example of a Religious Order," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 29, (1984): 355-6.

[102] Harvey Waterman, "Reasons and Reason: Collective Political Activity in Comparative and Historical Perspective," *World Politics*, (July 1981): 568.

[103] Jerold M. Post, M.D., "Group and Organizational Dynamics of Political Terrorism: Implications for Counterterrorist Policy," In *Contemporary Research on Terrorism*, p. 312.

environment not as it is but as they perceive it. The leadership's ability to interpret and stereotype the relationship between the terrorist group and the rest of the world gives it substantial power to manipulate members and their actions. The experience of the Red Brigades after the Aldo Moro affair also illustrates what can happen when the group fails in this endeavor. In her account of Italian terrorism, Alison Jamieson writes:

> The Aldo Moro Affair represented an attempt by the Red Brigades to bring the attack to the "heart" and the "state." In the end they failed because the "heart" and the "state" were myths they themselves had created and did not correspond to the real world whose complexities they had failed to understand.[104]

Reinforcing the illusion of a omni-present, malevolent world split into good and evil creates a paranoid group culture dedicated to making the "fantasy war" a reality.[105] To this end, terrorist groups may undertake violent action specifically designed to invite outside retaliation and, consequently, strengthen group cohesion. Paradoxically, authorities find themselves in a no-win situation since any reprisals against the terrorist group, no

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[104] Alison Jamieson, *The Heart Attacked: Terrorism and Conflict in the Italian State* (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1989): 25. See also, Salvioni and Stephanson, p. 502.

[105] For details on the paranoid organizational culture see Manfred F.R. Kets De Vries, "Personality, Culture and Organization," *Academy of Management Review* 11, No.2 (1986): pp. 266-269.

matter how effective, only add fuel to the fire by legitimizing the terrorists' claims and justifying their aura of importance. Therefore, when the question is asked whether or not groups under siege cohere or break apart, the answer is that both processes are probably occurring. A more interesting question might consider what type of, or at what point, external threat succeeds in atomizing the group beyond repair.

At this point it should be noted that there are drawbacks to terrorists' obsession with seeking out enemies. One strategic drawback of the paranoid culture is the fear of taking risks. As the preceding discussion on action and cohesion indicates, excessive concern for group maintenance against external threats conflicts with the terrorists' demands for action. Another danger to group cohesion is that of suspicion turning inward and spilling over to intra group relationships, i.e., the group becomes a victim of its own culture. In the paranoid culture, the basic assumption is that no one can be trusted; there is always a conspiracy somewhere. An extreme example of this phenomenon is the bloody purges of the ranks in the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) between 1987-88. Paranoid that he was losing control of his organization, Abu Nidal (*Sabri Al-Banna*) ordered the purges of those deemed "not faithful enough." Apparently no one was above suspicion. Of the ANO's approximately 14-member Central Committee, four were killed and four defected

(one survived as assassination attempt).[106] J. Bowyer Bell states the problem best: "Conspiratorial organizations fear conspiracy." Bell adds:

> The prospect of betrayal is thus the negative force for cohesion -- and the reason that often rebels seem more concerned about small schisms, even a single betrayal, than about the intensity of the armed struggle will in time be successful because the faith so assures the loyal; but if the faith is spoiled, all, including and especially the loyal, are lost. Thus the rebel is always alert for signs and may even find them when no signs exist.[107]

Ironically, the power of the perceived threat that sustains terrorist groups can potentially set in motion the dynamics for their demise.

b. Intergroup Competition: Power, Status and Resources

Groups exist in an environment with other groups that espouse similar causes and goals, and this inevitably becomes a precursor to uneasy alliances and inter group competition for tangible and intangible resources. This competition represents a threat that can have both positive and negative implications for group cohesion. The previous discussion of external threats and common enemies suggests that a moderate amount of competition is beneficial in motivating individuals for in-group collective action. In order to increase cohesion, some group leaders deliberately

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[106] Seale, pp. 294, 307 and 327.

[107] Bell, "The Armed Struggle," p. 143.

devise situations which put one element within the group into competition with another. As long as the gambit is controlled, group solidarity increases. However, the concomitant danger is that the competition may run out of control or manifest itself among group members and weaken intra group bonds in the process.[108] As one study asserts, adversity through competition does not always draw group members together. When two or more groups are competing for material resources, members and, most importantly, loyalties, the loser may suffer decreased group cohesion while the winner simply increases cohesion further. The perceived threat of losing resources increases cohesion, but the actuality of their loss leads to internal dissension. Thus, inter group rivalry makes group membership more salient only if the group is able to preserve or increase its status vis-à-vis the competition.[109] Failing to do so increases the likelihood that group members will become disillusioned with their current situation and exercise options for change both inside and outside the group. Therefore, as a result of inter group competition, the group must be responsive to the shifting sentiments of its membership towards goals and tactics. Once again, the cost incurred for group survival may involve a trade-off between conservatism and maintaining

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[108] Reeves, p. 109.

[109] Staw, et al., p. 507.

the *status quo* on one hand, and satisfying the demands of the members on the other.

Wilson notes that most groups seeking to maintain themselves are highly averse to risk and, consequently, active rivalries. As such, the ideal strategy for minimizing internal strain on group cohesion is to develop autonomy, i.e., "a distinctive area of competence, a clearly demarcated and exclusively served clientele or membership and undisputed jurisdiction over a function, service, goal or cause." In reality, however, most organizations, particularly political ones, have no stable claims to resources and are required by their nature to compete. Wilson states:

> The extent to which competition will exist will depend on both the relative degree of autonomy and the relative level of resources of any pair of associations.[110]

For competing terrorist groups, the primary resources at stake are manpower and legitimacy. Failure in the face of competition may become a catalyst for members to leave the group and a serious hindrance to the group's ability to attract new members. The danger inherent in competition is that more successful or appealing rival groups with similar ideologies represent viable alternatives that undermine the exclusive legitimacy of the first group and, thereby, threaten to co-opt its disillusioned members. The

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[110] Wilson, pp. 263-4.

implication for group behavior is that the competing groups will do whatever is necessary to demonstrate their respective viability to their constituencies. A study on organizational behavior states the following:

> Since organizational survival is enhanced by legitimacy, legitimacy can be viewed as a resource which a given focal organization attempts to obtain and which, occasionally competing organizations may attempt to deny. Organizations may compete with respect to what activities they will perform and what activities other organizations will perform.[111]

Competition may lead a terrorist group to reevaluate and manipulate the set of incentives offered to its members in order to ensure it is more attractive than those offered by rival groups. In addition, the group may increase its scope of activity by committing symbolic terrorist acts in order to prove to its members that it remains a force to be reckoned with and is seriously committed to its stated purpose.

According to Wilson, the "recurring irony" is that the quest for autonomy drives most groups to spend more time and energy attacking allies rather than enemies.[112] Terrorist groups are no exception. In fact, most terrorist groups seem to confront rivals with similar political purposes, e.g., the Red Brigades vs. *Prima Linea* and the PLO's Fatah vs. the

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[111] John Dowling and Jeffrey Pfeffer, "Organizational Legitimacy: Social Values and Organizational Behavior," *Pacific Sociological Review* 18, No.2 (January 1975): 126-7.

[112] Wilson, p. 266.

various radical Palestinian splinter groups such as the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the PFLP-General Command. As with the Palestinian groups and others, the admixture of internecine conflicts and factionalism to inter group competition produces a particularly complicated and volatile situation in terms of the escalation of terrorist violence. Nonetheless, the crux of the problem for all terrorist groups remains the same: establishing legitimacy, domain and a distinctive identity at the expense of rivals are minimum prerequisites for group maintenance. Regardless of the political consequences, terrorist activity may be the only solution to internal dissent caused by external pressures.

5. Dealing With Internal Conflict: Deviance and Factionalism

Dealing with deviant behavior is an important concern to leaders and committed members because it represents a major internal threat to group security and cohesion. Deviance[113]

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[113] *Deviance* is nonconformist behavior by those who, for whatever reason, do not meet the norms of a particular group. *Norms* are defined as "the structural characteristics of groups which summarize and simplify group influence processes. Whether the norms are right or wrong by society's standards is irrelevant. They are generally developed only for behaviors, operational and ritualistic, deemed important by most group members. See J. Richard Hackman, "Group Influences on Individuals," In *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, ed. Marvin D. Dunnette (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 1495-6.

from group norms occurs for a number of reasons and is one way in which individual members can have a directly profound effect upon group cohesion, like a fox in the chicken coop. Every group experiences differences of opinion. How the group deals with these differences, however, affects internal cohesion more than the mere fact that the differences exist. The more quickly and efficiently and a group settles internal dissension in a manner satisfactory to most members, the greater the degree of group cohesion.

The ultimate effect of internal dissension upon group cohesion may be positive or negative depending largely upon the state of group cohesion at the time deviant behavior occurs, the extent to which the group has inculcated loyalty to the group and its norms through indoctrination and socialization, the efficiency of the internal control apparatus, and the status the deviant and his influence upon other group members. According to several studies, a certain amount of dissension positively affects group cohesion and is directly proportional to members' identification with the group and its major objectives. If the group and its primary objectives are worthy of sacrifice in the eyes of the majority of its members, deviance from the group norms by one or more members will cause others to work together against the deviant(s) in defense of the *status quo*. Left untreated, internal threats can lead to further dissension, leadership instability, decreased cohesion, and ultimately factionalism

as new centers of leadership attempt to build a new consensus to threaten the legitimacy and integrity of the primary group. The following discussion of deviant behavior and cohesion in terrorist groups considers why deviance occurs, how the terrorist environment affects both the options of deviant and the group, and how deviance affects the level of terrorist activity.

a. The Roots of Deviant Behavior

The reasons for individuals to deviate from the group norms are as variable and often unpredictable as the individuals themselves. No matter how attractive a person finds a group in the beginning, there are normally some aspects of the group that are not completely to his or her liking. These negative aspects will likely assume greater significance for the individual as disillusionment and disaffection for the group grow. Toch refers to this as the "manifestation of latent reservations," that is:

> The perception of some imperfections or weaknesses may make the member's eye more critical to others and minor quibbles may disguise relatively fundamental doubts, which may emerge openly later.[114]

It is generally accepted that individuals will attempt to change or move out of groups which no longer satisfy their needs, or whose negative aspects outweigh the positive satisfactions of belonging. As Kellen suggests, it cannot be

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[114] Toch, p. 163.

assumed that "the average terrorist sails along happily forever" once the decision is made to join a terrorist group. Sooner or later they can and sometimes do feel trapped.[115]

One of the most common reasons cited for terrorist disaffection for a particular group is divergence of opinion over the group's political goals and the strategies and tactics most suitable for attaining them. Lacking a consensus on group goals and norms, terrorist groups may fall into periods of frustrating inaction, or split into sub-groups vying to control the group as they see fit. More often than not the conflict involves shifts in the group's use of terrorist tactics, i.e., members may reject the current group for escalating terrorist violence or for choosing to abandon it as an effective strategy. As Crenshaw suggests, this problem is further complicated by the complex package of incentives that attract individuals to terrorist groups and, consequently, shape their expectations. The more members join for selective incentives rather than purposive goals of the group, the greater the likelihood that widespread policy disagreements eventually will surface to threaten group cohesion.[116] Conflicts over policy are often created or exacerbated by interpersonal conflicts and

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[115] Kellen, *Terrorists--What Are They Like?*, p. 56.

[116] Crenshaw, "Theories," p. 24.

rivalries, particularly among incumbent and challenging centers of leadership.

In addition to frustration that the terrorist group is not pursuing its campaign vigorously enough, individual disillusionment can take the form of *burnout*. Burnout refers to members' declining commitment to the group and its purposes, and violent tactics.[117] That is, terrorism as a primary means loses its appeal and relevance. Burnout, combined with the oppressive effects of the terrorist environment, group culture, anxiety and boredom, may lead individuals to change or abandon the group. By their nature, terrorist groups must constantly contend with the reality that terrorism is never morally justifiable and that legitimate, nonviolent alternatives do exist. In addition, it is nearly impossible to isolate members completely from the influence of negative valuations placed on the groups and their members, particularly in democracies where regular channels and methods of political expression exist to redress grievances. Even for those terrorist groups requiring absolute commitment of their members, there is no guarantee that social and ideological ties to the outside are completely broken. Therefore, disillusionment may allow latent beliefs and values to reassert themselves and make competing demands on members' loyalties. As Kellen states

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[117] See Ross and Gurr, p. 409.

concerning the nature of terrorist group support and legitimacy:

> ...their entire rationale is built upon quicksand, and the terrorist effort is perhaps constantly on the verge of collapse...If terrorists are basically rational...they cannot close their minds entirely and forever to the fact that the only feeling they have ever aroused in the masses is hostility. This realization should depress and eventually disillusion them.[118]

People come to a particular terrorist group for a myriad of reasons and, therefore, may become disillusioned due to any combination of group performance, relevancy and status, environment, unfulfilled expectations, and disagreements over the direction the group is taking. Regardless of its origins, the decision to take on the rest of the group may have serious consequences and is seldom taken lightly, particularly in terrorist groups.

b. Expressing Deviance: Loyalty, Voice and Exit

Albert O. Hirschman addresses the conditions under which dissatisfied members make the decision to remain or to leave a group. He suggests that members whose behavior deviates from group norms have two options: 1) to *voice* their complaints, work for change and continue as a members, or 2) to *exit* from the group, i.e., to vote with one's feet.[119] Both of these options, either as exercised by the members or

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[118] Kellen, *On Terrorists and Terrorism*, pp. 34-5.

[119] Albert O. Hirschman, "Exit, Voice, and the State," *World Politics* 31, (October 1978): 90.

regulated by the group, have implications for group cohesion and behavior. The rigid beliefs and behavioral norms of terrorist groups ensure that the deviant's decision is not an easy one. In most clandestine organizations, security and maintenance considerations dictate that members exercising *voice* in the form of honest criticism and self-appraisal cannot be tolerated. Similarly, *exit* from these groups is often severely constrained or impossible. Both avenues of dissent may be considered tantamount to treason and carry with them the fear of reprisals, or even death.[120] Therefore, as Crenshaw suggests, when serious pressures for change do emerge and no safety valve exists, the consequences can be explosive. By outlawing exit and voice, the gravity of either offense increases as does their potential for damaging the group.[121]

Merkl indicates that the impact of intense group pressures and complete psychological dependence of terrorists on the group makes leaving an extremely difficult proposition.[122] As such, the non coercive and coercive barriers to exit from a terrorist group are high and tend to

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[120] Interviews with West German terrorists reveal that simply leaving was considered tantamount to treason and that most group members understood that "the only way out is via the cemetery." See Baumann, p. 81.

[121] Crenshaw, "Theories," p. 23.

[122] Merkl, p. 367.

lead potentially deviant members into conformist behavior. One of the major non coercive barriers involves the high cost of joining a terrorist group. It is generally agreed that the greater the initiation cost an individual incurs in order to join a terrorist group, the more reluctant he or she will be to leave it. Referring to the theory of "cognitive dissonance" as discussed in Chapter III, even if members find the highly group unpleasant or in need of change, they tend to remain in the group, and perhaps fight even harder, to prove they were right in joining. Another non coercive barrier to exit is an individual's reluctance to abandon the protective environment of a group with which he has identified almost completely over a period of time. Depending upon the individual's degree of commitment, the process of detachment from the group may be as long and painful as the process of detachment upon joining. As Toch states:

> Defection is an easy process only for members who have been lightly or tangentially committed, and for those who have another commitment standing by. In more typical instances, defection...can be hard and painful...The typical member faces problems for which his social movement has become a solution; he has tied up feelings and aspirations with the aims of the movement; he has roots planted and interests vested in the life of the group.[123]

The fear of sanctions and reprisals from fellow comrades represents a major coercive motivator for compliance

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[123] Toch, pp. 175-6.

with the group, i.e., the risk of exit means more than simply losing membership. Although the severity of sanctions varies from group to group, the very fact that they exist may be enough to keep group members in line. Finally, unless the deviant member intends to join or form another terrorist group, the legal ramifications of leaving the terrorist fold essentially eliminate any hope of leading a normal life on the outside. There is more to lose by leaving than staying. As Merkl states:

> By the time they have committed their first bank robbery, assassination, or grand theft, the new terrorists are usually unable to return to living inside the law.[124]

c. Group Response and Behavior

The ideal for the group is that members' bonds of loyalty to the group are so strong that exit is not considered or that the members remain in the group even if alternatives exist. As William A. Gamson notes:

> Loyalty is at its most functional for the group when it looks most irrational...it can neutralize within certain limits the tendency of the most quality-conscious...members to be the first to exit...Thus, loyalty, far from being irrational, can serve the socially useful purpose of preventing deterioration from becoming cumulative, as it often does when there is no barrier to exit.[125]

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[124] Merkl, p. 366.

[125] William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1975), p. 60.

Under such circumstances, loyalty and dedication to the group are constantly reinforced by the flow of information about orientations and behaviors of group members. Hackman states that one of the most efficient and powerful means a group has to directly affect member behavior is through the creation and subsequent enforcement of group norms by its members. These norms specify conditions under which discretionary stimuli are used by the group to reinforce desired behavior or to inhibit undesirable behavior.[126] The maintenance activity of the group is deemed so important that the proposed course for remedial action is essentially automatic. The group reacts reflexively to a member's deviant behavior as a threat to their well-being, which results in an increase in group cohesion.[127]

Hirschman believes, however, that no organization can make itself completely immune to exit and voice of its members.[128] Given their oppressive operating environment, ideological rigidity, and marginal records of success,

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[126] Discretionary stimuli are transmitted to individual members differentially and selectively at the discretion of other group members. They include messages, approval, instructions and norms. See J. Richard Hackman, "Group Influences on Individuals," In Dunnette, *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, p. 1458-9.

[127] Reeves, p. 170.

[128] From Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 121. Cited in Crenshaw, "Theories," p. 24.

terrorists are certainly no exception. With restraining forces against departure and little tolerance for internal dissension, the true nature of terrorist group cohesion is questionable since it stems more from coercion and the threat of punishment than strong positive feelings towards the group. Terrorist groups face a constant dilemma with respect to deviance and pressures for change and, therefore, must weigh the potential harm of exit or voice to their solidarity and the psychological well-being of their members. Either exit or voice can hasten the decline of a terrorist group depending upon a number of factors including the health of the group at the time of deviance, the nature of the competitive environment, the persistence of deviant behavior, and the status of the deviant member in the group. The intended or unexpected result in either case may be an acute escalation of violence that can lead the group even farther down the path of decline.

Exit of deviant membership does not necessarily translate into a decrease in group cohesion as long as new members can be attracted and the rate of exit does not bleed the group to death. The latter may be particularly acute for small groups where any substantial outflow can reach the point of critical loss for the group.[129] In the short run, however, it may be more beneficial for group solidarity if

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[129] Hirschman, "Exit, Voice, and the State," p. 103.

the deviant member is driven out rather than retained lest he resort to voice and sows dissension throughout the ranks. In essence, the group removes the cancer before it can spread. A negative side effect of allowing members to exit the terrorist group is the possibility that they will join up with rival groups or create new ones that threaten the parent group. As Crenshaw notes, when either circumstance arises, it usually stems from the demands of more extreme members for an escalation of violence, demands that can only be resisted if no possibility of exit exists. Therefore, to prevent the departure of sub-groups when it endangers the survival of the group, the formerly moderate parent group may be forced to escalate violent activity and improve perceptions of its performance.[130] If deviants leave one group for another, the ensuing competition for legitimacy and membership also leads to increased violence. In the case of exit, the fate of the terrorist group rests in its resistance to change.

Terrorist group inflexibility also inhibits their potential ability to grow stronger by incorporating positive impetuses for change that are raised by deviant members. Crenshaw argues that voice can endanger terrorist group cohesion since most conspiratorial groups are more sensitive to internal disagreement than to defection. Although some deviant behavior is a source for innovation and change for

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[130] Crenshaw, "Theories," p. 22.

the better, groups that are unable to change without seriously compromising their *raison d'être* are inclined to reject the deviant before more harm can be done. The effects of voice can be particularly destructive when the disputes revolve issues that question the group's very existence. Deviant members who are frustrated but remain highly committed to the group may only strive harder and become catalysts for an escalation of violent activity directed towards goal achievement. Crenshaw states:

> The decline of an organization may produce a psychological dynamic in which complacency is succeeded by frenetic activism which goes beyond criticism of the leadership to desperate attempts to salvage the organization. Initiates into a group that uses terrorism have paid a high price to enter the organization and often face an even harsher penalty of exit. They may react not by denying reality but by trying harder to change it. the response to decline, then, may be the escalation of violence.[131]

For the less committed member who expresses dissent, failure of the group to return him quickly to conformity seriously threatens cohesion if the deviant is able to convince others to join in the fray against the *status quo*. At that point, the group may be forced to either eliminate the deviant and/or escalate its level of violent activity in order to retain the membership it has. The influence of the deviant member who chooses, or is allowed, to remain in the group

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[131] Ibid., p. 23.

largely depends on his power and status in the group, and his ability to become a credible agent for change.

d. Factionalism: Manifestation or Cause of Failure?

Despite the difficulties of exit, factionalism is a common phenomenon in terrorist groups. When deprived of formal outlets for grievances, competing factions within a group may form new groups in direct opposition to the parent organization, vying for loyalties and, as Bell states, "control of the truth."[132] Organizational studies indicate that exclusive groups exhibiting rigid value or ideological orientations are more prone to splintering than groups without such leanings.[133] The ideologies of most terrorist groups are generally vague. Therefore, nuances in their interpretation and justification for strategies and tactics are convenient and powerfully symbolic vehicles for the escalation of divisive internecine rivalries and competition for the bases of authority within the group.

Gamson argues that few groups escape internal division and suggests that, perhaps, this is the "nature of the beast in challenging groups." He also refers to actual factional splits as "the primary manifestation of the failure of the group to solve the problem of internal conflict."[134]

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[132] Bell, p. 144.

[133] See Cartwright and Zander, p. 87; Wilson, p. 10; and Zald and Ash, p. 337.

The challenged group must be able to bring quick and decisive pressures to bear, either through sanctions or action, in order to discredit the dissident elements before they gain any semblance of autonomy and strength. When successful splits do occur, the ensuing inter group competition calls the legitimacy and norms of the parent group into question. As a result, both groups are likely to escalate the level of violence in order to outbid one another as the true representative of the struggle. In some cases, indirect internecine violence involves heinously violent acts committed in the name of rival factions in order to encourage backlash and government reprisals against them. The competition between the various radical PLO splinter groups during the 1970s is but one example of how internecine conflict lies at the root of political terrorism. Between 1967 and 1977, more than 30 groups split from under the PLO umbrella as a result of disputes over ideology and tactics, personal conflicts, and troublesome linkages with rivaling Arab states. The majority of hijackings and hostage incidents during that time period were likely motivated by these conflicts rather than altruistic, political goals in the interests of the Palestinian people.

6. External Linkages

The development of linkages with outside sponsors, front groups and other terrorist organizations can have both

[134] Gamson, pp. 99-101.

positive and negative effects on terrorist group cohesion. In particular, ties to sympathetic governments and more autonomous and powerful groups can become bigger liabilities than assets to the long-term health of the group. Chapter III discussed how most terrorist groups require their individual members to eliminate or minimize all extra-group ties in order to protect the legitimacy of the group and its purpose. At the group level, however, developing links to the outside may become an unavoidable prerequisite for survival. Gaining much-needed access to networks for finances, supplies, training, and weapons allows terrorist groups, particularly the smaller ones, to not only sustain their operations but also to provide the supplementary incentives necessary to attract and maintain their membership. In addition, alliances with legitimate fronts and sponsor states can offer terrorist groups a greater semblance of legitimacy, influence and a potentially larger support base. It might also be noted that the exclusively rigid ideologies and beliefs held by many groups in the effort to maintain distinct identities the forging of ties to other terrorist groups and open, legal fronts that eventually could prove useful in perpetuating and expanding the group.

Regardless of the benefits to be derived from external linkages, terrorist groups are often averse to any long term affiliations due to their negative impact on group cohesion. Firstly, there is the danger that external groups can create

or exacerbate organizational weaknesses and hasten the process of factionalism and splinter group formation, playing rival groups off one another for their own ends. In the process, the terrorist groups risk losing their identity, autonomy, control of operations and, ultimately, security. For example, the PLO's dependence on Arab states, particularly Syria and Iraq, allowed the various Palestinian factions to be subjugated and manipulated into carry out terrorist actions in support of the foreign policies of those states. Secondly, the affiliation with legal fronts can contribute to member dissociation from the terrorist group since the fronts represent legitimate avenues of expression for the disillusioned terrorist. In addition to causing terrorist groups to compete for individual loyalties and sentiments, legal fronts and sponsors make it difficult for terrorist leaders to uphold the legitimacy of their version of the outside world. As Wilson states:

> The imperatives of organizational maintenance and the need to maintain a distinctive organizational identity do not permit combination into a single or large whole...To pursue the desire for information, assistance, and support too far and too systematically will weaken the distinctive competence or identity of the association and thus jeopardize its maintenance or compromise its position on those matters in which it must act for interests not shared by it *ad hoc* allies.[135]

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[135] Wilson, pp. 278-9.

One study cites an acknowledgment by Jans Joachim Klein of Germany's Revolutionary Cells that the group became wholly dependent upon the PFLP, at one point, whose purposes it began to serve rather than their own. The "obsession with world revolution made German terrorists incomprehensible to the Germans."[136]

Despite the drawbacks of establishing external ties, efforts to remain distinct, autonomous entities may prove detrimental to the ability of terrorist groups to adapt to future change. In the absence of legitimate fronts or supportive social and political networks, terrorist groups may eventually lack the capability to broaden or redirect their struggle and to obtain the resources and manpower necessary to sustain a clandestine program of violent operations. One study argues that the level of out-group distrust may bring group leadership to seek mergers and coalitions only when it feels the cause is lost, in hopes of "preserving some vestige of vitality."[137]

7. The Leadership Factor

At the core of almost every group is a leader whose personality, attitudes, actions and leadership style strongly

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[136] David C. Rapoport, "The International World As Some Terrorists Have Seen It: A Look at a Century of Memoirs," In *Inside Terrorist Organizations*. ed. David C. Rapoport (London: Frank Cass & Company, LTD., 1988): 53.

[137] Zald and Ash, p. 336.

influence the strategy and culture of the group. The literature supports the assertion that group cohesiveness varies widely according to the type and strength of leadership present. Obviously, the leader's primary role is to ensure the survival of the group largely by building and maintaining members' commitments to group productivity and goals. In highly centralized and personalized groups, in particular, commitment to the group may be synonymous with commitment to the leader. Even with nominal doctrine and chains-of-command in place, such groups are extremely vulnerable to loss of the leader and his authority. As Gamson notes:

> In some cases, the group is essentially a personal vehicle for such a leader and could hardly be said to exist independent of its core leader.[138]

This may be, in fact, typical of many terrorist groups. Assuming members share the desire to perpetuate the group, an uncertain environment and scarce resources will lead them to view the leader and his decisions as the key to the health and survival of the group. On the leader's influence Bell states:

> Control within a small underground is not a matter of issuing orders or fashioning a consensus. The capacity to control depends, in varying degrees on: 1) being harder than the hard men physically and often exuding an aura of immediate violence...; 2) using simple moral suasion through force of conviction and character and sense of purpose

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[138] Gamson, p. 93.

> without limits; 3) the impact of the vision illuminated, the dream made manifest, the prophet speaking; 4) setting an example by sacrifice, by dedication and courage, even by skill and capacity.[139]

More than administering the group, terrorist leaders must provide the charismatic authority and incentives needed to attract members, induce them to commit violent acts in pursuit of specific goals, and initiate change. Charisma allows the leader to have legitimate normative power over his subordinates such that everything seems to revolve around him. Wilson notes:

> Few, if any, incentives will prove effective in the long run if the members do not believe that the executive has the right to ask them to perform certain services.[140]

Wilson offers several sources of leadership legitimacy including the "authority of office," strong personal qualities and personal fealty through popularity of a "network of obligations" linking him to almost all members. However, none of these may be as powerful as charismatic authority stemming from "the gift of grace." Authority rests in the leader's ability to leave no doubt as to his belief and commitment to the purposes of the group. The legitimacy of this authority may simply result from sincerity of commitment or, perhaps, the his apparent possession of

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[139] J. Bowyer Bell, "Wayward Guerrillas," *Society* 28, No.3 (March-April 1991): 56.

[140] Wilson, p. 219.

exceptional or divine powers and qualities.[141] Most important is the leader's ability to convince the members to suspend their own judgments and to accept reality as he views it. The leader can exploit members' dependence to further isolate them from the outside world and, consequently, to strengthen their bonds to the group. As Post states:

> The hallmark of the destructive charismatic leader is absolutist polarizing rhetoric drawing followers together against the outside enemy.[142]

It is reasonable to assume that the charismatic leader also reinforces members' bonds to the group by encouraging certain activities designed to increase group cohesion. This might include a series of relatively easy, fail-safe operations to boost morale and to validate the leader's judgment and clarity of purpose and belief.

Despite the obvious benefits of charismatic leadership on group cohesion, entrenched loyalty to one leader can become a liability if the group is unprepared to survive without him. The more closely the legitimacy and credibility of the terrorist group are associated with the leader himself, the more likely that the group will encounter problems maintaining unity and organizational cohesion once that leader is gone. The literature suggests this is

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[141] Ibid., p. 220.

[142] Jerold M. Post, M.D., "Narcissism and the Charismatic Leader-Follower Relationship," *Political Psychology* 7, No.4 (1986): 675.

particularly applicable to the departure of the founding, or primal, leader around whom most of the group's norms and traditions revolve. Depending on the leader's tenure, these patterns may be extremely resistant to change. In most terrorist groups, there is room for only one leader. Therefore, if he is arrested or killed, the group may simply collapse, lose direction and become mired in internal conflict and factionalism, or remain inactive until a new leader emerges.

Loss of leadership does not necessarily mean an end to terrorist activity. Factionalism may produce a number of smaller, more radical groups seeking to assert their legitimacy as the new vanguard of the struggle. In addition, confusion may lead to spates of careless, misdirected violence. Studies on the Red Brigades suggest how the capture or death of most of the its founding members by late 1975 severely threatened the group's ability to survive. As the leadership passed to a less charismatic second tier of founders with an entirely different organizational focus. One study argues that the character of the Red Brigades' founding leadership and the group's early history is vital to understanding its subsequent decline.[143] Many groups are not prepared for survival post-leader. What happens may ultimately be a true measure of cohesion to the *group*. The

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[143] Salvioni, p. 490.

truly cohesive group is one that does not require the leader's constant efforts to maintain it. Survival of the group depends upon the degree to which commitment to the group, its norms and its goals is internalized by individual members. As one author states:

> I am not ignoring the leader and other powerful people in these groups, but there will always be the basic group that can be abused, beaten, harassed, and endure highly stressful conditions as members and still remain bound by the trust/dependency relationship that attracted them.[144]

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[144] Louis Joylon West, "Cults, Liberty, and Mind Control," In *The Rationalization of Terrorism*. eds. David C. Rapoport and Yonah Alexander (Frederick, Maryland: Alethesa Books/University Publications of America, 1982), p. 113.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

> The effort to maintain the group makes it inflexible.[145]

This paper has examined a number of internal and external factors that can have distinct, yet cumulative, effects upon the internal cohesion and behavior of terrorist groups. Survival is a minimum prerequisite for any group which hopes to achieve its ultimate objective, and group cohesion plays a critical role in this process. By the nature of their uncompromising rhetoric, methods and operating environment, terrorist groups have strikes against them from the start. As pursuers of an apparently lost cause whose survival teeters on a never-ending balancing act between external threats and internal demands, it is remarkable that terrorist groups can function at all, let alone persist for any length of time. Some may do so out of sheer luck. Others survive through concerted efforts to confront the forces that threaten to precipitate internal collapse. One way terrorists attempt to cope with this problem is through violent activity. Following Wilson and Crenshaw's argument, terrorist groups become more introverted and absorbed with group solidarity as a dominant incentive over time. Therefore, if violence is assumed to be a critical ingredient for group maintenance, it cannot simply be abandoned.

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[145] Crenshaw, "Theories," p. 23.

The preceding discussion has demonstrated how a terrorist group's need to maintain itself while remaining committed to a failing course of action places it on the horns of a dilemma. Because external and internal requirements are contradictory, terrorist groups are doomed whether they act or not. Terrorists face a lose-lose proposition whereby violent action taken to preserve the group in the short run undermines their already limited chances for success in the long run. As efforts become increasingly introverted, every action, paradoxically, takes the group farther and farther away from achieving its stated goals. At such point, any linkage between violent acts and the terrorist group's ultimate goal or end state is a matter of pure coincidence.

The management of a group in decline is operationally difficult and, perhaps, impossible to perform well. The process of decline for the terrorist group begins, in essence, with its first violent act. Initial failure begins a cycle of more violence intended to offset internal discontent and maintain group cohesion with demonstrable progress towards external goals. Continued violent action, however, inevitably breeds more failure, makes the terrorist group increasingly vulnerable, and exacerbates existing internal problems. Efforts to maintain the group through violent behavior, far from helping terrorists achieve their ultimate goals, begin a vicious downward spiral in which the

group is not only declining but doing so at a much faster rate.

One can conclude that a terrorist group's criteria for success is problematic, changing as the group moves through the various stages of its life cycle. Few, if any, terrorist groups ever succeed in achieving their ultimate goal or end state through violent means, yet many persist. Crenshaw states:

> "Winning" in a conventional sense may not be the actual goal of terrorists, despite the military terminology most employ. The reward is playing the game. Simply being able to stay in is sufficient for organizational maintenance.[146]

Because the use of terror transcends political objectives, the behavior of terrorist groups is difficult to predict. This should not, however, discourage further development of theoretical bases to help explain it. Practical rules for predicting, countering and containing terrorism will continue to fall short without serious consideration of the dynamics that determine how a terrorist group evolves and sustains itself over time. By examining the concept of cohesion and its relationship to group behavior, this paper hopefully has contributed to an appreciation for the causal complexity of terrorist violence beyond the political spectrum.

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[146] Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach," p. 489.

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