



# Irrational Rationality of Terrorism

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pp. 92-102

## Recommended Citation

Nalbandov, Robert Dr.. "Irrational Rationality of Terrorism." *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 4 (2013): : 92-102.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.6.4.5>

Available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss4/5>

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# Irrational Rationality of Terrorism

## **Author Biography**

Dr. Robert Nalbandov has received his B.A. in linguistics from the Tbilisi Foreign Language Institute, M.P.A. from the Georgian-American Institute of Public Administration, a M.A. in International Relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and his Ph.D. in Political Science from the Central European University, Budapest, in 2008. He is the author of "Foreign Interventions in Ethnic Conflicts" (2009, Ashgate) and numerous articles on international security and conflict resolution. Currently Dr. Nalbandov is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Utah State University. Dr. Nalbandov is currently working on two major projects: a manuscript entitled "Democratization and Instability in Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus" for the US Army War College and is co-editing a book entitled "Peace and Conflict in Africa" for the US Marine Corps University Press.

## **Abstract**

The present article deals with the ontological problem of applying the rational choice frameworks to the study of terrorism. It testing the application of the rational choice to the "old" (before the end of the Cold War) and the "new" (after the end of the Cold War) terrorisms. It starts with analyzing the fundamentals of rationality and applies it at two levels: the individual (actors) and group (collective) via two outlooks: tactical (short-term) and strategic (long-term). The main argument of the article is that while the "old" terrorism can be explained by the rational choice theory its "new" version represents a substantial departure from rationality.

## Introduction

The recent increase in research on terrorism put scholars and counter-terrorism practitioners in a quandary with no single overwhelming definition of terrorism.<sup>1</sup> The reason for such ontological diversity is the wish to put terrorism into the cognitive frameworks of rationality. According to a RAND study, “The main argument favoring a rational-choice model is that, if terrorists and terror organizations behave rationally, knowledge of their beliefs and preferences should help us understand and predict their behavior.”<sup>2</sup> The more rational, or predictable, the terrorists’ behavior is the easier it would be to find their true motivators and to deal with terrorism.

There have been several attempts to compartmentalize terrorism within the rational frameworks: Caplan looked into actor-specific rationalities; Crenshaw explored the rationality of the causes of terrorism; Kydd & Walter and Pape brought the rationality into the strategic actions of the terrorists; Oberschall focused on the collective action theory, while Libicki researched the rational thinking behind the terrorist’s motivations.<sup>3</sup> With all those multiple approaches to studies of terrorism there is a remarkable lack of the coherent and parsimonious theory of rationality that would bring it different forms under a uniform theoretical framework.

The present article fills this gap by testing the application of the rational choice to the “old” (before the end of the Cold War) and the “new” (after the end of the Cold War) concepts of terrorism. While the distinction follows the time-frame consideration it is far more fundamental. The phenomenon of “new” terrorists is not necessarily limited to suicide terrorists who had been in existence long before the Cold War ended (the Japanese kamikaze fighters during WWII, the Jewish resistance operatives in the wake of the State of Israel, Tamils who modernized the suicide terror in the 20th century and many more). The most recent self-radicalized “new” terrorists, the Boston bombers Tsarnayev brothers, had no intention to die with the intended victims of their terrorist attacks. The difference between “old” and “new” terrorism permeates the multi-layered categories: their goals and objectives; the targets they have and the victims they aim to destroy; the rationales behind their radicalization; the areas where they operate and the constituencies supporting them.

The article starts with analysis of the fundamentals of the rational choice theory and applies it at two levels: the individual (actors) and group (collective) via two outlooks: tactical (short-term) and strategic (long-term). The main argument of the article is that while the “old” terrorism can

<sup>1</sup> Schmid counted up to 190 definitions of terrorism between 1930s and 1980s; Schmid, Alex P. and A.J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin (eds.), “Social Science for Counterterrorism. Putting the Pieces Together,” *RAND: National Defense Research Institute* (2009): 170, available at: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG849.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG849.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Bryan Caplan, “Terrorism: The Relevance of the Rational Choice Model,” *The Political Economy of Terrorism* 128:½ (2006): 91-107; Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics* 13:4 (1981): 379-399; Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 31:1 (2006): 49-80; Robert A. Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *American Political Science Review* 97:3 (2003): 1-19; Anthony Oberschall, “Explaining Terrorism: The Contribution of Collective Action Theory,” *Sociological Theory* 22:4 (2006): 26-37; Martin C. Libicki, Peter Chalk and Melanie Sisson, “Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences,” *RAND Corporation Monograph Series*, 2007, available at: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND\\_MG483.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG483.pdf).

be explained by the rational choice theory, its “new” version represents a substantial departure from rationality. The article ends with the premise that one-fit-all solution to terrorism cannot be found and offers some alternatives to current counter-terrorist efforts.

## Rational Conundrum of Terrorism

As a theory of human behavior, rational choice focuses on both individual and groups as actors in two forms, “narrow” and “broad.” According to van Um, “The narrow version allows only for action that enhances the personal utility so that individuals act purely selfishly, while a broader version also allows for altruistic goals to be pursued.”<sup>4</sup> On the individual level, rational choice “...assumes that the individual is the most appropriate judge of what is best for him or her... The individual has the freedom, as well as the responsibility, to shape his or her own life.”<sup>5</sup> On the group level, rational choice emphasizes “...loyalty to groups, with the consequent tendency to evaluate actions in terms of their consequences for the group and without consideration of their consequences for people outside the group...”<sup>6</sup> At both levels, rational choice postulates that all actors are utility maximizers and consistently pursue goals based on the consciously chosen stable preferences.<sup>7</sup> The actors are guided by the logic of expected consequences: they possess credible information about the options available to them and chose the best ones based on their expected utility calculation.<sup>8</sup>

The problem with applying the rational choice framework to the phenomenon of terrorism is threefold. First, a single holistic approach is used to determine the existence or absence of rationality, which disregards other variables beyond the objectively existing cognitive patterns. Rationality is applied in absolute terms and the actors are considered static figures always ending up choosing between the actions with the highest post-action expected utility values.<sup>9</sup> In reality, rational behavior for one actor with set value systems may be irrational for other actors under the same circumstances due to their conflicting value systems. It is a universally accepted assumption that “actors know what they want and can order their wants transitively.”<sup>10</sup> The predicament of this approach is that a more rational outcome with increased utility value may occur on its own, or as a result of multiple interceptions of choices that may not always be rational. Rational actors may choose irrational options that may eventually maximize their expected utility and vice versa.

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<sup>4</sup> Eric van Um, “Discussing Concepts of Terrorist Rationality: Implications for Counter-Terrorism Policy,” *Economics of Security Working Paper 22* (2009): 9.

<sup>5</sup> William H. Riker, “The Political Psychology of Rational Choice Theory,” *Political Psychology* 16:1 (1995): 37.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert A. Simon, “Rationality in Political Behavior,” *Political Psychology* 16:1 (1995): 58.

<sup>7</sup> Bryan D. Jones, “Bounded Rationality,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 297–321; Kristen R. Monroe and Kristen H. Maher, “Psychology and Rational Actor Theory,” *Political Psychology* 16:1 (1995): 2.

<sup>8</sup> For additional accounts of the discourse on the logics of appropriateness and expected consequentiality see the following works; March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen, *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (Bergen, Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1976); March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions* (New York: Free Press, 1989); March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen, *Democratic Governance* (New York: Free Press, 1995); James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Order,” *International Organization* 52:4 (1998): 943–969.

<sup>9</sup> John R. Oneal, “The Rationality of Decision Making During International Crises,” *Polity* 20:4 (1988): 601.

<sup>10</sup> William H. Riker, “The Political Psychology of Rational Choice Theory,” 24.

This theoretical quandary is best seen in altruistic suicide. The end state of actions is rational if it fits within the specific cognitive frameworks: to die for the common good may be a noble fit. However, as Mises noted, “No man is qualified to declare what would make another man happier or less discontented,” which means that the core of rationality is essentially subjective.<sup>11</sup> On the individual level, an example of the suicide for the public good is a soldier who daily fights the enemy on the battlefield to ultimately survive, but suddenly decides to consciously commit a heroic but a suicidal feat to save her fellow soldiers. Here rational terrorism would predict high upsurge in the numbers of soldiers willing to commit suicide because of the set preferences to save the lives of others by sacrificing one’s own. This, however, is not happening and the rationale behind the premeditated suicide remains within the cognitive frameworks of an individual, and her unique personal preferences.

Another problem of the holistic rational approach to terrorism comes from the multiple layers of cognitive behavioral patterns. In the ideal world, the actors should clearly see and easily calculate the post-action expected utility of each option. However, as Monroe and Maher suggested, “...real people don't always operate this way, nor should they. We know that each of us has limited...capacity to perceive, recall, interpret, and calculate...”<sup>12</sup> Rationality is confined by human imperfections, by their inherent inability to “perform the calculations necessary even for a reduced set of options in a decision-making situation,” and, ultimately, by the absolute and objective flaws imposed by the “cognitive limitations of their minds.”<sup>13</sup>

A possible explanation for the irrational behavior of the actors is the factor of identity, which varies in different actors. Specific identity constructs force them to choose different options not based on the objective utility calculations but on their subjectively constructed assessment of the objective reality. The identity-based “logic of appropriateness” limits the power of rational reasoning of the actors, forces them “to derive actions from given identities” and act “according to the institutionalized practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit, understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good.”<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, no data is available on the multiplicity of layers of cognitive behavioral patterns that would explain heroism of the soldier from the previous example. The decision to act heroically may be based on her desire to bring victory to own group out of her specific identity or following the Christian doctrine on self-sacrifice for the sake of the common good. On the contrary, a soldier with a different identity—for instance, a deep believer in another Christian doctrine on suicide being a sinful act (depending on individual interpretations of the scriptures)—may wish to abstain from taking such a step.

Finally, the “weak” rationality fails when the actors are confronted by time-relative constrains. Rationality may or may not be present in immediate decision making: what may be rational in an instant may turn irrational, and vice versa if the actors take time for rational re-thinking of their

<sup>11</sup> Mises, Ludwig von, *Human Action* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1966), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Kristen R. Monroe and Kristen H. Maher, “Psychology and Rational Actor Theory,” *Political Psychology* 16:1 (1995): 1-21.

<sup>13</sup> Bryan D. Jones, “Bounded Rationality,” 306; Herbert A. Simon, “Human Nature in Politics: The Dialogue of Psychology with Political Science,” 293-304.

<sup>14</sup> Kjell Goldmann, “Appropriateness and Consequences: The Logic of Neo-Institutionalism,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 18:1 (2005): 44; James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “The Logic of Appropriateness,” *ARENA Working Papers*, 04/09: 4.

actions. An immediately rational action may lose its rationality under the influence of additional variables extrinsic to the rational choice frameworks. An option that previously had the lowest expected utility and was anticipated to remain as such may increase its utility depending on external factors. Similarly, a step that seemed immediately irrational may acquire rational basis provided there is enough time for re-thinking. The soldier from the previous example may change her mind and abstain from the heroic suicidal feat if she has enough time to carefully (i.e. rationally) weigh all the pros and cons of it instead of engaging in an impulsive immediate action. Likewise, if her extemporaneous reaction was to hold back from sacrificing her life, she may, at some point in the future or under similar circumstances, choose to die heroically and save others. In all the instances above the preferences are not set: they are multiple and volatile depending on individual cases.

### Individual Level Rationality

When applying rational choice theory to the actions of the individual terrorists a distinction should be made between the non-suicide and the suicide forms of terror. The non-suicide, or “survivalist” terrorism, was mostly characteristic of “old” terror, existing prior to the end of the Cold War, such as the Basque Euzkadi ta Askatasuna (ETA), Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA), the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FLMN), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Russian “Narodovolci” (short for the “Narodnaya Volya”), and the “Esers” (short for “Party of Socialists–Revolutionaries”). Most of the “old” terrorists were rational actors who wished to live through their struggle to see the results of their actions and to share their benefits with the whole group they represented. The notion of self-sacrifice for the greater common good was absent in the selfish rationality of the “old” terrorists. In addition to having survivalist reasons, the “old” terrorist directed their goals toward attaining tangible benefits: at minimum wider autonomy for their kin or sovereignty and independence, at maximum. These goals were limited in scope, geographic coverage, and usually concerned terrorists themselves.

The goals of the “new” terrorists, who appeared after the collapse of the bipolar system in early 1990s, are transnational in reach and limited in their long-lasting effects. On the individual level, the terrorist who sacrifices her life “hope[s] to achieve infinite bliss in heaven.”<sup>15</sup> At first glance, she can, indeed, be considered as “an agent who accepts certain death in order to kill with high probability.”<sup>16</sup> Similar to traditional terrorists, she would make relative cost calculations, which, in Sandler’s words, “...must demonstrate that the utility associated with the suicidal mission is at least as large as the utility of the status quo.”<sup>17</sup> This can be possible, as Caplan rightly noted, “...if you genuinely believe that death in a jihad brings infinite reward,” which makes “new” terrorism seem rational.<sup>18</sup>

Rational approach in decision making assumes the post-action utility to be higher, or, at least, not lower than the pre-action one. The key here is that both these utilities should be easy to calculate

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<sup>15</sup> Tyler Cowen, “Terrorism as Theater: Analysis and Policy Implications,” *Public Choice* 128:½ (2006): 238.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Harrison, “An Economist Looks at Suicide Terrorism,” *World Economics* 7:4 (2006): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Todd Sandler, “Collective Action and Transnational Terrorism,” *World Economy* 26:6 (2003): 785.

<sup>18</sup> Bryan Caplan, “Terrorism: The Relevance of the Rational Choice Model,” 98.

in tangible terms. The thought of exchanging individual lives for a greater common good is quite problematic to accept since sacrificing one's life for the unknown and, thus, the unquantifiable outcome, is far from being rational. Even if the person believes that her post-action utility from the suicide attack would be higher than her pre-action one she still cannot calculate the true value of the former. On the tactical level, the terrorists committing suicide attacks remain *in absentia* of the results of their actions. They die without comparing (in rational terms) their post-action utility with pre-action one. After all, no one had ever returned from the "other world" with the message that life after death is better or worse than life itself. In sum, there is no way to credibly quantify the individual utility in life and death: the suicide bombers might "go straight to paradise and enjoy the company of seventy-two virgins" or they might end up in hell (assuming that former is unarguably "better" than latter).<sup>19</sup>

Separate consideration should be given to the religion-based rationality. To start with, religion acts as an important motivator for human actions. Those who consider themselves true believers have the value-systems different from those who view themselves as atheists. This leads to different cognitive frameworks of reference: what is rational for a believer (i.e. justifiable from the point of view of post-action utility) can be as irrational for a disbeliever. Many religions have the rational-choice frameworks imbedded in their belief systems. . The notions of "heaven" versus "hell" are more or less present in most of the religions and the paths to either one depend on how their followers had spent their lives. Compliance with the dogmas leads to better existence after life and vice versa – a sinful person would face worse future after death. The choice of the afterlife is rational as much as the person "chooses" to live in sin or in righteousness according to different religious institutional standards.

This fact, however, does not make religion either the independent or the intervening variable here. By their very virtues many religions are "outward" discriminatory and "inward" non-discriminatory. This means that single religions discriminate between those on followers and those of other faiths; discriminate between what is considered "good" or "evil" but do not discriminate between all own believers or all own non-believers. Religious preferences are set equally for all own actors: all "righteous" people will face the afterlife corresponding to their earthly deeds and so will all the "sinners". The same reasoning is applied to own followers and those of other religions.

The problem of accepting religion as a factor-variable here is that the resulting rational choice framework would predict that all actors-believers would normally strive to achieve the same outcome: "Heaven" for Christians, "Nirvana" for Buddhist, "Shamayim" for the Hebrews or "Jannah" for Muslims. If the religion is assumed to be the predominant driving force among the "new" terrorists, another assumption should be equally true: that all believers would commit mass acts of suicidal or non-suicidal violence in their beliefs to take the lives of all other non-believers. If this is the case, then Mises's argument on the impossibility to prescribe universal happiness fails. When all actors supposedly have equally set preferences within the frameworks of their respective religions, this would predefine their *modus operandi*: killing heretics/infidels should be omnipresent across all religious actors. However, this view fails the test of scientific robustness and generalizability.<sup>20</sup> Suicidal acts are still quite rare and not all the true believers in

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>20</sup> Soler, Lena, Emiliano Trizio, Thomas Nickels and William Wimsatt (eds.), "Characterizing the Robustness of

paradise randomly attack the followers of other religions: events like the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre are still outliers.

## Economics of New Terrorism

From a purely economic standpoint, there is conflicting evidence of lethal efficiency of “new” terrorism. In absolute terms, suicide terrorism proves to be more efficient than its survivalist version: according to Caplan, “[a]n average suicide attack claims anywhere from four to over thirteen times as many victims as a non-suicide attack.”<sup>21</sup> Pape, too, found that that, although rare, suicide attacks account for almost half of the total human casualties for the same period.<sup>22</sup> However, the costs imposed on the target governments by all terrorists are exponentially lower than those of the conventional warfare. Mueller & Stewart's study corroborate this claim, “...annual terrorism fatality risks... are less than one in one million and therefore generally lie within the range regulators deem safe or acceptable, requiring no further regulations, particularly those likely to be expensive.”<sup>23</sup> Charkavorti also points out that “...terrorism alone does not anywhere match the range of destruction caused by regular war, guerilla war and communal riots.”<sup>24</sup> Finally, as the findings of Asthappan's statistical analysis show, from 1981 to 2006 “...suicide bombers are killing fewer people even though more incidents are occurring.”<sup>25</sup>

In relative terms, however, the violent deaths of the so-called “hard targets”—high-level government officials—would have significantly higher policy-altering strategic impacts on the domestic and/or international environments than the deaths of ordinary citizens.<sup>26</sup> Yet even here rationality is relative: the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in 1914 by Gavrilo Princip, a member of the Serbian terrorist organization “Black Hand,” led to more significant political shifts than the killing of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by the LTTE, which caused no noteworthy international or regional political deviations.

## Strategic Rationality

On the strategic level, i.e. long-term effects of the terrorist actions, individual terrorism may acquire some rationality traits. Strategic rationality postulates pursuing long-term goals by the actors. Here the distinction should be made into the actual perpetrators of terrorist attacks and the masterminds behind them. As Etzioni claims, “It may indeed be rational (in the sense of serving the goal) for the terrorist organizations and their leaders to send some of their recruits to die in acts of suicide; but that does not make it rational from the viewpoint of the individual recruits.”<sup>27</sup>

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Science: After the Practice Turn in Philosophy of Science,” *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science* 292 (2012).

<sup>21</sup> Caplan, “Terrorism: The Relevance of the Rational Choice Model,” 94.

<sup>22</sup> Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” 1-19.

<sup>23</sup> John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, “Hardly Existential: Thinking Rationally About Terrorism,” *Foreign Policy* (April 2, 2010), available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66186/john-mueller-and-mark-g-stewart/hardly-existential>

<sup>24</sup> Robi Charkavorti, “Terrorism: Past, Present and Future,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 29:36 (1994): 2343.

<sup>25</sup> Jibey Asthappan, “The Effectiveness of Suicide Terrorism,” *Journal of the Washington Institute of China Studies* 5:1 (2010): 22.

<sup>26</sup> Eli Berman, and David D. Laitin, “Hard Targets: Theory and Evidence on Suicide Attacks,” (December 2006), available at: <http://econ.ucsd.edu/~elib/Hardtargers.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Amitai Etzioni, “Rational Actors: Neither Mad nor M.A.D.1: The Meanings of Rationality, Rogue States and Terrorists,” *Defense & Security Analysis* 26:4 (2010): 434.

Thus, the death of a suicide bomber as a result of her attack—whether premeditated or accidental—is not a sole variable in defining the overall rationality of the act. The factor of third party – organizers of terrorist attacks and not their immediate perpetrators – should be also taken into account.

Whether suicidal or survivalist, terrorist attacks usually tend to spare the lives of their organizers and risk only those of the actual perpetrators. The leaders of various terrorist groups and factions, according to Cowen, “...may have differing motivations than the lower-level troops. Often they organize attacks but do not conduct them personally.”<sup>28</sup> From that standpoint the threat of being damaged as a result of any terrorist attacks for the individual group leaders is minimal. According to Pape, “even if many suicide attackers are irrational or fanatical, the leadership groups that recruit and direct them are not.”<sup>29</sup> Finally, Neumayer and Plumper claimed that “the leaders of terrorist groups are predominantly rational and act strategically to reach their goal of gaining political influence on the political system of their home country.”<sup>30</sup>

### *Group Level Rationality*

Terrorism is mostly a collective endeavor with rare exceptions, such as the 2013 Boston marathon bombers. The individual terrorism is still an “aggregation of individual decisions and the behavior of a group can be explained with recourse to individual behavior.”<sup>31</sup> Terrorist loners can claim their identity affiliations with the known terrorist organizations but this does not make them more than mere criminals in pursuit of their personal agendas. This, of course, does not mean that self-radicalization cannot happen on the individual level. The case of the Tsarnayev brothers is a perfect example of the terrorist identity based on the “imagined communities.”<sup>32</sup> These terrorists had little or no contacts with the umbrella organizations and even attacked the country that had done nothing wrong to their ethnic external homeland in Chechnya.

This brings in the following point: radicalization and political motivations are two distinct instances of terror. For violence to be truly politically motivated it should have some sort of an institutionalized approval by specific groups. Otherwise the counter-terrorist efforts will stumble upon the problem of non-falsifiability. If every lone wolf chooses the identity that forces her to undertake premeditated acts of violence, then there is no political motivation as a separately existing phenomenon. As in the Tsarnayev brothers case, the discourse on their political motivations is futile: not only does not it yield any valuable insights into the reasons for the terrorists attacks it also distracts the counter-terrorism efforts by taking them in the wrong direction of organizational versus individual terror.

At the group level from the point of view of rational choice, the objective is to increase the aggregate expected utility for the whole group. The difference is in the degree of rationality in achieving goals by the “old” and “new” concepts of terrorism. Most of the “old” terrorist

<sup>28</sup> Cowen, “Terrorism as Theater: Analysis and Policy Implications,” 237.

<sup>29</sup> Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” 2.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plumper, “International Terrorism and the Clash of Civilizations,” *British Journal of Political Science* 39:4 (2009): 712.

<sup>31</sup> Um, “Discussing Concepts of Terrorist Rationality: Implications for Counter-Terrorism Policy,” 10.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: New Edition, 2006).

organizations represented and recruited from ethnically or ideologically limited circles of supporters and strived to achieve the benefits for these groups only. This was largely due to the specificity of their strategic objectives. Since most of them were advocating for social justice for their respective groups, their supporters would, naturally, come from these very communities. The embodiment of traditional terrorism, ETA was almost entirely composed of the Basque nationals acting in Spain. Similarly, the RIRA recruits were Irish only: "unpropertied unmarried, young men of middle classes, increasingly disproportionately dominated by urban, skilled and socially mobile activists" throughout the world. ASALA also used to replenish its ranks among young Armenians, and so did the PKK: according to Kalyvas, "...it would be hard to find ethnic Turks fighting on the side of the PKK."<sup>33</sup> The "Narodnaya Volya" and the "Esers", too, were composed of ethnic Russians and operated within the Russian empire only.

From a tactical standpoint, the purpose of the "old" terrorism was to impose insurmountable human and economic costs on the opponent side to force the latter to undertake the sought policy change.<sup>34</sup> These goals, according to Pape, were pursued by "inflict[ing] enough pain on the opposing society to overwhelm their interest in resisting the terrorists demands and, so, to cause either the government to concede or the population to revolt against the government..."<sup>35</sup> With this, the "old" terrorism had limited goals to achieve: "to coerce a target government to change policy, to mobilize additional recruits and financial support, or both" or "...to provoke the target into a disproportionate response, radicalize moderates, and build support for its ambitious goals over the long term."<sup>36</sup> For instance, ASALA was pressing on Turkey to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide and eventually wanted "...to establish an independent and fully sovereign Armenian state comprising of the Armenian Soviet Republic and Turkish Armenia" without complete destruction of the Turkish Republic per se.<sup>37</sup> The RIRA and ETA advocated for the sovereignty of their respective ethnic groups - the Irish and the Basques - from the UK and Spain, correspondingly, without complete annihilation of their enemies' statehood or the supranational governance of the European Union. The same limited locate can be seen in PKK's actions: to gain increasing political rights for their group representatives and "to form an independent state of Kurdistan."<sup>38</sup> Such goals were, in principle, rationally achievable and showed the "behavior that benefit[ed] not only an individual but also a group the individual feels loyal to may also be considered as rational."<sup>39</sup>

On a strategic level, the limited objectives of the "old" terrorist organization made them act very selectively mostly aiming at "hard targets." By doing so, the terrorists were sending a clearly rational message to their successors: we will kill you if you continue to resist. Over 60 percent of

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<sup>33</sup>Peter Hart, "The Social Structure of the Irish Republican Army, 1916-1923," *The Historical Journal* 42 (2009): 207; Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Ethnic Defection in Civil War," *Comparative Political Studies* 41:8 (2008): 1043-1068.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27:2 (1975): 175-200.

<sup>35</sup> Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," 4.

<sup>36</sup> Martin C. Libicki, Peter Chalk and Melanie Sisson, "Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences," *RAND Corporation Monograph Series* (2007): 5, available at:

[http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND\\_MG483.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG483.pdf); David A. Lake, "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century," *Dialog-IO* (2002): 26.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Wilkinson, "Armenian Terrorism," *The World Today* 39:9 (1983): 346.

<sup>38</sup> Hatem Mukhlis, "Voting Yes to Chaos," *The New York Times* (October 18, 2005): 27.

<sup>39</sup> Um, "Discussing Concepts of Terrorist Rationality: Implications for Counter-Terrorism Policy," 9.

ETA's victims were the members of the Spanish police, the military, and the politicians whereas the civilians were mainly the collateral or the "[i]nformers, drug dealers, entrepreneurs who do not succumb to the financial extortion, people with extreme right-wing ideology, or people involved in the "dirty war" against ETA."<sup>40</sup> ASALA was also notorious for targeting exclusively Turkish policymakers and mainly diplomats.<sup>41</sup> RIRA had developed the similar pattern in their attacks.<sup>42</sup> The FLMN also mostly targeted the governments' military and installations.<sup>43</sup> The LTTE's preferred hits were the military, police, government officials, and the private citizens associated with and supporting the policies of the Sri Lankan Government.<sup>44</sup> The "Narodovolci" and the "Esers" focused exclusively on "governor-generals, mayors, commanders of military regiments, heads of prisons, gendarmes, high-level policemen, bailiffs, constables, judges and prosecutors,...members of the State Duma and even the royal family."<sup>45</sup>

The "new" terrorism became a truly global enterprise: as the avant-garde of the new terrorism, al-Qaeda recruits Muslims and converts all over the world. It does not have a "single, uniform recruitment process for a group; rather, there are as many recruitment processes as there are distinct regions and nodes in which the group operates."<sup>46</sup> Appearance of "new" terrorism also altered the overall strategy of politically motivated violence, which made it even more dangerous than ever. This change occurred as a result of moving away from the politically motivated attacks to staged shows of unexpected blanket violence on the organizational and individual levels. "New" terrorism has lost the privilege of the "exclusive club membership" and has turned into a "franchised" tactics readily available to organized and individual actors: anyone with any background living anywhere can be self-radicalized and commit terrorist attacks on behalf of any organization and any cause.

### *Tactical Rationality*

Tactically, the "new" terrorists are not engaged in the war of attrition but the war for full but less perceivable zero-sum victory. They wish not just to change the system where they live or to place their own policy entrepreneurs in charge: they want to destroy it completely and to creating a new world order, the global Caliphate under Sharia law. Numerous Chechen terrorist organizations operating in Russia replicate this idea on a smaller, regional scale in the form of the Caucasian "Imarat," a Chechen word for an all-Muslim political entity in the Caucasus.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, I, "The Persistence of Nationalist Terrorism: The Case of ETA," in Kledja Mulaj (ed.) *Violent Non-State Actors in Contemporary World Politics* (2008): 24.

<sup>41</sup> "Turkish Diplomats Killed by Armenian Terrorists," *Assembly of Turkish-American Associations*, 2011, available at: <http://www.ataa.org/reference/diplomats.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Real Irish Republican Army, "The Global Terrorism Database," *START*, 2012, available at: <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?charttype=pie&chart=target&search=Irish%20republican%20army&count=100>.

<sup>43</sup> Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, "The Global Terrorism Database," *START*, 2012, available at: <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?charttype=pie&chart=target&search=FMLN>.

<sup>44</sup> Tamil Tigers, "The Global Terrorism Database," *START*, 2012, available at: <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?charttype=pie&chart=target&search=Tamil%20Tigers>.

<sup>45</sup> K.G. Razumovsky, "History. Terrorism in Russia," *Moscow State University of Technology and Management*, available at: <http://mgutm.ru/stopterror/histori.php>.

<sup>46</sup> Scott Gerwehr and Sara Daly, "Al-Qaida: Terrorist Selection and Recruitment," in David Kamien (ed.) *McGraw-Hill Homeland Security Handbook* (RAND: 2008), 75.

<sup>47</sup> The following are among the most notorious Chechen terrorist groups: the Supreme Military Majlisul Shura of the United Mujahidin Forces of the Caucasus; the Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan; the Caucasus Front

The problem with such a strategy from the rational choice perspective is revealed on the level of strategic objectives. The “new” terrorists have no points of reference to credibly evaluate the expected utility of the proposed end state of their struggle. Al-Qaeda’s proposed global Caliphate is related to its various historically existing forms, including the Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid and the Ottoman empires. However, even those “mini-caliphates” suffered from a steady desire of their people to move away from pure Islam and Sharia law to secularism. According to Arnason and Stauth, “[t]he history of Islamic states appears as a long-drawn-out retreat from full exercise of religious authority. The early caliphate...was replaced by a monarchy, which... tended to replace the direct authority of religion with ‘group feeling and the sword’...”<sup>48</sup> In case of both al-Qaeda and the Chechen terrorist organizations, strategic rationality rests on their ephemeral promise to the followers without any rational framework of reference that they would be better off in the Global Caliphate than without it.

From the point of view of tactical rationality the “new” terrorism can be quite rational due to its specific targeting pattern: indiscriminate violence against civilians. Due to the fact that all terrorism, but mostly so its new version is essentially a show in need of its audience, according to Stohl, the latter’s “... victims and all that destruction were not as important to the perpetrators as the audience around the world that viewed that destruction.”<sup>49</sup> Crenshaw also supports this change in wider targeting of “new” terrorists groups by saying, “The victims or objects of terrorist attack have little intrinsic value to the terrorist group but represent a larger human audience whose reaction the terrorists seek.”<sup>50</sup> The change in asymmetric tactics happening all over the world is backed up by the statistical data. A 2008 RAND study identified 3827 civilian deaths and over 8000 injuries with only 110 military deaths and 221 injuries in al-Qaeda attacks between 1994 and 2007.<sup>51</sup>

Instead of sending the personalized message to their targets, by attacking unknown and mostly civilian actors, the “new” terrorists indirectly aim at the “hard targets” to instigate the political change. This is a significant departure from the targeting modus operandi of the “old” terrorists for whom both victims and targets were the same. The “new” terrorists’ demands are delivered indirectly by the survivors of the attacks. In these cases and especially when the terrorist acts touch threaten to spoil the re-election prospects, some governments tend to succumb to terrorist’s demands. There is nothing that the democratically elected governments hate to see more than the deaths of their innocent constituencies. To a point, such tactics can, indeed, help terrorists to succeed. More recent examples of the tactical rationality include the withdrawal from Iraq of the Philippines troops shortly after their truck driver was kidnapped by the extremists and removal of the Spanish troops as a result of the pre-election promise of then Prime Minister Zapatero after the 2004 Madrid Bombings, shortly followed by Honduras and the Dominican Republic.<sup>52</sup> This,

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of the Military Forces of Chechen Republic Ichkeria.

<sup>48</sup> Johann P. Arnason and Georg Stauth, “Civilization and State Formation in the Islamic Context: Re-Reading Ibn Khaldun,” *Thesis Eleven* 76:1 (2004): 39.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Stohl, “Old Myths, New Fantasies And The Enduring Realities Of Terrorism,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1:1 (2008): 13.

<sup>50</sup> Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 379.

<sup>51</sup> Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, “How Terrorist Groups End. Lessons for Countering Al Qa’ida,” *RAND Corporation* (2008), available at: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG741-1.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG741-1.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> James Glanz, “Hostage Is Freed after Philippine Troops Are Withdrawn from Iraq,” *New York*

however, did not have a desired effect on the overall long-term counter-terrorist mission of the coalition forces in Iraq.

## Conclusion

The difference in applying the rational choice framework to the study of motivators and behavior of the “old” and “new” terrorists is substantial. The rationality-based approach presupposes the counter-terrorism efforts based on the rationality of the government actors fighting with terror. Such an approach would be successful in case of the “old” terrorists who had clearly presented and tangible goals. This made their behavior more or less predictable and easily to target due to the clearly identifiable sources of threat. On the contrary, the “new” terrorists are unpredictable in their global reach, mutating forms and vague objectives. The same counter-terrorist operations that applied in case of the “old” terrorists—small-scale operations, such as in Ireland and the Land of Bask, or larger military interventions, as in case of Afghanistan—are likely to fail here.

The “Global War On Terror” coined by President Bush after the September 11 attacks is a very dangerous term from the point of view of absence of an exit strategy. The “new” terrorists are not fighting for any specific or tangible goals. Their aim is to fight for the sake of fighting. This is the inherent difference of “new” terrorism from its predecessor and its grave danger: absence of clearly defined and attainable end states for the terrorists themselves. Global or even regional caliphates and the universal Sharia rule are utopia primarily for the terrorists themselves as well as the counter-terrorist circles.

Absence of rationality makes the “new” terrorism nothing but a fear show with the sole purpose of sustaining further shows with the increasing number of audience around them. Success of terrorist attacks should be measured not in term of its victims – as shown above, from purely rational perspective the lethality rate of terrorism is very low if compared with other threats. The United States troops may withdraw from Afghanistan but this would in no way mean the defeat or victory for terrorists. The only way a show would end is when the audience would stop buying tickets. The philosophical school of empiricism postulates that the world exists as long as we acknowledging its existence.<sup>53</sup> The world is, essentially, a combination of the matters that came into being because of the actors’ desire to recognize them. Similarly, the “new” terrorism would remain a threat until the counter-terrorism cycles continue to perceive it as such. Once the audience stops paying attention to multiple tapes of caved terrorists broadcast by global television networks, to the ephemeral jihads sporadically launched in different areas of the globe by numerous terrorist cells and affiliates against different nations, and starts treating it as an ordinary crime requiring relevant punishment, the pandemics of terrorism will gradually evade.

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*Times* (July 21, 2004), available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/21/world/hostage-is-freed-after-philippine-troops-are-withdrawn-from-iraq.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Nabu Press, 2010).