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The role of psychological processes in terrorism:

A group-level analysis.

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Declarations

The word length of this dissertation is 14,991

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Abstract

A large body of research has been built up in the attempt to explain the occurrence of terrorism. The majority of this work has focussed at the structural level of analysis (political, social and economic causal factors) or at the individual level (terrorist personality, psychopathology and abnormality). This paper attempts to formulate a group-level explanation of terrorism. The first section summarises the existing literature, in order to establish why a group perspective is important. The following chapter explores the processes underlying how individuals come to accept radical ideologies and join violent political groups. The final section evaluates psychological theories of group dynamics (including obedience and conformity, groupthink, group polarisation and social identity processes) that may help to explain how and why certain groups come to accept terrorism as justifiable course of action. Though a group-processes account is by no means a definitive explanation of terrorism, it can help to integrate other levels of analysis; explaining why groups of seemingly normal individuals may react to certain environmental conditions with terroristic violence. Furthermore, this approach allows terrorism to be viewed as the result of interactive processes, rather than simply the aggregation of static factors. This approach is therefore a promising one, and indicates that further research is needed into the dynamics of terrorist groups.

<u>Dedications</u>

To my family, for their infinite love and support, and for providing me with so many opportunities to grow.

To my teachers, for their guidance and encouragement in a subject that was new to me.

To my closest friend, for her warmth, compassion and superb cooking.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

ELN: Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)

ETA: Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom)

FARC: Fuerzas Armadas de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)

JRA: Japanese Red Army

LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

MI5: Military Intelligence, Section 5 (British Security Service)

PIRA: Provisional Irish Republican Army

PKK: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers Party)

RAND: Research and Development Corporation

SES: Socioeconomic Status

SIT: Social Identity Theory

Introduction

Researchers from many disciplines, including sociology, politics, economics and psychology, have all contributed to an ever-growing discourse which seeks to explain why terrorism occurs. This body of research has helped to build a picture of potential determinants of terrorism from the large-scale (e.g. poverty, oppression, lack of political representation) to the small-scale (e.g. individual terrorist psychology, political perceptions, alienation). As terrorism is almost exclusively perpetrated by individuals who are embedded in radical political groups, the following paper will attempt to assess how social and group psychological processes may act to drive terrorism. By treating terrorism as a dynamic process, rather than an aggregation of a number of static factors, it is hoped that the paper will be able to contribute to a better understanding of how apparently 'normal' individuals may progress to carry out such violent acts.

Firstly, it is necessary to define a number of important terms. Perhaps the most important, and yet most difficult, among these definitions is that of 'terrorism'. The term 'terrorism' originally appeared in discussions the post-revolution 'reign of terror' in France from 1793 to 1798. This described the use of violence and mass extermination of 'enemies of the revolution' by Maximilien Robespierre and the new French Government, intended to stifle dissent among the population (Fromkin, 1975). To a large extent, modern usage of the term agrees with this; terrorism is widely viewed as the use of violence or threatened violence against 'civilians' or 'non-combatants' for political ends (White, 2006). There is, however, considerable debate and disagreement over different factors of this definition. Held (2004), for example, suggests that terrorism need not necessarily be against civilian targets. Furthermore, some suggest that terrorism is exclusively the domain of sub-state actors; the

official definition of terrorism set out in the US Code (and used by the CIA and other agencies), for example, describes terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents" (US Department of State, 1999). The majority of terrorism researchers, however, agree that states may also use violence to intimidate civilians for political reasons (Sproat, 1996).

Despite such disagreements, it is necessary to come to a working definition for this paper. On the basis of general, but by no means complete, consensus, 'terrorism' is defined here as the *use of actual or threatened violence intended to spread a message of fear to civilians for political purposes[1]*. This is not to say that this is a universally acceptable definition (if such a thing were even possible), but rather it should function adequately for the purposes of this discussion. Where relevant theoretical opinion differs or this definition becomes insufficient in the course of this paper, it will be reconsidered. Furthermore, terrorism is a politicised and pejorative term; very few of those engaged in political violence would classify *themselves* as terrorists, and it is often used by both sides in a conflict to describe the others. It is therefore important to stress that, for the sake of accuracy and impartiality; the term 'terrorism' as used in this paper describes a tactic that is used by certain groups, and not the groups themselves[2].

Secondly, it is also very important to define what constitutes a 'group'. Taken widely, a group can be any collection of people with some shared association; from a family to a culture or society. For social psychologists, however, the term is applied more specifically, to mean a collection of people who are in some way "interdependent and have at least the potential for mutual interaction" (Taylor, Peplau & Sears, 2003:308). Though this has

[1] It is worth noting that, as the focus here is group-level dynamics in non-state groups, only sub-state actors are examined in this paper.
[2] Many different actors use terroristic tactics for varied reasons and to achieve different goals, and categorisation on the basis of a tactic is therefore arbitrary. Where the term 'terrorist' or 'terrorist group' is used, it is therefore shorthand for an individual or group that engages in terrorism.

traditionally meant face-to-face contact, the rise of expanded avenues for communication and interaction such as the internet has affected group psychology research considerably. For the sake of this paper, then, a form of Taylor et al's definition will suffice; the groups under scrutiny here are obviously political in nature (with shared ideology or identity) and consist of individuals interacting face-to-face, and also (in the more recent examples) via the internet and other communications channels. Again, where definitions of the 'group' vary from this, it will be discussed.

As mentioned above, the purpose of this paper is to examine the psychological processes that may play a part in driving terrorism. The first chapter will briefly explore the research into structural causes of terrorism; political, economic and social. Following this, the relevance of psychological theories to terrorism will be explored. It will be seen that, given the paucity of corroborating evidence and conceptual problems and biases in the research, existing individual-level explanations (personality and psychopathology) are inadequately prepared to explain terrorism. The subsequent chapters will examine the psychology of terrorism from a social and group-psychological perspective; thus placing the individual in context and recognising the path to terrorism as a dynamic process. Chapter two will therefore assess the processes behind the individual's engagement with radical politics and associated groups. Chapter three will then explore how the dynamic psychological processes between individuals within radical political groups may act to impel its members to commit terrorism. Finally a conclusion will be drawn, drawing together the findings of the chapters, and suggesting avenues for future research and application.

A brief note is required on the methodology of this paper. Modern psychological research is largely empirical in outlook; concerned with the production and direct evaluation of hypotheses through scientific methods. The constraints of the dissertation mean that this paper does not apply experimental methods to terrorism. Instead, psychological theories that

may be relevant to terrorism will be evaluated in terms of their conceptual applicability and the strength of their research base. No single case study will be examined, as terrorism is an extremely diverse phenomenon. Instead, general conclusions will be supported by examples from varied terrorist groups. Where the type or structure of these groups affects the psychological processes being examined, it will be explored.

Chapter 1. The origins of terrorism: Towards a group-level explanation.

Many different theories have been proposed in the attempt to ascertain why terrorism occurs. Researching the causes of terrorism therefore quickly reveals a complex picture of interacting factors and processes, all leading certain individuals and groups to use violence against civilians in the pursuit of political goals. Such research has generally looked either from a top-down perspective (such as political, economic or social factors) or bottom-up perspective (such as terrorist demographic profiles, personality etc.) (Victoroff, 2005:11).

Obviously it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine all of these in any great depth; however it is necessary to mention them briefly in order to properly situate a group-level analysis within the existing terrorism literature. This chapter will therefore seek to provide an overview of terrorism causation research. Firstly, some possible macro-level causes of terrorism will be briefly outlined, including structural factors and relative deprivation. Following this, individual-level approaches to terrorism (mental illness and terrorist personality) will be evaluated[3]. The conceptual and practical problems for these approaches will be discussed, in order to outline the need for a group-level psychological process approach to terrorism.

As terrorism is a political phenomenon, the obvious place to start an examination of the causes of terrorism is at the 'macro' level of analysis, which includes political social and economic conditions. Crenshaw (1981) provides a useful exploration of social conditions which may "directly inspire and motivate terrorist campaigns" (Crenshaw, 1981:381).

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[3] Terrorist profiling lies at the individual-level of analysis, but is descriptive rather than explanatory (in that it does not provide direct theories of why the identified individuals engage in terrorism) and thus is omitted from this discussion.

Evidently groups do not engage in violence against civilians without a perceived injustice which they seek to right and without the opportunities to engage in terrorism. According to Crenshaw (1981), a 'concrete grievance' among a subset of the population, such as state discrimination against an ethnic or religious group, may inspire politically-motivated violence; this is perhaps demonstrated by examples of nationalist terrorist groups who consider themselves to be oppressed by the majority-led polity (e.g. the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or ETA).

Secondly, a "lack of opportunity for political participation" (Crenshaw, 1981:383) may also cause terrorism. Where no alternative avenues for political representation exist, and groups are frustrated in their legitimate attempts to attain political efficacy, terrorism may seem like the only remaining course of action for achieving their aims. This, suggests Crenshaw, is especially true when it affects the elites of a society, who may be frustrated by their inability to affect the polity despite their relative privilege[4].

Crenshaw also highlights the importance of *precipitating* factors in driving terrorism. These are events which shock a certain subset of the population and cause some individuals to believe that violent action is required immediately, such as recent use of extreme force against a group by the government[5].

Other structural explanations for terrorism have also been advanced. Some researchers have for example, indicated that poverty or a lack of education may drive political violence, including terrorism. This follows the logic of *relative deprivation theory* (Gurr, 1970), which posits that when a societal group is frustrated by their own deprivation

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[4] Crenshaw (1981) also suggests a number of strategic reasons that groups may use terrorism. These include disrupting or discrediting the polity (by making them appear unable to protect their citizens), causing harsh retaliation from the government (in order to create sympathy in their constituency), or internal functions such as morale building or discipline within the group.
[5] Della Porta (1992:267), for example, points out that a perception that "the state had broken the rules of the democratic game", through police brutality or an attack on civilians, provoked vengeful violence in left-wing militants.

and inability to pursue life goals they may react with collective violence. As Martin (2006:93) puts it; "when a group's rising expectations are met by sustained repression or second-class status, the group's reaction may include political violence." People who wish to attain, for example, wealth and education (and they value the security and resources that they can get from these) may, if they are frustrated in their attempts to get these, turn to the 'weapon of the weak', i.e. terrorism. To some extent, this theory is intuitive, and appears to be supported by the fact that terrorism is often carried out in the name of those who are impoverished or of low socio-economic status (SES) (such as Palestinian terrorism or 1970's left-wing terrorism).

In actual fact the evidence for the association between relative deprivation and violence is equivocal (Martin, 2006). Krueger and Malečková (2003), for example, analysed Hezbollah militants and Palestinian terrorists, and found no negative correlation between poverty and education and terrorism. They even found a possible positive correlation; indicating that these terrorists may in fact have higher SES than the majority of their constituency. It would therefore appear that, rather than directly causing terrorism by mobilising the 'masses', poverty and education could cause terrorism by motivating the elites to take action because of their *perceptions* of injustices.

Though this is only a brief discussion of the possible structural causes of terrorism, a number of important factors have been explored. It would be incorrect, however, to treat terrorism as simply being a consequence of structural, political and economic factors alone. Though many people may be affected by such factors, only a tiny percentage will actually engage with terrorism. Just as poverty and lack of education in a societal group appears only to have an effect through elites' perceptions of injustice; any grievance must be mediated by individuals themselves. That is to say, in order to become manifest as terrorism, such factors must motivate certain members of the society to turn to violence against other civilians as an

attempt to solve the perceived injustice. For this reason, many researchers have also attempted to understand terrorism from the level of the individual. If only certain people will react violently to macro factors, then perhaps it is possible to identify key features or factors that can determine who will become a terrorist.

One of the first avenues for investigation into terrorist psychology is the search for psychopathology or mental illness in terrorists. For many, the violence and destruction caused by terrorism is incomprehensible, and consequently terrorists are often labelled as 'mad bombers'. The apparent callous disregard for human life shown by terrorists, for example, could suggest that terrorists must be 'psychopaths'. Indeed, individuals exhibiting psychopathy[6] do appear to show some similarities to terrorists; for example aggressiveness, a lack of remorse or empathy for their victims and violation of societal norms and rules (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Furthermore, the actions of psychopathic individuals often harm people or property, much like the actions of terrorists.

There are, however, a number of significant problems with attempting to explain terrorism in terms of psychopathy. Most notably, psychopaths tend to be egocentric in motivation, and so their violence is self-serving and their targets personal. In contrast, terrorists tend to be 'altruists'; their violent actions are intended to create positive outcomes for the 'masses' or their particular constituency, and their targets tend to be incidental and symbolic (Horgan, 2005). A psychopath's selfish agenda would therefore be incompatible with a politically-motivated group's chosen goals. Victoroff (2005: 13) points out that terrorists are "often regarded by their in-group as being heroic freedom fighters". This suggests that terrorists fighting to right social injustices or inequalities perceived by their

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[6] Or *antisocial personality disorder* as it is often called in clinical diagnosis.

constituencies may be engaged in a form of pro-social rather than antisocial behaviour. From the perspective of the targeted group terrorist behaviour is naturally antisocial, but it is important to bear in mind that such judgements are culture- and group-centric.

Furthermore, a number of researchers have suggested that psychopathic individuals may be a significant liability for terrorist groups. Psychiatrist and terrorism researcher Marc Sageman (2008) points out that such individuals are "so self-centred that they have no consideration for others in the organization" (ibid. p.63). Terrorist groups, due to their need for security, require members to form strong interpersonal ties and remain committed to the group, and so egocentric and unstable psychopathic individuals are likely to be avoided. This does not mean that there are no psychopaths at all in terrorist groups. Instead it would seem that, due to the problems that they may cause for a given 'terrorist' group, it is unlikely that psychopathy is the main driving force behind terrorism.

Some have even suggested that terrorists, especially suicide terrorists, may be suffering from depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (Perina, 2006). Terrorists have often witnessed violent events themselves, and so terrorism may be a self-destructive tactic used to escape from emotional pain. In his study of suicide terrorists, however, Pape (2005) noted that "suicide terrorists are acting on the basis of motives fundamentally different from those that underlie ordinary suicide and would probably not commit suicide absent the special circumstances that create these motives" (ibid, p.172). Suicide terrorists therefore wish primarily to further their chosen cause (an 'altruistic' motive) rather than to relieve their own suffering (an 'egoistic' motive). Again, there is little evidence that mental illness is a significant factor in driving terrorism.

There have also been attempts to understand the terrorist as an individual by building a 'personality profile', or a set of personal characteristics that predispose them towards

political violence. Most prominent among this approach are those who suggest that terrorists often exhibit signs of narcissism[7]. Narcissistic individuals have a grandiose, inflated self image, are highly egocentric, and tend to lack empathy towards others. Taking a psychodynamic approach[8] Pearlstein (1991) advanced a 'narcissistic rage' theory of terrorism. This posits that, when narcissists suffer 'narcissistic injury', i.e. a threat to their grandiose self-image, they are likely to be impulse towards violence in order to protect their self esteem. Thus, if they encounter value systems, beliefs or social environments that differ from their own, they interpret this as a threat to their own, fragile ego and thus engage in 'defensive' attacks to protect themselves. Pearlstein therefore suggests that narcissistic injury is a major psychological impetus towards terrorism.

John Horgan (2003), however questions Pearlstein's account of terrorist psychology, arguing that he "does not consider the literature critically enough" (ibid. p.13). In support of his claims, Pearlstein gives his interpretations of second hand biographical information on nine selected terrorists (e.g. Carlos the Jackal and Ulrike Meinhof). Such evidence is subjective and anecdotal, lacking any systematic scientific analysis or a comparable 'control' group. Furthermore, the cases chosen are 'oddities'; "unrepresentative of the heterogenic 'unknown' rank-and-file members of terrorist organisations around the world" (ibid. p.13). Thus on the basis of Pearlstein's evidence alone, it is difficult to conclude that terrorists are narcissists.

Post (1990), also believes that narcissism may play a role in driving terrorism, but takes a less deterministic approach. He instead suggests that there is no evidence of major psychopathology in terrorists, but instead argues that terrorists may often exhibit some of the

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[7] Others have suggested that terrorists may be stress-seekers (Crenshaw, 1986) or have aggressive personalities (Plous & Zimbardo, 2004); however these theories have been much less influential. A discussion of narcissistic-rage theory should sufficiently illustrate the problems with the personality approach.
[8] The psychodynamic approach to psychology involves explaining personality and behaviour in terms of unconscious drives, often with an emphasis on the role of childhood experiences in the formation of these mental processes.

symptoms/traits of narcissistic personality disorder; namely 'splitting' and 'externalisation'. According to Post (1990), terrorist biographies often reveal that the individuals had high levels of conflict with their parents as a child, and have "demonstrated a pattern of failure both educationally and vocationally" (Post, 1990:28). Many seem to share this view of terrorists being 'failures'; for example UK Director of Public Prosecutions Sir Ken McDonald, commenting on the July 7th (7/7) London bombers, referred to the terrorists as "deluded, narcissistic inadequates" (McDonald, 2007, as quoted in The Times, 2007, Jan 24).

The suggestion is that such experiences can cause a person's personality to 'split' into good and bad; the good is held as their own self-image, whereas the bad is externalised (and thus projected) onto others in their environment. If the polity or any other societal group displays different values, they will become "a target to blame for his own inner weakness and inadequacies" (Post, 1990: 27), and thus a potential target for terroristic aggression. Post rejects the possibility that "all terrorists suffer... narcissistic personality disorders or that the psychological mechanisms of externalization and splitting are used by ever terrorist" (ibid, p.27), and instead suggests that these symptoms are common among terrorists and may contribute to the terrorist mind-set.

There may, indeed, be some merit in highlighting the role of value conflict in driving terrorism. The wish to replace the polity's value system with another is often the aim of terrorists[9]. Nevertheless, there are considerable conceptual and methodological problems with this approach. Firstly, the evidence presented in support of the narcissistic rage hypothesis is suspect. Post refers to Bollinger's (1982, as cited in Post, 1990) study of 250 West German terrorists, which reported a prevalence of "narcissistic wounds and a predominant reliance on the psychological mechanisms of splitting and externalization" (Post, 1990:29) in terrorists.

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[9] For example al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's attempts to replace the secular Egyptian government with an Islamic state, or the Brigate Rosse's desire to replace the Italian government with a revolutionary Communist system.

Horgan (2005) points out that these interviews were with *suspected* terrorists undergoing trial and that the interviewees were often reluctant to cooperate with the researchers. Furthermore, there was no control group with which to make a valid comparison, and the subjective nature of open-ended interview techniques means that results are likely to be affected by the interviewer's own biases. The stresses and pressures of terrorist group membership may also change the individual's personality, meaning that it is difficult to predict involvement in terrorism on the basis of interviews conducted after arrest.

There are also significant conceptual problems with the psychodynamic/psychoanalytic approach taken by Post, Pearlstein and others. The psychoanalytic conceptual framework assumes that terrorism is driven by internal factors that must be inferred (Horgan, 2003); i.e. unconscious injuries, motivations and drives. The researchers must therefore rely on their own interpretations of what is occurring within the terrorists' minds; interpretations that lack falsifiability and cannot be tested scientifically. Indeed, in mainstream psychological research, psychodynamic theory has been largely rejected in favour of more empirically-based and less subjective approaches.

If psychology is to play a part in explaining terrorism, then it is perhaps more useful to apply theories and methods that are currently accepted in psychological research. Obviously terrorism research exists within an entirely different set of constraints; large-scale surveys of terrorists are difficult if not impossible. Furthermore, even if such a study were conducted, the applicability of the results might be limited. For example, even if it were found that narcissists are more likely to become terrorists, there are many individuals with narcissistic personalities and still only a small proportion of these will actually engage in terroristic activities. The correlation between personality traits and actual behaviour across multiple situations varies considerably (Steinberg, 2004); it is therefore probable that it is the

interaction of the individual with environmental and situational variables that is most important in driving terrorism.

As a consequence of this, Arena and Arrigo (2006) point out that researchers pursuing personality-based theories of terrorism are committing the 'fundamental attribution error'; the phenomenon whereby individuals tend to "overemphasise internal causes and personal responsibility and to deemphasise external causes and situational influences" (Steinberg, 2004:A37) when explaining the behaviour of others. Being mindful of the tendency toward fundamental attribution error is important in studying the psychological origins of terrorism, as it can cloud our understanding of the complicated and interactive nature of the phenomenon.

The idea that we can explain terrorism in terms of the internal attributes of the terrorist themselves, be it personality or psychopathology, may stem from biased assumptions in the research. Silke (1998) argues that terrorism researchers have been guilty of assuming that, because of the heinous nature of the acts; anyone who could commit a terrorist act must be 'mad or bad'. There is a growing realisation that terrorists may not be abnormal individuals. On the basis of her research on Palestinian terrorists, Nassr Hassan (2002, quoted in Plous & Zimbardo, 2004:9) concluded "what is frightening is not the abnormality of those who carry out suicide attacks, but their sheer normality."

This 'us versus them' approach has probably arisen because the idea that *any* person could become a terrorist, given the right environmental conditions, is a potentially uncomfortable and disquieting one. Furthermore, demonising and stereotyping one's enemies is natural and common to almost all groups (Duckitt, 2003). Seeing enemies as 'mad' or fundamentally different to oneself could help reduce our empathy with them and thus make

attempts to eliminate them easier. Just as terrorists denigrate their enemies, perhaps some of those who write on terrorism are following a similar pattern through their assumptions.

Terrorism has been used by many different groups, in many different contexts, and for many different reasons. A parsimonious and all-inclusive theory of terrorism causation is therefore not possible. Structural causes, which emphasise the importance of large-scale factors such as political exclusion, oppression and deprivation, highlight the fact that terrorism is a tactic used by certain groups who wish to bring about a change in society. Such explanations are, however, limited by the fact that very few individuals affected by these social conditions will actually engage in terrorism. This has led some to suggest that the 'terrorist' must therefore have a special psychology or mindset that predisposes them toward terroristic violence.

The individual psychology approach to terrorism causation research has, however, been dogged by a dearth of corroborating evidence, especially research with scientific methodology. Furthermore, such an approach may be highly biased in its assumptions and suffers from major conceptual flaws. In order to overcome the problems seen in much existing terrorist psychology research, it is important to place the individual terrorist in context. Any potential terrorist is embedded in interpersonal, group and cultural systems, which affect the development of the individual's beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. As Crenshaw (1990) points out:

> "Terrorism is not... the act of an individual. Acts of terrorism are committed by groups who reach collective decisions based on commonly held beliefs... It is a political act performed by individuals acting together and collectively trying to justify their behaviour" (ibid, p.250)

In seeking to understand the psychological roots of terrorism, it may therefore be more fruitful to examine the interactive processes between the individual and their environment. The following chapter will therefore examine theories regarding how such interactions may act to radicalise the individual's political or religious attitudes and cause them to join violent political groups.

Chapter 2. Individual radicalisation and joining 'terrorist' groups

Attempts to explain terrorism solely in terms of static personality factors and individual abnormality are both methodologically and conceptually flawed. This has caused some to propose that terrorists are 'made, not born'. As terrorism is used by diverse groups, consisting of varied individuals, and in many different contexts, it would be foolish to suggest that there is one environmental factor or experience that is common to all potential terrorists. As found in the previous chapter, not all terrorists have a history of failure, parental conflict or deprivation. Thus looking at static environmental factors cannot explain why 'normal' individuals become terrorists.

It is therefore more likely that becoming a terrorist is the result of long-term, interactive processes (Horgan, 2005). Terrorism is largely committed by groups with a political and/or religious agenda, and individuals are unlikely to join (or be recruited) into these groups unless they support the group's goals. This chapter will therefore examine a number of potential processes underlying two major steps in the individual's involvement in terrorism; the acceptance of a radicalised/extreme political opinion, and joining a violent political group. The possible influence of brainwashing, contagion through the media and socialisation processes will be assessed, along with the supporting evidence for each. This should give some insight into how individuals become radicalised and join groups that may use terrorism.

Perhaps the most popular explanation of why individuals, predominantly young males, get drawn into terrorist groups is 'brainwashing'. Brainwashing refers to attempts to change a

person's beliefs, attitudes or values by coercive techniques (Lifton, 1967). The term was first used in reference to 'thought reform' techniques by Communists in China seeking to force political prisoners, students and even foreign citizens to accept their ideology (Taylor, 2005). More recently, religious cults have been accused of indoctrinating individuals by coercive manipulation (Robbins & Anthony, 1982); perhaps explaining why members of some cults accept extreme action such as suicide[10].

Taylor (2005) outlines the process of 'brainwashing'. Firstly, the brainwasher, who seeks to make an individual think and act against their existing beliefs, must exert considerable control over their 'victim'. The individual must be isolated from any people or messages that support their existing beliefs and contradict the 'new' ones; requiring the brainwasher to tightly control the environment and communications. The brainwasher must also directly (and repeatedly) challenge the victim's existing beliefs directly in order to create stressful uncertainty (or 'cognitive dissonance'). This uncertainty, combined with the brainwasher's "authority and expertise" (ibid.) and the new all-encompassing, totalist ideology makes the new beliefs more attractive to the victim. Cases of brainwashing have also included coercive techniques such as sleep deprivation and humiliation in order to increase the victim's stress, and presumably therefore make them more 'malleable'. Such 'thought-reform' has, according to some, proved effective in making individuals accept a new doctrine as their own.

In some cases, 'brainwashing' religious cults have used terrorism. The Aum Shinrikyo cult, for example, held "a considerable degree of totalism in dominating the lives of its membership" (Metraux, 1995:1142), including restricting members' contact with outsiders, depriving them of food and sleep, and constant exposure to its totalistic ideology.

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[10] E.g. the 909 members of the 'Peoples Temple' cult who all committed suicide in the 1978 Jonestown Massacre.

This apparent 'brainwashing' perhaps explains why members committed a number of terrorist attacks, including the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo Subway in 1995. It is plausible that other terrorist organisations may also brainwash individuals into accepting their beliefs and joining their groups. Hudson (1999), for example, posits that terrorist organisations operate in a way that is "similar to sects or cults" and "attempt to brainwash individual members with their particular ideology" (Hudson, 1999: 35) in order to radicalise individuals and turn them into terrorists. The Turkish government, for example, maintains that the PKK[11] "recruits its guerrillas forcibly and then subjects them to "brainwashing" sessions at training camps" (Hudson, 1999:86). Brainwashing may therefore be the main recruitment tool for some terrorist groups.

In practice, however, there are a number of reasons to doubt that brainwashing plays a significant role in pushing people towards radical political ideology and joining violent political groups. As mentioned above, traditional brainwashing requires two main factors; a highly controlled environment and coercion. Despite Hudson's example, there seem to be few instances of individuals being forcefully made to join terrorist groups. Furthermore, though terrorists groups are clandestine and the members' environments are tightly controlled (White, 2006), the process of accepting the group's radical ideologies appears to begin before they enter such this environment (as will be seen below). This has led many to reject the brainwashing explanation. In his review of the profiles of suicide bombers from 1980-2003, Robert Pape concluded that:

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[11] The 'Kurdistan Workers Party', a Marxist-Leninist nationalist group seeking an independent Kurdish state.

"...suicide terrorists are *not* primarily from religious cults whose members are uneducated, isolated from society, and easily brainwashed into pursuing delusional aspirations." (Pape, 2005:200).

Some have even suggested that the idea of brainwashing is a 'myth'. Marc Sageman argues that there is no scientific evidence to prove that brainwashing exists, and that 'brainwashing' instead "refers to the process of adopting an ideology that the labeller rejects" (Sageman, 2008:50). Consequently, like 'terrorism', the term 'brainwashing' may be a politicised one. It is difficult to understand why someone would choose a different ideology from the one that we select for ourselves. Seeing those who do this as being victims of an immoral and planned external force is to some extent comforting to the collective ego, as it avoids the possibility that a self-determined person could choose an ideology that directly opposes our own. The 'loaded' nature of the term is perhaps demonstrated by the fact that both sides in conflicts involving terrorism often accuse each other of brainwashing. For example, al Qaeda have often been accused of brainwashing young Muslims (Sunday Morning Herald, 2004), and al Qaeda themselves have accused Western media of brainwashing their publics in order to denigrate Muslims (Michael, 2008). Those on both sides of the conflict therefore reject the idea that individuals would consciously choose to oppose them without external coercion.

A brainwashing explanation of why individuals radicalise and join terrorist groups has therefore been excluded; there is little evidence that terrorists have simply been forced against their will to obey the orders of a leader. This is not to say, however, that outside influences are unimportant. Terrorism does not occur in a vacuum; the prospective terrorist

must come into contact with radical messages and information, which comes from their environment.

A different potential effect linking external information and individual radicalisation is the 'contagion effect', which refers the potential spread of terrorism via media coverage (Martin, 2006). Contagion theory posits that, when terrorists receive publicity through media channels, their actions may be 'glorified', thus leading others to emulate this behaviour. Terrorism therefore spreads like a disease; exposure to terrorism is enough to push individuals towards terrorism.

This theory is, in part, based on psychological studies into the association between television violence and violent behaviour in the viewer (Marsden & Attia, 2005), in which a number of researchers have found a significant link between these two variables (e.g. Anderson et al, 2003). In such studies the media violence is thought to have its effect by providing individuals with scripts and cognitions supporting violence, as well as by triggering an "automatic tendency to imitate observed behaviours" (Anderson et al, 2003:81) and desensitising individuals to violence. In terms of terrorism, this may translate to providing methods for terrorism and cognitions supporting terroristic action[12]. Exposure to terroristic violence in the media may therefore cause individuals to consider terrorism a viable and justifiable way to achieve their goals, and so they may potentially seek to join a terrorist group.

There is some correlational evidence to support the 'contagion' theory of terrorism. Martin (2006) points out that there have been 'cycles' of similar terrorist attacks, including the spread of airplane hijackings in the 1970s-1980s and left-wing terrorism in Europe in the

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[12] E.g. cognitions that terrorism is justifiable and is a viable method for meeting one's goals.

1960s-1980s. For many, these patterns of similar attacks are due to the media; individuals witness such attacks through the media, which in turn causes them to support the 'glorified' terrorist groups, perhaps to the extent that they may come to believe terrorism is justifiable, and that they too want to join these groups in their struggles.

This theory has in fact been quite influential; many have suggested that there should be either tight controls or an outright ban on media coverage of terrorism, for fear of giving the terrorists a voice and thus convincing others to join their cause. Margaret Thatcher, for example, famously remarked that nations should "try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend" (Thatcher, 1985, as quoted in Preston, 2004). Others, however, have argued that this theory is overly simplistic. Firstly, the psychological research into media violence and violent behaviour is not conclusive; experts still debate the association (Picard, 1991)[13]. Furthermore, this research base largely regards indiscriminate individual aggression rather than specific, goal-directed violence such as terrorism. It is not unreasonable to assume that the process behind a terrorist attack (e.g. planning the attack, making a bomb and planting it) is a more conscious process than the socially learned, disinhibited behaviour of a generally 'violent' person. Consequently, making firm conclusions about the spread of terrorism based on generalisations from this research is perhaps unwise.

Robert Picard is perhaps most vocal in his criticism of contagion theory, stating that the literature behind it consists largely of:

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[13] There is no definite causal relationship between media violence and aggressive behaviour; though people could be learning violence from the media, it is also possible that inherently violent people seek out violent media.

"...sweeping generalities, conjecture, supposition, anecdotal evidence based on dubious correlations, and endless repetition of equally weak arguments and non-scientific evidence offered by other writers on the subject of terrorism" (Picard,1991:40).

Though this is strongly put, Picard's points are important; there is little direct evidence linking media coverage and the individual radicalisation or terrorist group recruitment or formation. The cycles observed by Martin (2006), for example, could easily be explained by other factors such as direct cooperation and communication between groups.

The only conclusive result of exposure to terrorism through the media is knowledge of terrorism's existence and the goals of those who perpetrate it. Upon viewing terrorism, most individuals react negatively; expressing anger at the perpetrators. Those who do have a pre-existing sympathy towards the perpetrators may simply be made more aware of the existence of terrorist organisations and their goals; there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that this will lead to radicalisation of their attitudes, or their joining or forming terrorist groups.

Understanding the process of political socialisation may instead help to explain why individuals adopt radical, absolutist political frameworks, and why they in turn seek to join violent political groups. Socialisation is the process by which individuals learn culturally-specific attitudes, beliefs and values from others in their social networks. Such an approach therefore emphasises the interactions between the individual and the social networks in which they are embedded.

Media may play a role in socialisation, in that political messages received through the media may promote certain political attitudes; however the wide coverage of media means that such socialisation cannot explain why only certain individuals in a society or culture turn to terrorist. Commenting on left-wing militants in Europe in the 1970s-1980s, della Porta pointed out;

"...membership in the political counterculture was in no way typical of those who later joined the underground. To the opposite, radical groups were only small minorities of mass movements" (della Porta, 1992:272).

The same is true of most terrorist organisations and the social movements that surround them; many people may hold similar attitudes or beliefs to those who commit terrorism, however only a small fraction of these will become actively involved in violent protest. Instead, the socialising effects of the interpersonal networks in which a prospective terrorist is embedded may better explain why specific individuals adopt radical ideologies. If an individual's family and friends hold highly radicalised political attitudes, and beliefs that political violence is justifiable, then these may be transferred to the individual.

One major channel for socialisation is an individual's parents; they are a source of a large proportion of a person's beliefs, attitudes and values. This influence also spreads to political and religious socialisation; children often support the same political party as their parents or practice the same religious beliefs. This association is supported by a large body of research. For example, on the basis of a longitudinal socialisation survey, Glass, Bengston and Dunham (1986) concluded that parental religious and political attitudes "exert an

influence independent of social status inheritance, and that these effects, though diminished, exist past early adulthood" (ibid, p.696).

Could it therefore be that the radical ideologies seen in those who engage in terrorism come from their parents? Perhaps counter-intuitively, there actually appears to be little evidence for this. There are no large-scale surveys to suggest that terrorists tend to come from families with histories of radical political opinions. Instead, in most cases parents appear to show shock and surprise at the terroristic actions of their offspring. A good example is provided by the parents of the 7/7 London bombers. They all expressed their disbelief and shock at the actions of their children (Rai, 2006), and none held fundamentalist Islamic beliefs. Indeed one of the bombers, Abdullah Jamal (born Germaine Lindsay), was born into a Christian family and converted to Islam at the age of 15.

There are some exceptions to this, however. Marc Sageman (2008) points out that, in his database of individuals who joined the global Islamist terrorist movement, approximately a fifth of the sample were close relatives, including sons, of existing members. Such cases are, however in the minority. Though parents can be responsible for the radicalisation of their children it does not appear to be the typical pattern.

Socialisation via other individuals, such as friends, peers and teachers may be more important in terms of the acceptance of radical ideologies. A number of studies have demonstrated that individual attitudes often correlate with those of their peers at schools, colleges and universities. Alwin, Cohen and Newcomb (1991), for example, followed a number of women from conservative homes who went to study at a liberal college. They found that instead of persisting with the conservative political attitudes of their parents, these women became liberalised. Furthermore this effect often lasted into adulthood, with the new liberal political beliefs often persisting to a follow-up nearly 50 years later.

For individuals who later become terrorists, it may therefore be socialisation from peers and teachers (including religious preachers, political activists etcetera with whom the individual has frequent interactions) that causes them to adopt extreme political or religious attitudes and beliefs. Many terrorism researchers have suggested that peer influences are important. Again on the basis of her studies of Italian left-wing terrorists, della Porta indicates that "the decision to join an underground organization was very rarely an individual one. In most cases, it involved a clique of friends" (della Porta, 1992:273). She points out that the majority of recruits (74%) actually had more than one new friend in the organisation, and many (42%) had more than seven. Interpersonal relationships with peers appears to have had a significant impact on individuals' decision to join the violent groups.

Sageman (2008) discovered a similar pattern in his database of Islamic terrorists. His data showed that approximately two thirds of his sample were "friends with other people who joined together or already had some connection to terrorism" (Sageman, 2008:66). Furthermore, many of the terrorists he studied joined through meeting up with childhood friends when emigrating to the West; as "if a former friend is part of a terrorist group, a latecomer will start to socialise with him, and soon his entire social circle will be people involved in terrorism" (Sageman, 2008:67). Again it would appear that socialisation by friends and close peers is important in the process of radicalisation.

Levine and Moreland (1994) describe a theory of socialisation that may explain why individuals come to accept the attitudes and beliefs of their peers and consequently join associated groups[14]. This model outlines three psychological processes involved in

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[14] This theory "assumes that the relationship between the group and the individual changes in systematic ways over time and views both parties as potential influence agents" (Levine & Moreland, 1994:306). Radicalisation and joining terrorist groups can be modelled as a transactional process rather than an aggregation of non-dynamic factors.

socialisation; *evaluation*, *commitment* and *role transition*. Once an individual comes into contact with a particular group (through peers) they will proceed through these processes.

Evaluation involves "assessments of the rewardingness of relationships" (Levine & Moreland, 1994:308). As groups have goals that they want to accomplish, they will evaluate prospective members in terms of whether they will aid the attainment of these goals. Similarly, the individual will evaluate the group in terms of whether they can help him/her to attain their own personal goals. For terrorist groups their goals may be to gain political representation, to overthrow a government or to attain some other ideologically-motivated achievement, and thus they will evaluate individuals in terms of whether they will further the cause. They will perhaps recruit those with practical skills or simply those with a compatible ideology. A report by the RAND corporation (Gerwehr & Daly, 2006), for example, found that al-Qaeda tends to target for recruitment those with high levels of dissatisfaction, cultural disillusionment and a compatible belief/value system.

There are a number of goals which membership of a violent political group may be able to fulfil for the potential terrorist. According to Schwartz' (1973) theory of political alienation, those individuals who value political efficacy (i.e. the ability to have some impact on the decisions of the polity) but feel they have little, will seek to increase their efficacy. Consequently, if they perceive the extremist political group as being able to provide them with political efficacy, they may seek to join[15].

Membership of such groups may also provide a way to achieve 'identity' goals. According to Social Identity Theory (SIT), social identity (the part of one's self-image gained from membership of cultural and social groups) is an important source of self-esteem (Tajfel

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[15] This is supported by the suggestion that terrorists often come from the elites of society. If individuals feel that they should, due to their relatively well-off status, have a greater impact on the polity, and yet feel that they are inhibited from doing so, they may believe that violent group membership would be empowering.

& Turner, 1986)[16]. Thus individuals strive to have membership in positively-valued groups. If an individual therefore desires positive social identity, they may desire to join a violent political group; the heroic identity of 'freedom fighter' is strong is such groups.

Furthermore, many potential terrorists appear to have experienced conflicting identities. Clark (1983, as cited in Post, 2007) surveyed ETA members, and found that approximately 40% had one Spanish and one Basque parent; again suggesting conflicting identity. Similarly, the 7/7 London bombers may have encountered conflict between Islamic identity and modern Western identity (Rai, 2006). Individuals experiencing identity conflict may seek to join groups that could help them reduce value conflict by providing them with a single, totalistic, and positive identity. The strong, positive 'freedom fighter' identity associated with membership in violent political groups may therefore attract such individuals.

The *commitment* process entails both the individual and the group making evaluations of the "past, present, and future rewardingness" (Levine & Moreland, 1994:308) of their relationship according to their goals. If the group and individual remember their relationship to have been beneficial in the past and expect this to continue in the future, then the commitment between them will be higher. This is important in socialisation, as feelings of commitment increase the likelihood that the individual will;

"...accept the group's goals and values, feel positive affect toward group members, work hard to fulfil group expectations and attain group goals, and seek to gain or maintain membership in the group." (ibid.)

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[16] This theory will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3.

Thus individuals who believe membership of a violent political group will be rewarding will assimilate the group's radical attitudes and beliefs.

The final process is *role transition*. This is where a decision is reached to relabel or reclassify the relationship, including entry into the group and acceptance by the group[17]. This can include rites of passage "designed to clarify that an important change has taken place" (Levine & Moreland, 1994:309). Such ceremonies can be observed in terrorist groups; Sosis and Alcorta (2008:5) point out that "secular and religious terrorists alike maintain communal rituals and initiation rites that communicate an individual's level of commitment to the group."

Levine and Moreland (1994) describe how these processes act in the initial stages of joining a group. Firstly, at the *investigation* stage, the individual is looking for groups that match his/her needs and the group is similarly seeking members to help them reach their goals. Once this occurs commitment may build between them until it meets an 'acceptance criteria', at which point the individual goes through the 'entry' role transition and becomes a member of the group. Secondly, at the *socialization* stage, the group influences the individual's values, beliefs and goals, and thus the individual is 'assimilated' into the group's ethos[18]. Again, once commitment has risen to a sufficient level, the individual goes through another role transition to 'acceptance' by the group.

It is easy to see how this model can apply to terrorist groups. If individuals feel that violent political groups may help them meet their own needs and the groups calculate that that individual may help them to further their cause, then the individual will be permitted entry once they meet a certain level of commitment. The process then continues with

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[17] Levine & Moreland's (1994) model in fact covers the individual's entire progress through the group, from entry to eventual exit. As this discussion only covers the entry of people to terrorist groups, only the first stages are mentioned here.

[18] The individual can also, to some extent, influence the group's goals and values; both new member and group must accommodate the other.

commitment building up between individual and group. The individual assimilates the group's radical and absolutist ideology, beliefs in violence as a justifiable recourse, and a desire to actively pursue the group's goals.

Levine and Moreland's (1994) model has been supported by studies into individuals joining non-terrorist groups such as student organisations at college. Direct research into these processes in violent political groups is, however, difficult to achieve. Despite calls for "applied research that focuses on the socialization process in terrorist groups" (Moreland, 2006) there has been little (if any) such research to date.

This model obviously cannot by itself explain why individuals join such groups; perceptions of the political, social and economic climate must also play a part. If the individual does not deem the society to need changing, they are unlikely to seek membership in groups that seek to change it by force. It is important to bear the wider context in mind when considering whether an individual will seek to join a radical political group. Nevertheless, aspects of the model can be easily inferred across to the process of individual socialisation into extremist political ideologies. Thus it may act as a useful model for explaining how and why individuals accept extreme political ideologies and join violent groups.

The processes underlying individual radicalisation and transition into groups that use terrorism are extremely complex. Every potential terrorist treads their own path, and is influenced by many different environmental factors and life events. There may, however, be some commonalities in the social psychological processes that underlie the joining of terrorist groups.

Brainwashing is often advanced as an explanation of why individuals join terrorist group. Nevertheless there is little evidence that the majority of potential terrorists are coerced into accepting a new set of radical beliefs. In reality, 'brainwashing' is a politicised term, which is often used as an explanation for why individuals may chose ideology that contradicts one's own. Contagion theory is equally problematic. There is little systematic evidence to suggest that simply viewing terrorism will cause individuals to adopt radical ideology, and 'patterns' in terrorism can be explained by cooperation between groups. It would therefore seem that media exposure can perhaps describe the spread of information regarding terrorism, but not why some individuals come to accept extremist ideologies.

Socialisation research, from the social psychology literature, may provide the best explanation for this discussion. It is well established that interpersonal relationships are an important source of individuals' political and religious beliefs and values. There is evidence that peers, teachers and the like may be responsible for the radicalisation of individuals' ideologies and their inclusion in violent groups. Levine and Moreland's (1994) model of socialisation describes this process; individuals seek membership in groups which may help them to achieve their own goals, and their increasing commitment to these groups causes the individual to integrate the group's beliefs and values. Unfortunately, this theory has not been directly tested in the context of terrorism, and such research would be difficult. Nevertheless, it is a good conceptual fit, and may serve as a useful model for describing individuals' movement toward terrorism.

Up to this point, no mention has been made of individuals' active involvement in terroristic violence. This is because the decision to use such tactics is assumed to be a group one. The following chapter will therefore explore the group-level processes leading political groups to engage with terrorism.

Chapter 3. The group's engagement in terrorism

In the previous chapter, how some individuals come to join radical and potentially violent political groups was examined. As the majority of terrorism is committed by such groups, the group context is perhaps the best level at which to understand the processes behind the use of terrorism. As Crenshaw (1990:251) argues; "the group may be more important than the individual to the initiation and conduct of campaigns of terrorism... As the group is formed, a collective mind-set emerges." It is the interactions between members of violent political groups that therefore determine their decision to use terrorism. Consequently, this chapter will explore how well-known phenomena in group psychology (obedience, groupthink, group polarisation and social identity processes) can help us understand why such groups come to engage in terrorism. The theories presented will be described, and their applicability and supporting research will be evaluated, in order to assess how useful such explanations can be in describing the origins of terrorism.

Political groups are complex; consisting of different interacting individuals tied into systems of norms, rules and beliefs. Some groups have an obvious hierarchical structure, like an organised army, whereas others are less rigidly structured. Furthermore, groups vary considerably in their size, dispersion and ideologies (White, 2006), perhaps presenting significant difficulties for the generalisability of group-psychology theories of terrorism. Nevertheless, there are significant commonalities between such groups too, meaning that these theories can still provide useful explanations for terrorism. Where variance in group make-up has an important impact on the dynamics under discussion, it will be explored.

In any social group with a hierarchical structure, norms and rules demand that individuals obey the orders of those who hold legitimate authority (Taylor et al, 2003). Just as soldiers in an army follow the commands of their superiors, perhaps members of violent political groups are simply obeying leaders who have made a tactical decision to use terrorism.

Obedience is a well-studied phenomenon in psychology. Stanley Milgram's (1965) experiment famously demonstrated the power of authority over people's actions. In his study, subjects were asked to give increasing electric shocks to another individual (actually a confederate of the experimenter) whenever they gave an incorrect answer to a question on a learning test. Though the learning test was a cover, and there were in fact no electric shocks, the confederate complained each time a 'shock' was administered, eventually shouting with pain and finally falling silent. The presence of an authority (the experimenter who urged them to continue) led most participants to continue giving the shocks even up to lethally high voltages.

This obedience effect has proved durable across different contexts and situations, and over many repetitions of the study. As Milgram himself put it;

"Men who are in everyday life responsible and decent were seduced by the trappings of authority... and by the uncritical acceptance of the experimenter's definition of the situation into performing harsh acts" (Milgram, 1965:74).

He therefore demonstrated that the presence of an authority figure can cause individuals to take actions that they would otherwise find morally unacceptable. He ascribed this effect to

individuals entering an 'agentic state' whereby "they suspend their own judgment and cede responsibility for their actions to those in charge." (Haslam & Reichter, 2007:616).

Caildini (2001) explains this facet of human behaviour in terms of cultural systems and childhood development:

"...we are trained from birth to believe that obedience to proper authority is right and disobedience is wrong. This message fills the parental lessons, the schoolhouse rhymes, stories, and songs of our childhood and is carried forward in the legal, military, and political systems we encounter as adults." (ibid. p.185).

People are therefore subject to social and cultural programming that makes them comply with norms and rules regarding social hierarchy. This suggests that there is no 'obedient' personality type (Milgram found obedience from all subjects); all people have the inbuilt tendency to defer to authority figures deemed legitimate by the social or cultural group.

The application of this research to political violence is perhaps obvious. There are many cases of those who have committed violent atrocities attempting to deny accountability for their actions by arguing that their crimes were simply the result of following orders; so called *crimes of obedience* (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Milgram's findings have been used to explain why ordinary German citizens may have become involved in the genocidal campaigns of the Nazis. Soldiers, police and even concentration camp guards may simply have been deferring to authority, on the basis of social and cultural rules and norms that

demand obedience to legitimate superiors[19]. Blind obedience to authority has since been blamed for many cases of extreme violence by groups, including the Mai Lai massacre[20] (Bandura, 2004) and the Soviet purges (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989).

If some shockingly violent and even genocidal behaviour can be explained by natural deference to authority, then perhaps terrorism is also a 'crime of obedience'. Once individuals have developed a radicalised ideology and accepted membership of a political group, both their own social learning and the norms and rules of the group will act to force them to defer to the control of group leaders. If these leaders decide to use terrorism in support of the group's cause, they will order subordinates to carry out their plans. The leaders will be seen as legitimate authority by these members, as their position is upheld by the shared beliefs, values and norms of the group. Furthermore, unlike in Milgram's studies, these individuals are actually supportive of the aims of their leaders due to shared goals and ideology. This means that, though they might in other contexts avoid such violence, here ideology and leadership can interact to make the individual not only carry out terrorism, but also to believe it justifiable.

There is plenty of evidence that many terrorist groups demand obedience to the leadership. The Provisional IRA's Green Book (a training manual for new volunteers) demands that:

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[19] A number of defendants at the Nuremberg trials attempted, unsuccessfully, to claim that they were simply 'following orders'. These individuals were, however, high up in the German hierarchy (i.e. they were the authority figures themselves, giving orders and making tactical decisions) and thus Milgram's evidence on obedience would appear not to apply to them. Such a defence has since become known as the 'Nuremberg defence'.

[20] Where US soldiers obeyed the orders of their superiors to kill hundreds of unarmed civilians, including children, during the Vietnam War.

"All recruits, entering the Army declare that they shall obey all orders issued to them by their superior officers and by the Army Authority... Orders and instructions sometimes may be distasteful to the Volunteer, but this is what is involved in being a volunteer.... the ability to take orders and to carry them out to the best of your ability" (as quoted in Horgan, 2006:128).

Thus we can see that, in this group, huge pressure is put on a recruit to carry out orders, even if they are violent and 'distasteful'. Volunteers must therefore give up a considerable degree of their autonomy to group leaders, and will carry out terrorism if commanded to do so. Cult-like organisations such as Aum Shinrikyo are also known to demand blind obedience to leaders (Crenshaw, 2000). Crenshaw points out that leaders may even apply coercive pressure; threatening punishment in order to ensure that group members comply with orders.

This pattern would seem to be most applicable to those groups with a rigid hierarchical structure (e.g. paramilitaries such as the LTTE or FARC). Some groups follow strategies such as 'leaderless resistance'; "a kind of lone wolf operation in which an individual, or a very small, highly cohesive group, engage in acts of anti-state violence independent of any movement, leader or network of support" (Kaplan, 1997:80). This strategy was popularised among radical right-wing groups in the USA, and Marc Sageman (2008) argued that a similar configuration exists in the international Islamic jihadist network. Though many people assume that Osama Bin Laden and the al Qaeda leadership are coordinating and commanding all of the terrorist attacks committed in the name of the global Islamist social movement, in actual fact many (if not most) of these attacks, such as the 2004 Madrid bombing 7/7 London bombings, are committed by "informal groups of wannabes,

copycats [and] homegrown initiates" (Sageman, 2008:31) who make up a global social movement.

Some groups using terrorism do not therefore have a straightforward leader-subordinate structure. This means that simple obedience to the tactical decisions of authority figures cannot be solely responsible for the use of terrorism by all groups. Whereas Milgram's research remains a useful explanation of why members of military-type organisations may carry out terroristic violence, members of 'leaderless' groups may instead be motivated to carry out such actions because of conformity and compliance to decisions made by the group as a whole. It is therefore important to attempt to understand how groups may come to decide that terrorism is a valid course of action.

Violent political groups are purposeful actors, and as such the actions that they take are the result of decisions aimed at reaching group goals. This means that "the launching of terrorism on the part of some perpetrators requires a deliberate decision; rooted in the belief that spreading fear in a target population will advance their objectives" (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006:204). The killing of civilians would appear, to many, to be irrational, and yet terrorists themselves (as seen in Chapter 1) are generally normal individuals[21]. A 'deliberate decision' is not necessarily, however, a rational one. Defects in the decision-making process itself may instead be responsible for these groups engaging with terrorism.

Groupthink theory, developed by Irving Janis (1982), is one of the most famous attempts to explain how 'faulty' decision-making in groups can lead to the adoption of risky or unwise courses of action in groups. The term 'groupthink' refers to;

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[21] Albeit, individuals with radicalised political or religious beliefs and values.

"...a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (Janis, 1982:9)

Defective decision-making in groups can therefore lead groups to fail to examine the risks associated with, and alternatives to, a chosen course of action. Furthermore, groups suffering groupthink often fail to make contingency plans and show biases in information selection (i.e. only looking at information that supports their decision) and processing (i.e. interpreting information as supportive of their decisions even when it is not).

From case studies of policy decision-making 'fiascos' such as the Bay of Pigs and Watergate, Irving developed a general model of groupthink in an attempt to explain under what conditions a group may be at risk. Firstly, highly cohesive groups, where members share common beliefs and norms, value membership of the group, and have strong interpersonal ties, are at increased risk of groupthink. This is probably because in such groups individuals desire to be liked and accepted by the group. This can lead members to self-censor any dissent that they may have to the group opinion, meaning that counterpoints to arguments (and thus perceived problems with the group's decisions for action) will not be aired or considered.

Furthermore, insularity, homogeneity of members and a lack of impartial leadership can also predispose a group toward groupthink. Again, this is because dissent and opposing viewpoints will not be heard in the group's deliberations. Insularity means that external information that may suggest that a certain course of action is risky or unpopular outside of the group is not heard or accepted. Additionally, when groups have members of very similar background or ideology (i.e. homogenous groups), the members are less likely to be able to

bring different points of view to discussions that may again counterpoint the group's position. Finally, if leaders favour a certain course of action, they may discount or exclude the opinions of members who disagree with them. This is especially true when the group is under stress from external threat, when members may look for the guidance of leaders.

Janis (1982) also outlines a number of 'symptoms' of groupthink that may help to indicate situations where groupthink has occurred. These symptoms include the illusion of invulnerability and unanimity in the group, a belief that the group's position is a just and moral one, the emergence of censorship (e.g. 'mindguards' who suppress dissention among members), and heavy pressures toward unanimity. He also suggests that groups encountering groupthink may stereotype members of any opposing outgroups. All of these act to enhance the group's confidence in its own decisions, making them complacent about the possibility that their decisions could be poor ones.

As mentioned above, Janis (1982) evidences his groupthink theory in relation to policy decision-making by governments. Others have continued this work, for example applying groupthink concepts to the decision-making behind the War on Terrorism (McConville, 2003) and the 1991 Gulf War (Yetiv, 2003). Though there has so far been little application of groupthink theory to terrorism, some have suggested that it "could be argued that the symptoms and decision-making characteristics that typify groupthink are present in terrorist organisations" (Copland, 2005:32). Terrorist groups do appear to share many of the predisposing factors outlined by Janis. Such groups are highly cohesive and insular, as necessitated by their clandestine nature and strong conformity pressures. Furthermore, they are normally highly homogenous; tending to consist of young males from similar backgrounds and sharing a single ideology (Hudson, 1999). Terrorist groups also have strong conformity pressures due to the strong norms regarding behaviour and thought (Taylor and

Lewis, 2004) which may lead individuals to self-censor objections to decisions. These factors together mean that groupthink is, according to Janis' theory, highly likely in such groups.

The symptoms of groupthink are perhaps also easy to discern in the radical political groups that engage in terrorism. They often claim ultimate morality, perceiving themselves to be backed by god or a political ideology that is just and fair. Furthermore, members of such group see their terroristic actions as justifiable even in the face of negative public opinion, and often see terrorism as the 'only way' to achieve their goals (Copland, 2005). What is more, compliance with group decisions is not simply a result of conformity norms; dissenters and deviants may well be punished (a la Janis' 'mindguards'). Hudson (1999) provides a good example of this:

"In 1972, when half of the 30-member Rengo Sekigun (Red Army) terrorist group, which became known as the JRA, objected to the group's strategy, the dissenters ... were tied to stakes in the northern mountains of Japan, whipped with wires, and left to die of exposure." (ibid. p.37)

Groupthink theory could therefore explain why political groups with a radical ideology may turn to terrorism. If such a group suffers from groupthink when deliberating on what course of action to take to achieve their goals, then they may not consider alternative courses of action or opposing viewpoints and opinion (from both within and outside the group) that may suggest that terrorism is an unwise, unpopular and risky choice. This could therefore lead to an uncritical adoption of terroristic action as a result of faulty decision-making. Furthermore, this theory is generalisable across different types of group; in a

hierarchical group groupthink may occur in the deliberations of the top leadership, and in smaller or less structured groups it may occur in the decisions of the group as a whole.

This theory does, to some extent, contradict the assertion by some researchers that terrorism is a rational response to environmental pressures such as political exclusion or oppression. Martha Crenshaw, for example, argues that "campaigns of terrorism depend on rational political choice" because "terrorist organizations possess internally consistent sets of values, beliefs, and images of the environment" (Crenshaw, 1981:385). She therefore suggests that the beliefs and ideologies of groups, and their perceptions of the world, are what drive groups towards terrorism. Groupthink, however, suggests that it is the social dynamics of the group that drives terrorism. Obviously the group will use its beliefs and values to rationalise the choice of action it makes, however ideologies could potentially support many different types of action other than terroristic violence in reaction to perceived injustices. Thus groupthink theory does not envision terrorist 'irrationality' as a property of being a terrorist, but rather a property of group dynamics exhibited by many groups including terrorist groups.

There are, however, a number of problems with groupthink theory. Most notably the supporting evidence does not stretch much beyond subjective and anecdotal case studies. This is largely due to the nature of the groupthink concept; it is complex and multifaceted, making it difficult to test scientifically. In a review of groupthink research, Turner and Pratkanis (1998) indicated that a number of studies had tried and failed to find evidence for Janis' 'predisposing factors' for groupthink under laboratory conditions. For example, in a laboratory experiment on groups of students, Leana (1985) found no evidence that cohesiveness encourages self-censorship[22]. She did find that directive leaders (i.e. leaders

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[22] It is worth noting, however, that in such laboratory groups, a major contributor to groupthink, stress from external threat, is missing; the true conditions of groupthink may be impossible to replicate experimentally.

with an obvious preference for the outcome of the discussion) caused groups to discuss fewer alternatives than leaders who encouraged free discussion. This may suggest that poor group decision making may be more down to faulty leadership than group dynamics.

As noted above, there has been little direct application of groupthink theory in the terrorism literature. Even if there were significant evidence for the existence of the groupthink phenomena, it would therefore be impossible to draw conclusions about its relevance to terrorism without further research. This theory may therefore be limited in what it can tell us about the decision of some groups to engage in terroristic violence. As Turner and Pratkanis (1998:112) point out, "the intuitive appeal of the groupthink concept and the seductiveness of its formulation at times can overwhelm the scientific evidence on the topic." The theory is intricate and insightful; however it lacks strong empirical support. Furthermore, the lack of direct studies of groupthink in terrorist groups means that its explanatory power for terrorism may be limited.

This does not mean that group dynamics are an unproductive field of study for those seeking to understand terrorism. Instead, it may be more useful to apply concepts with a more solid research base. One well-researched process which may be able to explain the radicalisation of members of terrorist groups, and consequently the adoption of extreme courses of action, is *group polarisation*.

An unpublished study by Stoner (1961, as cited in Taylor et al, 2003) demonstrated that decisions made by groups tended to be more risky than those my by individuals. This "sparked considerable interest, in part because it seemed to contradict the popular belief that groups are relatively conservative and stodgy about decision making" (Taylor et al, 2003:315). Further studies found the effect to be two-way; with groups making either more

risky or occasionally more conservative decisions than individuals alone. Group polarisation therefore refers to this commonly found phenomenon in groups, whereby through discussions "groups are prone to make more extreme choices than individual members." (McDermott, 2004:257).

A typical group polarisation experiment involves giving individuals a hypothetical scenario and asking them to rate the probability of success that they would accept in a course of action (i.e. proceeding with the action only if success is certain to proceeding even if success is unlikely). The participants then deliberate in groups, and come to a unanimous decision. The numerous examples of such research tend to show that, if individuals tend to favour a risky course of action before group discussion, then the group decision will be polarised towards risky action (as opposed to the group decision simply being an average of the individuals' opinions) (McDermott, 2004). Conversely, if individuals start favouring a conservative course of action, the group decision will be polarised towards conservativism. There is also evidence that the effect can polarise attitudes. Moscovi and Zavalloni (1969) asked students in France to rate their individual attitudes toward Americans as individuals, and then asked them to do the same in groups. They found that their subjects exhibited negative attitudes alone, and following the group task their attitudes were polarised, becoming more negative.

This well-supported theory may therefore be applicable to the study of terrorism; potentially helping to explain how groups may radicalise together and adopt extreme, violent courses of action. Sunstein (2001) advanced the idea that group polarisation dynamics play a role in terrorism. He notes that "extremists are especially prone to polarization. When they start out an extreme point, they are likely to go much further in that direction with which they started" (ibid. p.433). What is more, Sunstein argues that such groups are especially prone to this effect because they share strong affective ties, a shared identity, and a high degree of

solidarity; three predisposing factors for group polarisation. Thus members of a radical political group are at risk of coming to support extreme violent action, including terrorism, through the group polarisation process.

There are a two possible processes underlying group polarisation (Sunstein, 2002). One line of reasoning holds that 'social comparison' and self-presentation biases is responsible for polarisation. This holds that individuals wish to compare favourably to others in the group; desiring to look more confident or more determined than others. Thus, when they hear the opinions of others, "they adjust their positions in the direction of the dominant position." (ibid. p.179). Others then shift themselves too, thus pushing the group decision to one extreme through a process of 'one-upmanship'. In terms of terrorist groups, individual members may wish to seem more committed to the cause or to taking action to write perceived injustices. This may lead them to claim more extreme attitudes (e.g. claiming stronger belief in the ideology or hatred of their enemies) and to suggest increasingly extreme courses of action.

A second possibility is the 'persuasive arguments' theory, which posits that deliberating in a group where members start with similar opinions exposes the individual to more and varied arguments supporting their initial position. If a greater number of supporting arguments means greater confidence in one's own opinions, then each member (and thus the group in aggregate) will polarise to a more extreme position (Taylor et al, 2003). Again this is plausible for radical political groups; members may each have different reasons for violent action (e.g. examples of oppression or violence against the group that require retribution) or may have arguments supporting the group's ideology, which could in turn make others more sure of their ideological opinions or more supportive of terroristic violence.

The group polarization phenomenon is therefore a plausible explanation for the movement of groups toward terrorism. Group polarisation has been widely researched in many contexts, and though it has not been directly studied in terrorist groups (such research would be extremely difficult), generalisations to terrorism can be made. Polarisation could explain the radicalisation of ideology (becoming more fundamental in belief), the demonisation of the outgroup 'enemies' and the inflation of the group's own sense of morality and justness, and the group's belief in the need for increasingly extreme action including violence against civilians.

Furthermore, the effect should occur in groups of all different types; leaders and followers in hierarchical groups and members of 'leaderless resistance' groups should all be susceptible to polarisation. Members of wider, more dispersed groups/social movements should also be susceptible; the global jihadist network described by Sageman (2008), for example, could be polarised though discussions via global communication networks[23] Nevertheless, this theory is not definitive. Almost all groups are susceptible to polarisation effects, and yet not all will engage in terrorism. Those groups experiencing a greater level of environmental pressure, or consisting of individuals who originally favoured more violent actions, may be more likely to engage in terrorism.

There may be group psychological processes beyond faulty decision making and polarisation driving terrorism. One of the most oft-researched phenomena in social psychology is inter-group conflict and its origins. An understanding of the group-psychological factors that drive groups to compete with each other and engage in violence against one another may give

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[23] Though it has not been widely researched, the internet allows like-minded individuals to engage in discussion on a global scale. This could potentially be a new route to polarisation for sympathy groups and social movements.

important insight into why some groups are motivated to use violence against civilians of another group.

Tajfel and Turner's (1986) 'Social Identity Theory' (SIT) was developed to explain intergroup prejudice and discrimination, and as such provides a useful model for competition and conflict between groups .Three basic premises underlie this theory; (1) individuals strive to achieve self-esteem and positive social identity, (2) social groups and categories[24] (into which individuals categorise the world) are associated with positive or negative evaluations, and so one's own social identity (and thus self-esteem) are determined by the evaluations of one's own groups, and (3) these evaluations are determined by comparisons between one's own ingroup and comparable outgroups[25], with favourable comparisons creating higher prestige for group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Group members are therefore motivated to see their own groups in a favourable light because group memberships are integral to the individual's self-concept. This desire for positive distinctiveness from other groups can drive the behaviour of groups. If an ingroup-outgroup comparison leaves group members with negative social identity (i.e. the outgroup is evaluated more favourably), they will take steps to rectify this; either by leaving their current group or (if groups boundaries are impermeable because of status differences) attempting to make their current group more positively distinct. This is where conflict may come into play; a number of strategies may be used to make these ingroup-outgroup comparisons more favourable, including competition and aggression (in order to decrease the outgroup's standing) and denigration, prejudice and discrimination (in order to make the outgroup more negatively evaluated).

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[24] It is worth noting here that 'groups' in SIT may refer not only to small groups, but also to larger social categories, including religion, ethnicity, political ideology; anything into which individuals may categorise their social worlds.
[25] Comparisons will only be made between the ingroup and relevant outgroups; "similarity, proximity and situational salience all play an integral role in determining which groups are comparable" (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:29).

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that these ingroup-outgroup processes produce conflict. Even arbitrary groups (i.e. groups composed of randomly-assigned subjects in laboratory experiments) show evidence of discrimination and prejudice (e.g. allocating more rewards to ingroup members than the outgroup, or denigrating members of the outgroup), even where they are not directly interacting with members of their own or the other group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). For those groups with concrete grievances against an outgroup, this effect should presumably be stronger.

Social Identity processes may therefore push groups toward terrorism in a number of ways. Firstly, terrorism is often referred to as the 'weapon of the weak' (i.e. those with little political power and low status), and SIT can explain why 'the weak' may engage in violence. As Arena and Arrigo (2006), who apply SIT concepts to terrorism, point out;

"...those groups with negative social identity use various strategies to reduce the psychological discomfort... Some strategic examples include assimilation, strengthening the group identity, *direct challenge* and *violence*." (Arena & Arrigo, 2006:30, emphasis added).

Thus if political group members find their own group to be negatively evaluated compared to an outgroup (e.g. if the group perceive themselves as weak or marginalised) they may attempt to try to redress the balance through violent actions against the outgroup. Such actions are aimed at making their own identity, whether it be a religious or political identity, more positively evaluated.

What is more, as individuals seek to create positive distinctiveness between the ingroup and the perceived outgroup, the members of the outgroup can become vilified and

dehumanised. Thus members of political, religious or ethnic activist groups, categorising the world into 'us' and 'them', may come to see all individuals in the perceived outgroup, whether they be an active threat (e.g. police or security forces) or harmless civilians, as subhuman, amoral or animalistic (Silke, 2004). Bandura (2004) suggests that dehumanisation is an important part of the moral disengagement required for individuals to engage in violence like terrorism; "it is easier to brutalize victims, for example, when they are referred to as 'worms'" (ibid, p.136).Therefore the processes outlined in SIT can lead to civilians becoming valid targets for political groups.

This theory can easily be applied to contemporary cases of terrorism. For example, the 7/7 London bombers viewed their 'ingroup' (i.e. Muslims) as being oppressed by the powerful Western 'outgroup'[26]. Under SIT this would create a negative identity for the ingroup, and thus derogation of outgroup members (including the citizens who supported their 'oppressive' governments) and a desire to harm the outgroup. The use of violence against western citizens could therefore be motivated by the group's desire to create an "assertive Muslim identity" (Rai, 2006:97); elevating the status of the ingroup and thus the self-esteem of the bombers themselves.

SIT may also explain internecine violence between similar political groups, such as between Loyalist factions in Northern Ireland (McDonald, 2004) and FARC and the ELN in Colombia (BBC, 2006). Tajfel and Turner (2004:60) indicate that "similarity, proximity and situational salience" increase ingroup/outgroup comparisons. As making positive ingroup/outgroup comparisons is difficult when the groups lack considerable distinctiveness, groups may discriminate against and take violent action against similar groups.

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[26] In his video statement, released after the bombings, Mohammed Sadique Khan spoke of the oppression of Muslims worldwide by western governments (Rai, 2006).

This theory benefits from its ability to integrate different levels of analysis. At the micro level, members of groups engage in violence on behalf of their group in order to enhance their own esteem. At the macro level, terrorism occurs because of the different statuses of the two groups; with the low status group seeking to increase its own self-evaluation through conflict with the more powerful group. Furthermore, SIT processes should, theoretically, occur in groups of different sizes and shapes; from large, nebulous 'social movements' to smaller, structured armed organisations.

SIT is obviously, however, not a perfect model for terrorism. Again, though SIT is a well-researched theory in social psychology, the direct application of SIT to terrorist groups is limited. Also, though it is able to explain why outgroup civilians may become targets, it does not explain the actual engagement in terrorism; the movement from prejudice against the outgroup to actual violence is vague. Nevertheless, SIT may be a useful tool for explaining some of the processes that occur in groups using terrorism

As terrorism is largely committed by groups, theories of group psychology should be highly applicable to the study of terrorism. This is especially true as the group acts as the point of interaction for the other levels of analysis; the individual is most likely turned into a 'terrorist' through group processes, and structural factors have their effect through the group's perceptions of them. The theories outlined in this chapter should therefore help to explain the occurrence of terrorism.

Firstly, the study of leadership and obedience can potentially explain why individuals engage in terrorism when they are embedded in hierarchical groups. Just as soldiers carry out the orders of their superiors, some terrorists may be complying with the instructions of leaders who have made a tactical decision to use terrorism.

The dynamics of group decision-making may also be important in driving terrorism. If dissent is stifled and information is used in a biased way by the group during discussions regarding how to meet group goals, the groups could suffer from 'groupthink'. The resulting faulty decision making could cause groups to therefore uncritically adopt risky and violent courses of action including terrorism. Evidence supporting this theory is, however, equivocal. Group polarisation theory may be a more viable alternative, due to its stronger research base. Members of radical political groups may become further radicalised through social comparison and exposure to persuasive arguments; leading them to have more extreme negative opinions of their enemies and to accept violence where they may not otherwise.

Finally, Social Identity Theory, with its focus on ingroup versus outgroup, may be able to explain both the origins of conflict and why civilians may become valid targets in the eyes of group members. Furthermore, this theory is applicable to all groups; from large 'social movements' to small radical political or religious groups. Social Identity Theory is vague, however, in how discrimination and prejudice turns into actual violence.

In reality, all of the above group processes may be at play in terrorist organisations. Identity processes may cause demonization of citizens in the perceived 'enemy outgroup', while polarisation (and perhaps groupthink) in decision making cause the adoption of radicalised attitudes and violent courses of action[27]. Finally, obedience to leadership (or conformity in less structured groups) may then cause individual members to carry out the terroristic act itself. All of these theories do, however, suffer from a dearth of research in terms of terrorism. Their potential explanatory power would seem to warrant further study.

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[27] The decision to use terrorism is not always unopposed by members of the group; in some cases it can lead to a more violent splinter group splitting from the main organisation (Crenshaw, 1990). Thus these processes may instead occur in a subsection of the larger group.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The aim of this paper was to examine whether social psychology, with a focus on group dynamics and processes, could offer a useful perspective from which to study the origins of terrorism. Chapter 1 outlined some of the structural and environmental factors that may be important in driving terrorism, such as political exclusion, deprivation and oppression. Individual-level explanations were then examined, which attempt to explain why only a few of those who experience such conditions actually become terrorists. These theories are troubled by conceptual problems, a lack of supportive evidence, and biased assumptions regarding the origins of behaviour. It is perhaps better to place the potential terrorist in context, and attempt to understand what social processes may explain why they adopt radicalised political or religious ideologies, and why they consequently join violent political groups.

Chapter 2 firstly assessed whether two common explanations, brainwashing and contagion, were viable explanations for this process. A brainwashing explanation is flawed, as it requires that the individual be coerced into adopting a new ideology; something for which there is little evidence in terrorism. Contagion theory, the idea that the media is responsible for the spread of terrorism, would appear to be similarly unsound. Although there is evidence of 'waves' of similar terrorist attacks and groups forming, these can be explained by communication and cooperation between groups. Furthermore, research base on which this theory is based is equivocal, and media is unlikely to affect those who do not already have significant sympathies with the viewed terrorists. The observation that new members in terrorist groups often have existing ties with other members implies that psychological research into socialisation would be a more useful explanation of radicalisation and

recruitment. Indeed, Levine and Moreland's (1994) model provides a useful description of the processes involved in joining a terrorist group, and the associated radicalisation of attitudes and beliefs.

The final chapter examined a number of psychological theories that may be able to explain how the dynamics in radical political groups may lead them towards committing terrorism. Group norms demanding obedience to leadership may cause members of terrorist groups to comply with the decisions of their superiors, even if they would not otherwise. In less structured groups, simple conformity factors may serve the same function; causing individuals to carry out actions on the basis of group decisions. Groupthink theory suggests that faulty decision-making (with the stifling of dissent and uncritical analysis of information) may be responsible for engagement in terrorism. Though this theory lacks strong research support, it may act as a useful descriptive tool. Group polarisation theory, with its strong research base, may provide a better explanation for why groups radicalise and engage in terrorism via social comparison between members and exposure to persuasive arguments. Finally, in political groups, social identity processes may lead to the derogation of perceived 'outgroup' members, including civilians. Violence may be used in order to create 'positive distinctiveness' for the ingroup compared to the outgroup.

This paper therefore presents a process model for terrorism on the basis of social psychological factors. Significantly, this approach does not assume anything special about either terrorists or terrorist groups; they are neither inherently mad nor bad. The processes are the same as in many (even all) groups, albeit exaggerated by radical ideologies and environmental factors. Terrorist groups are formed when collectives of individuals perceive an injustice in society that they desire to right. As few individuals in oppressive or deprived situations actually become terrorists, and there is little evidence of terrorist abnormality, terrorism would appear to be a group-level reaction to environmental factors. Crenshaw

(1990:251) points out that "the existence of the group frequently precedes the move to terrorism." Groups that use terrorism therefore rarely start out with the intention to harm civilians; instead, polarisation and identity processes may act to radicalise the group to the point that civilians become viable targets for violence. Individuals may join the group if they believe that it may be able to help them reach their goals, and will internalise the group's radicalised ideologies, rules and norms. Finally, obedience to authority and conformity to group norms (combined with the belief that their actions are just and necessary) help to impel the individual member to carry out terrorism on the behalf of the group.

The conclusions reached here are tentative due to the lack of direct study of these processes in terrorist groups. What is more, the processes explored here are just a few pertinent examples from the social psychology literature. Though direct study of group psychology in terrorist organisations is evidently very difficult, further research from a group psychological perspective may provide more insights into why terrorism occurs. Future study should also attempt to identify the psychological processes underlying the formation of the groups that later radicalise. Finally, an understanding of terrorist group psychology may have significant implications for counterterrorism. There is a growing understanding that the profiling and targeting of individual terrorists is of limited value[28]. Initiatives aimed at political groups rather than individuals, with the intention of reducing radicalisation and polarisation (as well as offering alternatives to violence), could be more successful in combating terrorism.

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[28] For example, MI5 recently produced a report stating that there is no typical demographic profile or abnormality in British terrorists (Travis, 2008).

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