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Who Wants to Talk to Terrorists?

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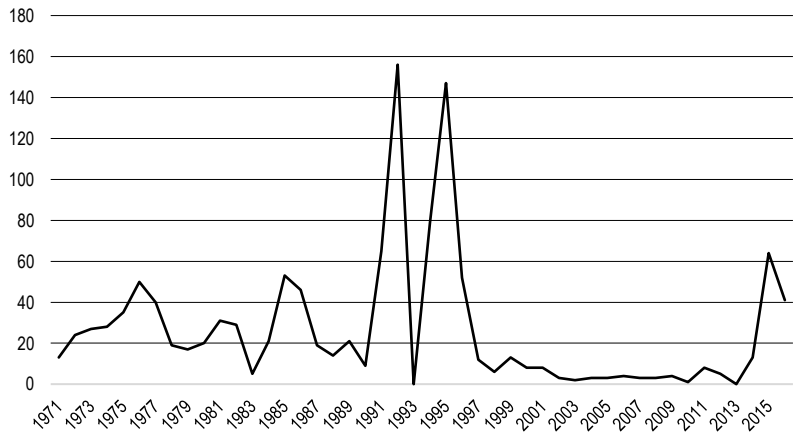
ABSTRACT

Interviewing terrorists or former terrorists has become an increasingly popular research method in terrorism studies. What terrorists say can shed light on motivations, decision-making processes and operational details that without first-hand testimony could only be inferred. In this chapter, a selection of these studies is reviewed alongside a consideration of global trends in terrorism and developments in terrorism research.

Introduction

In 1979, shortly following the German Autumn of 1977 when terrorism dominated the news cycle in the Federal Republic (West Germany), the academic psychiatrist Wilfried Rasch (1979) published an account of terrorist psychology based on first-hand psychiatric evaluation of subjects suspected of involvement in terrorism. The account, which generally concluded that terrorists are not clinically ill, included Rasch's psychiatric assessments of the four principal members of the first generation of the Red Army Faction (RAF): Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe.[1] Through a psychiatric study of the individuals involved in terrorism, together with a careful consideration of the context, Rasch concluded that actions that appeared to be incomprehensible without there being some element of psychological illness at play, come to be understood as motivated and rational, at least among 'serious' perpetrators. Rasch (1979, p.80) says, "They were convinced that their position was right while still being able, principally, to look at themselves from distance and to recognise and reflect upon reality. None of the men and women I encountered could have been diagnosed as 'paranoid'."

Figure 1: Terrorism in Germany (West Germany 1970 to 1990 & Germany 1991 to 2016)



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[1] The RAF emerged from the student movements of the late 1960s. The group was active in Germany until at least 1992 and was only formally dissolved in 1998. According to Melzer (2009, p.55), "The number of active members in the RAF during the 1970s remained small; they lived underground and operated in individual cells responsible for separate political actions. The RAF bombed US military facilities, kidnapped and assassinated influential businessmen and state representatives, robbed banks and worked with the militant wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)." A popular history of the RAF can be found in Aust (2008).

Terrorism in West Germany was a consistent problem throughout the 1970s. There were more than 400 attacks perpetrated between 1970 and 1980 (Figure 1).[2] Almost 100 people were killed and more than 800 were wounded. Not surprisingly, given the magnitude of the problem, Rasch's study was quickly followed by a similar but much more extensive investigation. In one of the most comprehensive studies of terrorist psychology yet undertaken, between 1980 and 1983, 250 left-wing and right-wing terrorists were interviewed in an attempt to discern any patterns in their demography, life history and psychology (Jäger, Schmidtchen, and Süllwold 1981). Like other attempts before and since, no single defining characteristic was identified and, indeed, the study concluded that terrorists are characterised by either of two very different personality traits (extroverted/stimulus-seeking on the one hand and hostile/suspicious on the other). The failure of the investigations to yield defining characteristics for terrorist offenders was in itself an important finding and the systematic interviews undertaken with known terrorists provide some of the first glimpses about what might be learned by asking questions directly of the terrorists themselves.

The 1970s had also been a particularly active period for terrorism in the United States. In the four years between 1968 and 1972, there were 124 hijackings of aircraft in the U.S. Although the probability that an aircraft would be hijacked on any given day was still very small (0.000007), this was still 30 times greater than the probability that an individual would be murdered on a given day (0.0000002) (Landes 1978, p.1). And this at a time when crime in American cities was very high. Hubbard (1971) undertook a series of unstructured interviews with incarcerated hijackers in order to explore the psychological profiles, if any, that they held in common. Hubbard concluded, unlike Rasch in his study of the German terrorists, that the hijackers were indeed psychologically ill. Importantly, however, none of the offenders that Hubbard interviewed held any political ideology. In this respect, the hijackers interviewed by Hubbard resemble the type of individuals that Rasch calls 'imitators'. These are individuals who hold no genuine political ideas, who may indeed suffer from some form of psychological illness, and whose 'terrorist' actions are clumsy imitations of the (rational) politically motivated terrorists (Rasch 1979, p.80).

Interest in hearing from the terrorists themselves (or from those who have talked with them) oscillates with the nature of the terrorism context and the degree to which the existing body of knowledge satisfies or fails to satisfy the demand for explanation. During the 1970s, terrorism studies itself was in its infancy[3] and many of the contributions that the field would receive from other disciplines such as economics, psychology and criminology still lay in the future. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s a fairly persuasive theme dominated terrorism research. This was 'terrorism as theatre' (Jenkins 1975, 1981; Weimann 1983, 1987, 2005; Weimann & Winn 1994; Wilkinson 2007).[4] This cast terrorism as a symbolic act of communication with its explanation to be found in symbolic communication theory (Weimann 2005), a characterisation that, not surprisingly, fit the most highly publicised acts of terrorism very well. The

[2] All data sourced from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) unless otherwise noted.
[3] The first course on terrorism to be offered at an American university was developed by David Rapoport in 1970 (Rapoport 2001). Rapoport also founded one of the major journals in the field, Terrorism and Political Violence, in 1989. The journal, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism had been established much earlier, in 1977.
[4] According to Delli Carpini & Williams (1987, p.47), not one month passed between 1969 and 1980 without the major news networks devoting at least one story to the topic of international terrorism. Also see Crelinsten (1997).

kidnapping of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics by the Palestinian terrorist group Black September was undertaken with full knowledge that most of the major news networks would be represented (Ross 2007, p.216).[5] As one would expect, the attack received a tremendous amount of media attention and who could doubt that this was indeed the underlying motivation?

Media attention is certainly a primary 'payoff' to terrorist activity but many other questions still remained to be answered. For example, what sort of person wants the publicity associated with being a terrorist? Who would go to such lengths? And how does the lure of media attention shape terrorist choice?[6] Following 1980,[7] in the search for deeper understanding of terrorist behaviour, decision-making and motivations, terrorism studies began a period of continuous expansion that shows no signs of slowing down. A number of new disciplines ventured into terrorism for the first time. Each new perspective emphasised some aspects of terrorism and pushed others into the background. All the while, the terrorism context itself evolved. The left wing revolutionary groups of the 1970s gradually faded away as Islamic terrorism became a more pressing concern, though a distant one until the 9/11 attacks. The early 2000s brought a new wave of research to help understand and explain the unique characteristics of the 'new' terrorism.[8] The 21st century has witnessed the rise of the lone wolf (Spaaij 2010, 2012; Phillips 2011, 2013; Gill 2015; Simon 2016; Hamm & Spaaij 2017), the emergence and defeat of Islamic State (ISIS) (Warrick 2016; Cockburn 2016) and the growing recognition of the threat posed by both radical Islam and extreme right-wing movements in various parts of the world. These changes, both in the terrorism context and in the scientific study of its elements, are the backdrop against which there has been an increasing interest in what terrorists have to say for themselves.

The Fourth Wave

If it is true that terrorism comes in waves and that a fourth wave began in 1979, then the beginning of the fourth wave of terrorism also marks the emergence of terrorism studies as a distinct field of inquiry within the social sciences. According Rapoport (2001), the third wave of terrorism emerged during the Vietnam War when the success of Vietcong tactics suggested the possibility of combatting the resources of Western governments. The third wave was characterised by a revolutionary ethos and terrorist groups held fast to the belief that they were vanguards for the masses of the third world (Rapoport 2001, 421). The major events of third wave terrorism usually involved hostage-taking, hijacking and kidnapping of prominent persons. For example, the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), a domestic American terrorist group,

[5] According to Wilkinson (2007, p.52), the Munich Olympics action was broadcast to a worldwide audience of more than half a billion people.

[6] This matter has only been explored recently. See Pohl (2015, 2017). In older studies, if media attention were considered the primary payoff to terrorism, then it was implied that terrorists would select the single action designed to maximise it. However, terrorist groups do not always choose in this way and often engage in a variety of different actions. Pohl (2015, 2017) explains how such choices are consistent with a desire to maximise media attention.

[7] The number of articles published in 'terrorism studies' increased from essentially zero to around 100 per year during the 1970s. This level was maintained for much of the next twenty years before another exponential increase during the early 2000s took the number of articles per year to more than 400 (Miller & Mills 2009, p.416).

[8] According to Kurtulus (2011, p.477), the 'new terrorism' refers to a qualitative change that took place in the nature of terrorism some time during the 1990s. The term was used, for example by Laqueur (1998, 1999) in the late 1990s, though he had earlier used the label 'post-modern terrorism' in the same sense (Laqueur 1996). Also see Duyvesteyn (2004).

kidnapped heiress Patty Hearst with the objective of using her family's political connections to arrange the release of two imprisoned SLA members (a demand that was not met). Another prominent kidnapping was that of Aldo Moro, former Italian Prime Minister, who was kidnapped by the Italian Red Brigades and later killed when the demands to release prisoners was refused. The Red Army Faction (RAF), the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Basque Homeland and Liberty (ETA) were all prominent third-wave groups (Weinberg et al. 2004).

Towards the end of the third wave, as mentioned previously, terrorism studies began to emerge as a distinct field of study. The media-oriented nature of terrorism, especially during the 1970s, was a dominant theme in the emerging literature alongside an interest the psychology of terrorists. According to Weinberg et al. (2004, p.785), "Third wave terrorism also engendered widespread discussion of such phenomena as the ''Stockholm syndrome,'' brain-washing, the process of hostage negotiations, and the role of the mass media in reporting the events which came to be labelled terrorism. In short, the late 1960s through the early 1980s was a time during which terrorism seemed to elicit the discussion of psychological issues". We have seen that on a few occasions during the 1970s researchers decided to delve deeper into these psychological issues by interviewing terrorists directly. From a purely psychological or psychiatric point of view, however, the terrorists exhibited few consistently common traits or demographic characteristics and no signs of psychopathy (Crenshaw 1981, 1986; Victoroff 2005). By this time, terrorism had entered a fourth wave and the psychology of terrorists was put to one side, though not discarded, as researchers explored terrorist behaviour from new perspectives.

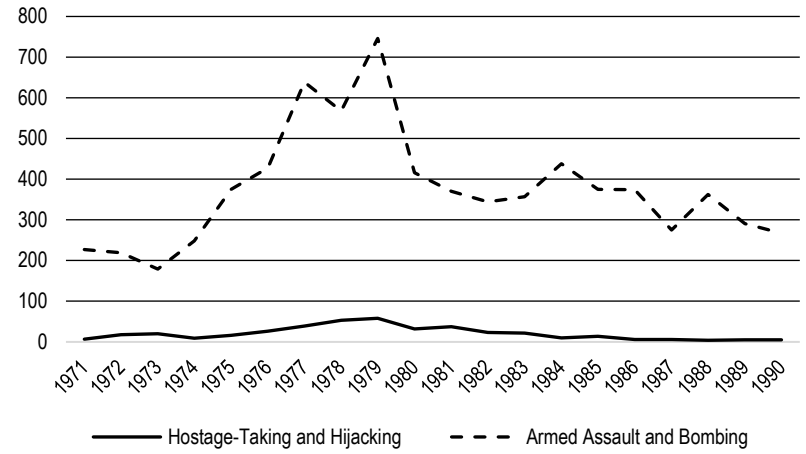
The Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan ushered in the fourth wave, finding its foundations in religion as revolutionary movements faced widespread defeat (Rapoport 2001). The hijackings that had become a popular choice of action during the third wave were surpassed by suicide bombings, a type of action with murkier motivations and a demanding wholly new analysis. Does publicity matter when you are dead? If the hijackers, bombers, bank robbers and assassins of the 1970s were not psychopathic, perhaps the suicide bombers of the 1980s were? The objective of terrorist groups to inflict as many casualties as possible on their victims also seemed much different to what had happened before. Furthermore, in at least one case, the new tactics appeared to work. Hezbollah's suicide bombing campaign in the period 1983 to 1985, forced the withdrawal of America, France and Israel from parts of Lebanon (Victoroff 2005, p.15). Against this fairly rapid evolution in terrorism, research in terrorism studies was quickly directed to the most pressing problems. Like always, however, there were natural limits to this application stemming from the regular pace of developments in the underlying social sciences.

Perhaps there is no better illustration of this than the economic analysis of terrorism. In the 1940s, game theory was one of the brightest of the new fields of mathematics and quickly became a hallmark of mid-twentieth century economics. Von Neumann & Morgenstern's (1944) monumental *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* marks the real beginning, though there had been prior contributions here and there (including by von Neumann himself in 1928). Nash's (1950, 1951) equilibrium concept and non-cooperative game structure added an important extension. Relatively quickly, in fact, almost immediately,

game theory was put to use in analysing nuclear defence and offense strategies as the Cold War began to heat up. Much of this work was undertaken at the RAND Corporation. Soon after, a specialised literature dealing with conflict and conflict resolution in game theoretical contexts emerged. In 1960, Thomas C. Schelling published his *The Strategy of Conflict*. Gradually, an economics of defence emerged too. In 1970, McKean & Hitch published their *The Economics of Defence in the Nuclear Age*. Building on developments in game theory and on Becker's (1968) theoretical analysis of criminal behaviour, the first papers specifically applying economic analysis to terrorism emerged towards the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s.

Once all the pieces were in place, ten years passed before a specialised economic analysis of terrorism can be identified in the literature. The Cold War had drawn most of the analytical focus. For example, in an early paper on the economics of defence and alliances, Olson & Zeckhauser (1966) refer to NATO 47 times, Soviet Russia several times and terrorism not at all. When it did finally appear, most of the analysis was suited only to a small fraction of the terrorist incidences that were being experienced in the West. If we consider, for example, Sandler, Tschirhart and Caley's (1983) theoretical analysis, it is almost solely focussed on negotiation models that revolve around a hostage-taking incident. The bombings and assassinations, which in more than 90 percent of cases involved no issuance of demands (Sander et al. 1983, p.37), fall outside the scope of the negotiation models. Yet, Hezbollah was at the time waging a successful suicide bombing campaign against American forces in Lebanon and bombings and armed assaults had long been by far the most prevalent attack methods, if not the most spectacular (Figure 2). Bargaining models dominated economic analysis of terrorism throughout the 1980s (Corsi 1981; Sandler & Scott 1987; Atkinson et al. 1987; Lapan & Sandler 1988; Sandler & Lapan 1988). This was both a reflection of the time it takes a new field of study (the economic analysis of terrorism) within social science to develop and the general themes and trends of terrorism studies in which a conventional wisdom has been that terrorists want something and can, therefore, be bargained with.

Figure 2: Terrorism in Western Europe and North America 1970 to 1990: Incidents per Year



By the 1990s, *Defence Economics*, a journal dedicated to the economic analysis of defence, including terrorism, had been established and a new generation of analytical models gradually began to emerge. Despite the controversy attending it, the rational choice model was applied by economists to an expanding range of terrorist actions.[9] Analysis was still hemmed in by the orthodoxy of both economics and terrorism studies. Models of rational choice still identified 'political influence' as the most important payoff to terrorism and the models were still based on an assumption that 'terrorism' and 'legitimate action' are substitutes and that terrorists would willingly switch from one to the other if the incentives were different (Frey & Luechinger 2003). Phillips' (2009) paper, in which the choices of terrorists are analysed under the assumption that the operational objective of terrorists is the infliction of injuries and fatalities, was met with some scepticism that terrorists *really* wanted to inflict harm. Interviews with third wave groups that had survived well past 1979, particularly members of the IRA and Provisional IRA (PIRA), might have supported this scepticism to some degree (Horgan & Taylor 1999, 2003) but the terrorism context had changed significantly during this period. If the actions of fourth wave terrorist groups for the preceding two or three decades were not enough evidence, the words of these terrorists themselves can testify to the infliction of fatalities as a primary operational objective of terrorism. Below are two excerpts from Post, Sprinzak & Denny's (2003) series of interviews with 35 Middle Eastern terrorists:

> The more an attack hurts the enemy, the more important it is. That is the measure. The mass killings, especially martyrdom operations, were the biggest threat to the Israeli public and so most effort was devoted to these. The extent of the damage and the number of casualties are of primary importance.
>
> The various armed actions (stabbing, collaborators, martyrdom operations, attacks on Israeli soldiers) all had different ratings. An armed action that caused casualties was rated highly and seen to be of great importance. An armed action without casualties was not rated. No distinction was made between armed actions on soldiers or on civilians; the main thing was the amount of blood. The aim was to cause as much carnage as possible.

Post et al. (2003), unlike the earlier psychiatric interviews with imprisoned terrorists, were interested in the pathways that led individuals to radicalisation, extremism, terrorism and a willingness to kill.[10] This is indicative of a change in both our understanding of terrorism and a change in the nature of terrorism. The turn towards more violent extremism was not seriously entertained to be the result of psychopathy or psychopathology. Although Ariel Merari's (Merari 2010; Merari et al. 2010a, 2010b) interviews with failed suicide bombers led him to conclude that these individuals often suffer from serious depression, this finding has been challenged by a Brym & Araj (2012) who conducted interviews with immediate family members and close friends of Palestinian suicide bombers. As a result of their investigation, Brym & Araj (2012, p.432) recommend focusing on the political and social roots of suicide bombing rather than its psychological roots. Even suicide bombing came to be understood as having a 'strategic logic' (Pape 2003).

[9] Rationality in economics has many different meanings but ultimately means only that action is purposeful. It does not mean that calculation always underlies choice (rather than emotion) and it does not imply that calculation is always perfect. What the orthodox model of decision-making under risk and uncertainty, the expected utility theory, does do is provide a clear benchmark for optimal choice. If the objective of an agent is to inflict harm, who could argue that the optimal, most damaging, action or combinations is not worth knowing?

[10] Pathways to radicalisation are also studied by Horgan (2008).

Post 9/11 and the Surge of Interest in Terrorist Interviews

In the 1970s, in Western Europe and North America, 2,919 people were killed in 6,263 terrorist attacks. In the 1980s, 2,664 were killed in 5,325 attacks. There was, then, an 8.70 percent increase in lethality per attack during the 1980s. After rising in the 1980s, lethality declined considerably during the 1990s when there were 4,632 attacks in Western Europe and North America that killed 1,509 people. In the 2000s, the data are impacted by 9/11. Although there were 'just' 1,669 terrorist attacks, 3,500 people were killed. This represents a more than 300 percent increase in lethality per attack compared to the 1980s and demonstrates the impact that the single devastating attack on September 11 had on the historical record of terrorism. In the period between 2010 and 2016, there were 1,765 attacks that killed 767 people. This represents a decline in lethality per attack to just below 1970s levels but still above the 1990s level. In the West, terrorism remains, as it has been for a long time, a constant a low-level threat from the perspective of any individual citizen.

This stability over time is contrasted with the rapid increase in published terrorism studies since the turn of the century. The number of papers published each year on the topic of terrorism increased fourfold after 2001, from about 100 per year to 400 (Miller & Mills 2009). To place this in perspective, however, it is important to recognise that there was an explosion in publication across all areas in the first decade of the 21st century. According to Scimago's Journal and Country Rank (2018), the number of papers published in the United States (all fields) in the year 2000 was just over 300,000. By 2010, more than 500,000 papers per year were being published. The rise of open access publishing contributed to the increasing volume and the rising tide of publication has been observed in most fields. Terrorism studies could have naturally expected some increase from this system-wide trend in publishing. But it is true that the 9/11 attacks attracted new researchers to the field and led to an increase in the volume of terrorism research. For example, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* published 29 articles on terrorism between 1980 and 2008. Only five of these were published *before* 2001. This is a trend that is mirrored across a number of the major political science journals (Young & Findley 2011, p.413).

Although this increase in volume might have resulted in some short-term decline in the quality of scholarship, especially when researchers whose expertise resided in a different field decided to write about a topical problem, contemporary terrorism studies is far richer than it was two decades ago. There are more published papers to draw on and the increasing interest in the field has attracted research into niche problems that might not have seen the light of day during the 1990s. There is also more volume in each of the underlying fields. For example, economic analysis was once focused almost entirely on game theoretical analysis of negotiation scenarios and time-series data analysis of incidents. Now one can find economic analysis of terrorist choice in which important developments in decision theory are used to explore such problems as the choice of attack method when, among other things, a terrorist seeks to equal or surpass a predecessor (Phillips & Pohl 2014, 2017; Azam & Ferrero 2017). Similarly, in criminology there has been such an increase of interest in terrorism research that terrorism studies itself might be said to be undergoing a criminological 'turn' (LaFree & Dugan 2004; Rausch & LaFree 2007; Freilich & LaFree 2015).

Even the budding field of investigative psychology has directed some attention to terrorism (Canter & Youngs 2009).

Despite this growth and expansion, some researchers have been somewhat pessimistic. For example, Sageman (2014) laments the 'stagnation of terrorism research' despite 'thousands of new researchers' being attracted to the field. Sageman's arguments are certainly debatable. He only addresses one particular aspect of terrorism research: why does someone turn to political violence? And one might point out that he does not mention even once any research from either economics or criminology, which have real answers to this question (though not necessarily 'the' answer). More surprisingly, one of the most comprehensive reviews of the psychological literature (Victoroff 2005) is also overlooked and although Jerrold Post's work is mentioned, Post, Sprinzak and Denny's (2003) interviews with terrorists is not. Schmid (2014), in his reply to Sageman's 'polemic', launches a more detailed critique. Putting this to one side, Sageman's main point is that intelligence agencies need to share information about terrorists with researchers so that they can better answer the question as to why someone turns to political violence. If this was a somewhat roundabout way of saying that asking terrorists themselves about their motivations might turn up the 'answers' for which we seek, then this was already well and truly a burgeoning enterprise by the time Sageman's paper was published.

Harris et al. (2016) realised that the growth in studies relying on interviews with terrorists or violent extremists had been so rapid, in fact, that there was a very real need to take stock of the methodologies underlying those studies with a view to ensuring the rigour of this type of work. As part of the background to their discussion, Harris et al. (2016) identified 48 articles whose findings relied on interviews with terrorists. Only a handful of these had been published before 1999. The reported results contain a lot of information about the thought processes and emotions that extremists attest to having experienced, including their reasons for turning to political violence and, later, turning away from it. For example, in their overview article, Webber & Kruglanski (2018) note, "Individuals are motivated to join terror organisations as a mechanism to gain feelings of personal significance. Should there come a time in their tenure when the organisation no longer satisfies this need, or the need could be better satisfied through alternative sources, this should demotivate radicalisation". They go on to cite several studies in which violent extremists from ISIS, ETA and Far Right movements in Germany all state in interviews with researchers that extremism was boring, not fulfilling, riddled with hypocrisy or simply a waste of time (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2005; Atran 2010; Reinares 2011; Barrelle 2015; Neumann 2015; Speckhard & Yayla 2016). In short, they joined to find or enhance their identities and their lives and found the experience dissatisfying.

Of course, as Harris et al. (2016) highlight we must be circumspect in interpreting these results because methodological transparency is sometimes lacking. The same calls for methodological clarity have been made by Horgan (2012). Khalil (2017) argues that some interviewers accept what interviewees say

uncritically. Terrorists might also be liars.[11] One could ask what they would have to gain from lying to a researcher but this implies that lying always needs some plausible motive. In his long-running investigations into violent offender behaviour, Raine (2013, p.172) reports the apparently unmotivated deception that subjects exhibit:

> For example, one day our research assistant was struck by the fact that a participant walked on his toes. Upon questioning, our participant told a detailed and convincing story of how he was in a motorbike accident resulting in damage to his heels. The very next day, he was being assessed by a different research assistant on a different floor of our building and he walked perfectly normally. The con only came to light when our research assistants traded notes. A typical pathological lie: deception without any obvious gain or motivation.

More likely perhaps, is that interviewees will be unable to trace their decision processes. Even experts have difficulty tracing the cues that led them to particular judgements (Kahneman & Klein 2009). This raises one of the more potentially counter-productive outcomes of studies based on interviews with terrorists. That is the tendency to overlook key theoretical insights (Khalil 2017). For example, in their analysis of what terrorists have said in autobiographies or manifestos, Gill et al. (2018, p.7) quote the following excerpt from Ann Hansen's[12] memoir, *Direct Action*:

> A steady diet of small illegal activities had boosted my confidence in our abilities to get away with things. I no longer imagined a cop hiding behind every obstacle and actually found myself feeling quite relaxed out on a mission. Still a certain level of fear is a good thing in these matters—it keeps a healthy flow of adrenalin coursing through the bloodstream, which tends to heighten awareness. I think I had finally reached this healthy medium.

Gill et al. (2018, p.7) conclude from this that prior success decreases averseness to risk. While such a conclusion might appear to be a fair one to reach, it is a naïve one in the sense that it is detached from the theoretical frameworks developed in economics, behavioural economics and psychology for decision-making under risk. There are two different types of risk aversion, relative and absolute, both of which can be constant, decreasing or increasing. Is the decreased averseness to risk inferred from the Hansen quote a decrease in relative or absolute risk aversion? We would only expect one of these types of risk aversion to be decreasing and even then, the matter is not completely clear-cut. In orthodox economic theory, decreasing absolute risk aversion (DARA) is an intuitive and acceptable assumption alongside *constant* relative risk aversion (CRRA).[13] This is not the only subtlety. As gains accumulate, DARA implies that the decision-maker will increase his or her absolute resource allocation, including time, to riskier prospects (for example, to terrorist actions with more variable outcomes, like bombing, vis-à-vis actions with less variable outcomes, like assassination). However, as gains accumulate, the decision-maker also faces a

[11] People who interview criminal suspects are given special training at detecting deceit. Traditionally, this trainng focused on visible cues. More recently, training has focused on techniques designed to elicit cues to deception. Vrij et al. (2013) discuss these techniques and their specific application to terrorist suspects.

[12] Ann Hansen was a member of the Canadian anarchist guerrilla group called Direct Action. The group is known for its 1982 bombing of Litton Industries, an arms component manufacturer in Toronto. Hansen served eight years in prison. Her memoir was published in 2001 (Hansen 2001).

[13] It is also possible, for example, that the risk aversion coefficients are very high in the early stages of a terrorist group's life cycle. As the group accumulates resources, its risk aversion starts to decline. This decreasing risk aversion is not so much a function of successes as a function of maturity and resource acquisition. This is analogous to households that initially operate at subsistence and gradually accumulate wealth (see Ogaki & Zhang 2001).

greater overall risk. A failed action can undo the gains that have been hard earned. This will tend to lead to a lower allocation of resources to riskier prospects. There are, then, two effects, not one.

Behavioural economics sheds some more light on this particular problem. In behavioural decision theory, as the decision-maker experiences gains and accumulates payoffs, he or she becomes more risk averse in order to protect and consolidate those gains. By contrast, decision-makers who experience losses exhibit risk seeking behaviour in order to recoup those losses. Risk aversion, not risk seeking, is associated with gains. This is a core feature of Kahneman & Tversky's (1979) prospect theory. This example illustrates how much deeper the conclusions that are drawn from interviews with terrorists or other primary sources that record their thoughts can be when placed in the context of the available theoretical frameworks. Needless to say, the precision and rigour is also improved and safeguarded by theory. Ultimately, though, interviews without theoretical frameworks are merely interesting, not informative, and can be misleading even when the terrorist's account is true and honest.

Concluding Remarks

We have to be careful in writing about terrorism not to downplay or exaggerate the threat. Western countries in the 21st century do not face an unprecedented terrorism crisis. In Western Europe and North America, the number of attacks and the lethality per attack is lower now than it was in the 1970s, though not as low as it was during the 1990s. The fourth wave terrorist groups have different ideologies than the third wave groups and the tactics that they use have evolved but so too have police practices, security and intelligence capability. Perhaps, the one thing that distinguishes the contemporary terrorism context from all others is the knowledge that something like 9/11 can be accomplished, that it is possible, and that in all likelihood some terrorist group somewhere would like to replicate an attack of that scale if only they could. As a result of possessing this knowledge, though, we are in a much better position to prevent it. Notwithstanding the possibility of another attack on such a scale, it is 'mundane' terrorism that is the lingering problem that society continues to face.

On this front, the growth in terrorism studies since the turn of the century has provided a collection of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings that have allowed us to develop much deeper narratives for terrorist behaviour than was possible before. The missing, though rapidly appearing, piece of the puzzle is the connection between these frameworks and empirical findings and first-hand narratives, statements, stories, testimonies and autobiographical material from the terrorists, extremists and violent offenders. Viewed through the lens of the newly developed theoretical frameworks, what terrorists have to say can be placed in the context of the existing narratives that have already been built and, in the process, enhance those narratives. Furthermore, and just as importantly, the theoretical frameworks work as filters of what terrorists say. Statements that are at odds with theories that have found empirical support in other contexts can be questioned or researched in more depth and nuances, like the subtleties of the risk aversion concept, can help us draw more nuanced inferences from the terrorists' accounts. We must be cautious not to overvalue what terrorists say. Nevertheless, a combination of theory, empirical research and field research

that documents the results of interviews with terrorists is important to the ongoing development of terrorism studies.

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