Terrorist Motivations to Employ Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Weapons

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The opinions expressed in this presentation are the author’s and do not represent EAI or SAIC.
“It’s not a matter of if, but of when”

If so, why do most terrorist groups not pursue the acquisition of CBRN?
  - Lack of technical ability
  - Lack of resources (funds, materials)
  - Not motivated to pursue – “what they are doing is good enough”
  - Fear of repercussion from target / public outcry

But why do some terrorist groups ignore the challenges and attempt to acquire and more importantly employ CBRN weapons
Terrorism

- DOD Definition of Terrorism: the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or try to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological. (Source Joint Pub 3-07.2)

- An act or threat of violence against noncombatants to intimidate or influence an audience, with political change as the objective.
## Typology of Terrorism

### Ideological Categories

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<th>Ideological Categories</th>
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<td>Practical</td>
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<td>Social revolutionary</td>
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<td>Religious fundamentalist</td>
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Today, terrorist groups can be categorized into two broad groups:

- Practical
- Apocalyptic

Practical terrorist groups use violence as a tactic to achieve their strategic goal.

Apocalyptic terrorist groups use religion as their ideology and typically dismiss all other forms of religion other than their own as false.
Practical Terrorist Groups

◆ Will commit atrocious acts
  • setting off car bombs in public places
  • kidnapping the innocent relations of his chosen enemies
  • committing assassinations
  • conducting suicide attacks

◆ May resort to mass casualty attacks if the group is weak and isolated.

◆ End states
  • Freedom
  • New society
  • New economic system
  • Autonomy
  • Reassignment of territory

“scale of actions is usually limited, despite the attendant drama”

◆ May use toxic chemicals or poisons if the circumstances warrant and the effects are focused
Apocalyptic Terrorist Groups

- Religiously motivated
  - Islamic
  - Christian
  - Jewish
  - Hindu
  - Others

- Retribution against unbelievers, heretics, and those with lesser commitment
- Willing to commit spectacular, extremely violent acts
- Willing to give their life in the attainment of their goals
- Unconstrained violence

- End states
  - New society

- All methods are open
Historical Constraints

- Technically & resource intensive
- Conventional tactics work
- Backlash

Bottom Line
Conventional means have proven effective
Constraints On Violence

- Unnecessary to convey a message to target audience
- Loss of approval and support of the group that the terrorists claimed to represent
- Backlash from target nation or international community

“Terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead”
Lack of Constraint

Aum Shinrikiyo
- Circa 1990-1995
- Launched a number of attacks using botulinum toxin, Bacillus anthracis, sarin, VX, and hydrogen cyanide
- Had near and far term motivations; eliminate threats, proof of prophecy, instigate a war, & survive the apocalypse

Al Qaeda
- 1993 – present
- Attempted to develop / acquire chemical, biological, radiological, & nuclear weapons
- Biological warfare laboratory was under construction near Tarnak Farms, Afghanistan
- Worked with poisons & toxins
Performance Violence

◆ Spectacular violent acts with the intent of having the violence witnessed by the greatest number of people with little direct political impact.

◆ Killing the few does not suit the purpose of the apocalyptic groups. They are engaged in a cosmic war and the more horrific the act the better.

◆ The use of weapons of mass destruction – chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear – are weapons that would achieve them to achieve the desired effects.
Along the Spectrum of Use

**Most Likely to use CBRN**
- Al Qaeda
- Aum

**Least Likely to use CBRN**
- PIRA
- Rajneesh
- FARC
- LTTE
- Thomas Lavy (circa 1995)
- CSAL
- Thomas Leahy (circa 1996)

**Key**
- **Lone Wolves**
- **Terrorist Groups**
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Practical Terrorist
- FARC
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Small-scale CBRN Use
- PIRA
- LTTE

Mass Casualty CBRN Use
- Rajneesh
- CSAL
- Thomas Leahy circa 1996

Catastrophic CBRN Use
- Aum

CBRN Hoax
- CBRN Hoax

Apocalyptic Terrorist
- Al Qaeda
- Aum

Key
- Lone Wolves
- Terrorist Groups
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

- **Cyanide**
  - Home made hand-grenades, composed of explosives and a cyanide compound inside a plastic container
  - Cyanide tipped bullets

- **Parathion**
  - Added to water tanks supplying drinking water
  - FARC declared the water pipeline a "military target"

- **Biological Weapon**
  - Cylinder bomb charged with 5 kilos of homemade explosive R1, potassium chlorate, aluminum powder, sawdust, scraps of iron and "a mix of clay with human feces"

WMD? Not really
Rajneesh Religious Sect

◆ Biological attack, circa 1984
  • Salmonella bacteria
  • Placed bacteria in eight local restaurants’ salad bars
  • 751 affected
  • Two members pleaded guilty to salmonella poisoning charges & received four-year prison term

◆ Test run for a planned biological attack
  • Target was the town's water supply before the November election
  • Cult decided to abandon the idea
“It presupposes that I do possess such weapons, and goes on to ask about the way in which we will use them. In answer, I would say that acquiring weapons for the defense of Muslims is a religious duty. To seek to possess the weapons that could counter those of the infidels is a religious duty. If I have indeed acquired these weapons, then this is an obligation I carried out and I thank God for enabling us to do that. And if I seek to acquire these weapons I am carrying out a duty. It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims. But how we could use these weapons if we possess them is up to us.”

Usama bin Laden
Al Qaeda– Striving for Better Weapons

- “Encyclopedia of Jihad”, one entire volume is devoted to explaining how to construct CBW
- Attempted to construct a biological laboratory to develop a biological weapon using *Bacillus anthracis*
- Repeated attempts by cells and associates to use cyanide compounds & other toxic materials
- Interest expressed in nuclear and radiological weapons

- However, conventional attacks have proven successful
Conclusions

◆ Most terrorist groups will not employ CBRN weapons
◆ Practical terrorist groups will use them on occasion to enhance conventional weapons or for a very specific purpose
◆ Practical terrorist groups will not seek massive casualties
◆ Apocalyptic terrorist groups will seek CBRN weapons
◆ Most apocalyptic terrorist groups will fail to overcome the technical challenges to produce mass casualty devices
◆ An effective CBRN device, in the hands of an apocalyptic terrorist, will be employed in a spectacular manner against a symbolic target to achieve massive casualties