



## **Exploring Root and Trigger Causes of Terrorism**

28 June 2007

Revised: April 2008

Case study, Work package 3

COT Institute for Safety, Security and Crisis Management (NL, Project Co-ordinator)

Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research TNO

Fundacion para las Relaciones Internacionales y al Dialogo Exterior (ES)

Danish Centre for International Studies and Human Rights

Institute of International Relations Prague

Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations

A project financed by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. DEFINITIONS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1 What is Terrorism?.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1.1 Root causes and trigger causes.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. SCHOLARLY RESEARCH OVERVIEW .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.1 Studying Causes of Terrorism .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.1.1 General Qualitative Analyses of Causes of Terrorism .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.1.2 Psychological Research on Causes of Terrorism .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.1.3 Empirical Analyses of Causes of Terrorism .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4.1 Approaches to Terrorism Analysis .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4.1.1 Multi-Causal Approach .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4.1.2 Political or Structural Approach .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4.1.3 Rational or Organizational Approach.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.1.4 Psychological Approach.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5. LIST OF ROOT AND TRIGGER CAUSES OF TERRORISM.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5.1 Root Causes .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5.2 Trigger Causes .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6. MOST RELEVANT ROOT AND TRIGGER CAUSES.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>21</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Two years after the events of 9/11, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan delivered a speech to heads of state at a conference on "Fighting Terrorism for Humanity: A Conference on Roots of Evil". In it, Annan stressed the need to address the root causes of terrorism in order to be able to fight it. He warned that "[i]f we are to defeat terrorism, it is our duty, and indeed our interest, to try to understand this deadly phenomenon, and carefully to examine what works, and what does not, in fighting it." (United Nations Secretary General, 2003). The former Secretary General also emphasized that it was just as erroneous to believe that terrorism is unrelated to political and social factors, as it is to assume that terrorists are merely products of their environment. "Terrorism will only be defeated if we act to solve the political disputes or long-standing conflicts that generate support for it," stated Annan, adding that "[i]f we do not, we should find ourselves acting as recruiting sergeants for the very terrorists we seek to suppress."<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between various contributing factors and terrorism has been the topic of discussion among scholars since the 1960s. Progress has been made over the years through research in an effort to understand the nature of terrorism, why it emerges and escalates and subsequently how to counter it. The focus on identifying the causes of terrorism has escalated in light of developing threats, prompting intense debates and consideration, yet has not resulted in agreement on any one precise cause. Furthermore, while the subject has been explored in various forms producing a plethora of literature, the only agreement that seems to have been reached is predicated on the notion that there exists no single root cause of terrorism, or even a common set of causes.

Partly due to the fact that terrorism as a phenomenon is very diverse, constantly changing and extremely complex, the controversial issue also lacks a generally accepted definition. Thus, with a multitude of factors and circumstances contributing to terrorism and on the basis of prevailing literature for this report, we distinguish two types of causes: *root causes* and *trigger causes*, which are also sometimes referred to as *preconditions* and *precipitants*. The terms preconditions and precipitants are usually attributed to the research of Martha

---

<sup>1</sup> The speech in its entirety can be accessed online - <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/sgsm8885.doc.htm>.

Crenshaw (1981) and are explained in more detail in the following sections of the report.

With the aim of investigating and analyzing the root and trigger causes of terrorism, this report will first discuss and conceptualize the terms in question. Providing an overview of the prevailing literature, the causes of terrorism will be addressed as they related to a multitude of factors spanning a number of academic fields. A theoretical framework is introduced to highlight the diversity of approaches employed in analyzing the nature of terrorism. Based on the reviewed literature a comprehensive list of concrete factors is then presented to illustrate the scope of root and trigger causes. Finally, drawing on the assessment of elements, five of the most commonly cited characteristics thought to contribute to the root and trigger causes are illustrated in a table ranging from the broadest to the more specific underlying factors.

## **2. DEFINITIONS**

By replacing politics with violence, terrorism can have a destabilizing affect on civil society, posing a threat to democracy or legitimately constituted governments. Differentiating terrorist offences from other forms of criminal acts – politically motivated or otherwise – is therefore essential in trying to establish the root causes of the phenomenon and is dealt with in more detail in other reports within the workpackage. Defining terrorism has also been an equally daunting task. With more than one hundred definitions spanning across a number of academic fields, there has been no significant progress in securing a universally accepted definition. A brief conceptualization of the term is covered in the subsequent section, however a more detailed discussion on the definitional aspects of terrorism can be found in the chapter “The Nature of Terrorism: Defining Terrorism with the EU” of this workpackage.

### **2.1 *What is Terrorism?***

A highly complex and constantly changing phenomenon, terrorism stands at the forefront of national and international agendas. Taking on many forms, terrorism is associated with a wide variety of groups and motivations. The distinction between a terrorist and others, for example guerrillas or freedom fighters, continues to rouse debates and depends to a large extent on the perspective used. Moreover, the emotionally charged nature of the term itself makes it especially difficult to define. In simple terms, terrorism is the threat or use of violence for political, religious or ideological purposes designed to influence the attitudes and behaviour of a group or to achieve objectives that are otherwise unattainable (Rapoport and Alexander, eds. 1982). Terrorism differs from other forms of violence in the choice of targets and modes of activity. While definitions of the phenomenon abound, the international community has thus far not been able to reach a consensus on one general definition.

As the UN continues to push for a comprehensive definition acceptable to all member states, the EU has established one through the Framework Decision on Combating of Terrorism. This definition includes elements on the characterization of the act, as well as the motivation, intent, goal and result of the act. For the purpose of this report, terrorism is defined in accordance with the EU definition as an offence under national law, which, given its nature or context, may

seriously damage a country or an international organization where committed with the aim of:

- seriously intimidating a population, or
- unduly compelling a Government or international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act, or
- seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization.

(Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 (2002/475/JHA)<sup>2</sup>

### *2.1.1 Root causes and trigger causes*

The search for causes and causality is a central theme in all social sciences, deriving from the inherent need to understand the occurrence of particular phenomena. Moreover, in dealing with undesirable occurrences, we seek to understand the 'why' and 'how' in order to develop appropriate counter measures. Unfortunately, these questions seldom lend themselves to clear answers. One can, however, often distinguish different sets or levels of causes. With regard to the latter category, a typical distinction is that between deep, intermediate and direct causes. In this section we draw a distinction between 'root causes' and 'trigger causes', which are also often described as 'preconditions' and 'precipitants,' and for the purposes of this study, define the terms, based on the work of Martha Crenshaw (1981), as follows:

- o root causes (or preconditions) are those factors that set the stage for terrorism over the long run,
- o whereas trigger causes (or precipitants) are specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism.

Specific examples of each will be provided in the following sections of this report and will serve as a basis for distilling a list of the most commonly agreed upon causes.

---

<sup>2</sup> The complete definition can be found online at [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2002/l\\_164/l\\_16420020622en00030007.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2002/l_164/l_16420020622en00030007.pdf).

### **3. SCHOLARLY RESEARCH OVERVIEW**

The study of terrorism is multidisciplinary spanning a number of fields including political science, psychology, criminology, sociology, history and many others. Researchers from these fields have contributed to further developing our understanding of the phenomena, yet it has generally raised more questions than provided answers. The following sections present a general overview of the scholarly research, highlighting the range of approaches and examining the progress that has been made thus far.

#### ***3.1 Studying Causes of Terrorism***

Since the 1960s a plethora of studies have been published on the topic of terrorism, however, the number of publications that directly address the root causes has been surprisingly limited. Following the explosion of publications on the subject in the 1970s, terrorism research has produced steady growth in the number of publications since and according to some the quantity has not reflected improvements in quality (Silke, 2003). It is true that various aspects of terrorism have been tackled in recent years, including radical group affiliation, civil violence and suicide terrorism. However, despite the proliferation of academic studies and political discussions calling for the a closer look at the root causes, there has been no real improvement in this area. As Andrew Silke points out "[a] review of recent research work found that only about 20 percent of published articles on terrorism are providing substantially new knowledge on the subject" (2003: xvii). As such ongoing research continues to be based on the findings from years past.

##### *3.1.1 General Qualitative Analyses of Causes of Terrorism*

Among the most often quoted publications on the causes of terrorism is attributed to Martha Crenshaw's renowned article, "The causes of terrorism" (1981). In this article Crenshaw highlights the difficulty of finding general explanations for terrorism and contends that it is possible to distinguish different types of variables, as a starting point for further research on causal relations. Crenshaw's objective to outline an approach conducive to analysis of the causes of terrorism in order to distinguish "a common pattern of causation from the historically unique" (1981: 379), is predicated on a comparison of different cases

of terrorism. Differentiating between three groups of variables: strategic, structural and psychological, Crenshaw emphasizes the idea that terrorism is a product of rational political choice. A conceptual distinction is drawn with the division of the structural variables into preconditions (root causes) and precipitants (trigger causes). Preconditions are further divided and classified into enabling (or permissive) factors that provide opportunities for terrorism to occur, and situations that serve as direct motivations for terrorist campaigns (1981: 381). Although Crenshaw's article offers ample ideas for further research and has often been quoted by others, few scholars have picked up the challenge to bring our understanding of causes of terrorism to a higher level.

Another influential article, published twelve years after Crenshaw's and dealing with the subject, is that of Jeffrey Ian Ross. In "Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model" (1993), Ross identifies three prominent categories of causes of terrorism, comparable to those of Crenshaw, namely structural and psychological causes, as well as those related to the concept of 'rational choice.' Ross concludes that the first generation of causal models, including his own work, can be considered valuable in describing terrorism, but lack the necessary tools for in-depth analysis of the phenomenon.

Addressing terrorism's nature as a collective action, Dipak Gupta (2005) seeks to understand why people engage in such action in the name of a group based on ethnicity, religion, nationalism or ideology. Gupta presents arguments that are rooted in economic and socio-psychological dimensions of human motivations. Drawing a distinction between constructs that represent grievances and those that lead to violence, Gupta points out that "[p]olitical violence takes place when a leader gives voice to the frustration by formulating a well-defined social construction of collective identity and paints in vivid colour the images of 'us' and 'them'" (2005: 19). In other words, political, economic and religious grievances are not in and of themselves factors which lead to terrorism. The root causes can thus stay dormant until a trigger mechanism is activated, leading to an outbreak of violence.

Further building on Crenshaw's findings, Rakesh Gupta (1998) and Charles Kegley (2003) present recommendations and case-specific conclusions for explaining causes of terrorism. Gupta's research tries to identify relevant leads for an organizational theory of causation using India as a case study. With a general overview of existing literature, Gupta's work does not produce new

insights into specific causes of terrorism, but nonetheless expands on elements of socio-economic causation, legitimation process and identity movements. The edited volume of Kegley divides the subject of terrorism into three categories of analysis. The author places specific emphasis on the importance of initial characterization of terrorism, pointing out that how it is defined will consequently shape the resulting conclusions of its causes. Two of the book's chapters are by Crenshaw herself in which she focuses on the causes of terrorism and terrorism as a globalized civil war. Crenshaw's findings include that patterns of terrorism may be a consequence of strategic conceptions rather than a set of common circumstances or conditions.

Additional authors and scholars who have focused on terrorism and political violence and subsequently shed light on its causes include the books of Paul Wilkinson *Terrorism and the Liberal State* (1986), *Terrorism versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* (2000) Walter Laqueur *The Age of Terrorism* (1987), *A History of Terrorism* (2001), Ted Robert Gurr *Why Men Rebel* (1970) and Tore Bjørgo, *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality And Ways Forward* (2005). While all have attempted to explain the occurrence of modern terrorism, none have produced specific set(s) of causes.

In addition to published books and articles, numerous conferences have been held throughout the world in an effort to bring together experts and further the knowledge on the subject. Producing working paper series and furthering the debate on the subject, notable conferences in recent years include "Fighting Terrorism for Humanity: A Conference on Roots of Evil" held in Oslo in 2003<sup>3</sup> and "Democracies Confronting Terrorism" summit in Madrid in 2005<sup>4</sup>. The meetings produced insightful results and have contributed to our development of a comprehensive list of root and trigger causes presented further in this report.

---

<sup>3</sup> With the objective of debunking myths about the root causes of terrorism, a panel of leading experts in the field met to provide input from the research community and included such luminaries as Dr. Michael Stohl and Jerrold Post, among others.

<sup>4</sup> Held on the first anniversary of the Madrid bombings, the Madrid Summit was the largest gathering of terrorism and security experts. Aiming to launch a strategic dialogue between scholars, practitioners and policymakers, the gathering was also intended to come up practical suggestions. Following the Summit, a series of three working papers were produced for *Club de Madrid* outlining the elements of a comprehensive response to terrorism. Members of the working groups included notable researchers like Marc Sageman, Dipak Gupta, Martha Crenshaw, Jerrold Post, T.R. Gurr and many others.

### 3.1.2 Psychological Research on Causes of Terrorism

A number of scholars have tried to distinguish different causes of terrorist activities by focusing primarily on the psychology of individual terrorists or group processes. However, many of these studies only discuss the causes and motivations of individual cases or groups, lacking arguments and explanations of activities at the aggregate level. Among the exceptions, is the work of Jerrold Post entitled "The Radical Group in Context: 1. An Integrated Framework for the Analysis of Group Risk of Terrorism" (2002) which investigates the psycho-logic thinking of individuals involved in terrorism, and builds a framework for analysis with regard to the extent of conditions and characteristics that can increase the risk that a radical group will shift to terrorism. The author criticizes those who regard terrorism as a course of action and a deliberate choice among different alternatives. Post argues that "... political terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces, and that their special psycho-logic is constructed to rationalize acts they are psychologically compelled to commit" (1990: 25). While Post does not provide a specific list of root and trigger causes for terrorism, his research of critical internal and external variables of radicalization provides fertile grounds for assessing the causes of terrorism.

Another scholar that stresses the importance of psychological research of the causes of terrorism is Bruce Hoffman, professor of Security Studies at Georgetown University. In his studies, Hoffman analyzes the changing face of terrorism, pointing to the fact that it is often viewed as a means of communicating a message and using violence as a way to further solidify the triumph of their cause. Furthermore, Hoffman (1999) establishes several common traits, including strategic targeting and the undeniable belief in the ultimate triumph over their enemies. According to Hoffman terrorists live in the divinely decreed future, a point in time where the ultimate realization of their political destiny can be attained.

Additional insight into the psychology of terrorists, as well as a deeper analysis of their actions could result in a number of causal variables that bring them to commit terrorist crimes. In part, such insight can be observed in the recent work of Marc Sageman who in his book *Understanding Terror Networks* (2004), challenges conventional thinking about terrorism as a phenomenon and discusses the impetus behind the proliferation of terrorist networks. Sageman's

study is based on comprehensive biographical data of over one hundred participants in terrorist activities, detailing their accounts of affiliation with terrorist cells. Similarly to Post, while Sageman does not produce a list of concrete root or trigger causes, his work nonetheless contributes to the understanding of individuals involved in terrorism has some practical implications for the war on terror.

### *3.1.3 Empirical Analyses of Causes of Terrorism*

In addition to qualitative studies of which the above-mentioned studies are examples of, the method of quantitative – here called empirical – analysis is employed by a number of scholars investigating causes of terrorism. Many of these studies focus on the falsification of causal links between variables and different forms of terrorism. A recent example is the research work of Sean P. O’Brien on the possible connections between the foreign policy of superpowers in times of international crises and (state-sponsored) international terrorism. For a long time, especially in the United States, state support for terrorism was regarded as one of the important causes of terrorism. Following a time series analysis of three alternative hypotheses based on terrorism data sets for the period of 1968-1986, one of the conclusions O’Brien derives is that terrorism increases after one party feels victimized by an intervention by the United States (O’Brien 1996). These and other empirically based conclusions, however, do not go further than simply ‘proving’ common sense conclusions. While vehement debates on the subject prevail, our understanding of the causes of terrorism remains limited. Ultimately, even without these kinds of studies, it is not surprising that following their intervention in Iraq, United States troops and those of its allies are facing terrorist attacks.

A more interesting and definitely more surprising study is the often-quoted work of Alan Krueger and Jitka Malečková entitled “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” (2003). Based on, among other factors, public opinion polls, Krueger and Malečková refute the existence of a causal link between low education or poverty and terrorism in Israel/Palestine and Lebanon, discovering that “any connection between poverty, education and terrorism is indirect, complicated and probably quite weak” (2003: 120). Moreover, the study ascertains that the level of education of individuals involved

in terrorism in these areas is somewhat higher than average. Additionally, the background of suicide terrorists covers all socio-economic layers of society, further reiterating that "economic theory is unlikely to give a very convincing answer ... as to whether poverty or low education are important root causes of terrorism" (2003: 123). Undoubtedly, there are a number of scholars and studies that may disagree with this line of reasoning, however additional empirical evidence has thus far not been contradictory.

#### **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Apart from the publications by the above-mentioned authors, specific studies addressing the root causes of terrorism are scarce. Moreover, the relatively limited body of literature has not led to generally accepted paradigms of causal relationships. Numerous books and articles repeat the specifics on certain terrorist attacks and terrorist groups cited in previous publications and detailed studies. These readings may be interesting, however they do not contribute to new insights in the quagmire of actually explaining specific root causes. Disagreement between scholars studying terrorism seems to suggest that it may be too simplistic and erroneous to explain an act of terrorism by a single cause (Hudson, 1999: 15).

An inventory of scholarly publications with titles that include the words 'theory' or 'model' in combination with 'terrorism' does not produce an extensive list. Moreover, many of these studies can hardly be considered theoretical as they contain superficial descriptions or future scenarios. Some of the more interesting studies focus on possible psychological causes of terrorist behaviour, including that of Jerrold Post (1985) and Jeffrey Ross (1996).

In this particular field of study, progress has been made over the past few decades. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s the general assumption was that terrorists were mentally disturbed, thanks to much empirical research, today there is a much more diverse picture of 'the terrorist'. In fact, the outstanding common characteristic of individuals involved in terrorism is their normality (Crenshaw, 1981: 390). Terrorism is often the connecting link among varying personalities and apart from the results of socio-psychological studies of terrorism, the general situation remains one in which too little is known about causality (von Hippel, 2003). Additional comparative research is thus need to

further understand causality. Conclusive comparable studies employing a set of fixed variables to describe and analyze terrorism would be an asset in further developing the theoretical framework.

In contrast to the 1960s and 1970s when theoretical thinking on the cause of terrorism was dominated almost exclusively by political scientists and sociologists, today a much broader range of scholars emerged. From theological scientists to economists and psychologists, academics have pushed the construction of terrorism theories into new directions. The increase of groups interested in the phenomenon, however has not resulted in many publications that contain (elements) of a comprehensive theoretical framework. Studies focused on identifying the root causes of transnational terrorism are even less prevalent.

A short list of authors and institutes that have conducted thorough long-term research on the subject includes: Rohan Gunaratna, head of International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research; Bruce Hoffman, professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University; Brian Jenkins, senior advisor at the RAND Corporation; Yonah Alexander of the International Center for Terrorism Studies, Washington; Walter Laqueur of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington; and Yoram Schweitzer, Solly Ganor and Reuven Paz of The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, Herzliya. (Muller, 2003: 207-208).

#### **4.1 *Approaches to Terrorism Analysis***

As it has already been illustrated, terrorism is a phenomenon of multi-causal factors. However, thus far a concrete theory is yet to be developed. Notwithstanding the divergence of considerations on the root causes of terrorism, it is possible to categorize some of the more generally accepted views. Roughly speaking there are four categories of approaches to terrorism analysis: 1) the multi-causal approach; 2) the political or structural approach; 3) the organizational approach; and 4) the psychological approach.

#### *4.1.1 Multi-Causal Approach*

Emphasizing the presence of multiple causal variables, this approach incorporates psychological considerations, economic, political, religious and sociological factors as contributors to understanding the causes of terrorism. Some scholars, Paul Wilkinson (1977) for example, view the causes of political violence including ethnic, religious and ideological conflicts as causes of terrorism. Of the four categories, the multi-causal approach provides the least insight into the root causes of terrorism, contending that terrorism is the result of a combination of factors. The authors who fall within this category, such as Alan Krueger and Jitka Malečková, combine factors of previous approaches to explain the root causes of terrorism, or introduce new factors in combination with some of the aforementioned ones.

#### *4.1.2 Political or Structural Approach*

A political approach presupposes that the causes of terrorism can be found in environmental factors. For example, national or international arenas, as well as sub-national spheres like universities can be conducive to the rise of terrorism (Hudson, 1999: 16). This approach, which was mostly adhered to by left-wing researchers in the sixties and the seventies, including Ross (1996) and Ted Robert Gurr (1970; 2006) indicate poverty, oppression and inequality as causes of terrorism. Central to Gurr's research is the notion of relative deprivation, a term often used to describe feelings of economic, political, or social deprivation that are relative rather than absolute. Gurr suggests that the inability to obtain what is felt to be justified triggers feelings of frustration that ultimately facilitates the emergence of collective violence.

In addition to environmental factors, scholars have sought to identify preconditions – issues that set the stage for terrorism in the long term, and precipitants – mechanisms that activate the occurrence of terrorism. In a similar vein, preconditions are further subdivided into permissive factors which provide opportunities for terrorism to happen, and situations or reasons that directly inspire terrorist campaigns (Crenshaw, 1981: 381). The political approach thus seeks to distinguish what in the surrounding atmosphere can contribute to an individual's involvement in terrorism.

#### *4.1.3 Rational or Organizational Approach*

With a focus on terrorism as a rational strategic choice, this approach rests on the idea that organizations consciously make the decision to use the instrument of terrorism as the best option to attain certain political goals. Adherents to the rational approach, including Martha Crenshaw, would argue that terrorism is most definitely not the product of individual decisions or personal developments, but rather the result of a group process and its collective, rational decisions. This is highly speculative since no empirical studies have provided evidence of how decisions are reached collectively in terrorist groups. However, as Hudson rightfully points out, the organizational approach may be more relevant for groups that exhibit more traditional structures with clear chains of command rather than loose terrorist networks (1999: 17).

#### *4.1.4 Psychological Approach*

The psychological approach takes into account the motivation of individuals that resort to terrorism. Concerned with the personalities, beliefs and attitudes of terrorists and employed by scholars like as Marc Sageman (2004) and Bruce Hoffman (1999), this approach focuses primarily on the features and characteristics of the individual perpetrator or terrorist group; examining the behaviour, recruitment methods, individual profiles, and 'careers' of terrorists. Another study using the psychological approach was conducted by Robert Pape (2003) in an effort to understand the impetus behind suicide terrorism. Through an analysis of 188 cases, Pape refuted traditional thinking that modern suicide terrorism is religiously motivated. In concord with the findings of others, Pape was unable to establish a common profile for suicide terrorists. Based on the results of these studies one could conclude that resolving the so-called socio-political causes of terrorism would be futile, since terrorism, as a means of expression of specific ideas and needs, is part of the human disposition.

In sum, it is clear that none of the four approaches provide us with all the answers on the root and trigger causes of terrorism. Thus, a lack of consensus on the interrelation of the different factors perseveres.

## **5. LIST OF ROOT AND TRIGGER CAUSES OF TERRORISM**

With an overview of the theoretical approaches and conclusions drawn from scholarly literature, this section distils a number of concrete root and trigger causes of terrorism. It should be stressed that the following list is not all-inclusive and does not aim to present a comprehensive set of all causes of terrorism. Rather it is meant to illustrate the multiplicity of causal factors that often contribute to terrorism and are generally agreed upon in the academic community. The list is divided into two sets of causes in an effort to distinguish the sometimes overlapping factors and provide additional clarity and structure and is drawn from a comprehensive inventory of terrorism publications in Randy Borum's (2003) *Psychology of Terrorism*.

### **5.1 Root Causes**

1. The relationship between terrorism and democracy continues to challenge scholars in their search for causes of terrorism. It is generally agreed that a lack of democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law are preconditions for many forms of domestic terrorism. Generally, the most democratic and the most totalitarian societies have the lowest levels of oppositional violence. Failed or weak states on the other hand, lack the capacity – or sometimes the will – to exercise territorial control. This often leaves a power vacuum that is can be exploited by terrorist organizations to maintain safe havens, training facilities or serve as bases for launching terrorist campaigns. However, this should not be perceived as simply a lack of democracy or democratic processes. Long standing liberal democracies with established traditions of free speech and tolerance have been the targets of both domestic and foreign terrorism. As Crenshaw contends “[d]emocracy and terrorism are not polar opposites: saying ‘yes’ to democracy,

unfortunately, does not mean saying 'no' to terrorism" (Club de Madrid, 2005: 14).

2. Rapid modernization and urbanization in the form of high economic growth has also been found to correlate strongly with the emergence of ideological terrorism, but not with ethno-nationalist terrorism (Crenshaw 1981). This may be particularly important in countries where sudden wealth (e.g. from oil) has precipitated a change from tribal to high-tech societies in one generation or less. When traditional norms and social patterns crumble or are made to seem irrelevant, new radical ideologies that are sometimes based on religion or perhaps nostalgia for a glorious past, may become attractive to certain segments of society.
3. Extremist ideologies of a secular or religious nature are at least an intermediate cause of terrorism, although people usually adopt such extremist ideologies as a consequence of more fundamental political or personal reasons. When these worldviews are adopted and applied in order to interpret situations and guide action, they tend to take on a dynamics of their own, and may serve to dehumanize the enemy and justify atrocities.
4. Historical antecedents of political violence, civil wars, revolutions, dictatorships or occupation may lower the threshold for acceptance of political violence and terrorism, and impede the development of non-violent norms among all segments of society. The victim role as well as longstanding historical injustices and grievances may be constructed to serve as justifications for terrorism. When young children are socialized into cultural value systems that celebrate martyrdom, revenge and hatred of other ethnic or national groups, this is likely to increase their readiness to support or commit violent atrocities when they grow up.
5. Hegemony and inequality of power. When local or international powers possess an overwhelming power compared to oppositional groups, and the latter see no other realistic ways to forward their cause by normal

political or military means, "asymmetrical warfare" can represent a tempting option. Terrorism offers the possibility of achieving high political impact with limited means.

6. Illegitimate or corrupt governments frequently give rise to opposition that may turn to terrorist means if other avenues are not seen as realistic options for replacing these regimes with a more credible and legitimate government or a regime which represents the values and interests of the opposition movement.
7. Powerful external actors upholding illegitimate governments may be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to needed regime change. Such external support to illegitimate governments is frequently seen as foreign domination through puppet regimes serving the political and economic interests of foreign sponsors.
8. Repression by foreign occupation or by colonial powers has given rise to a great many national liberation movements that have sought recourse in terrorist tactics and other political means. Despite their use of terrorist methods, some liberation movements enjoy considerable support and legitimacy among their own constituencies, and sometimes also from segments of international public opinion.
9. The experience of discrimination on the basis of ethnic or religious origin is the chief root cause of ethno-nationalist terrorism. When sizeable minorities are systematically deprived of their rights to equal social and economic opportunities, obstructed from expressing their cultural identities (e.g. forbidden to use their language or practice their religion), or excluded from political influence, this can give rise to secessionist movements that may turn to terrorism or other forms of violent struggle. Ethnic nationalisms are more likely to give rise to (and justify) terrorism than are moderate and inclusive civic nationalisms.
10. Failure or unwillingness by the state to integrate dissident groups or emerging social classes may lead to their alienation from the political

system. Some groups are excluded because they hold views or represent political traditions considered irreconcilable with the basic values of the state. Large groups of highly educated young people with few prospects of meaningful careers within a blocked system will tend to feel alienated and frustrated. Excluded groups are likely to search for alternative channels through which to express and promote political influence and change. To some, terrorism can seem the most effective and tempting option.

11. The experience of social injustice is a main motivating cause behind social revolutionary terrorism. Relative deprivation or great differences in income distribution (rather than absolute deprivation or poverty) in a society have in some studies been found to correlate rather strongly with the emergence of social revolutionary political violence and ideological terrorism, but less with ethno-nationalist terrorism.

12. The presence of charismatic ideological leaders able to transform widespread grievances and frustrations into a political agenda for violent struggle is a decisive factor behind the emergence of a terrorist movement or group. The existence of grievances alone is only a precondition: someone is needed who can translate that into a programme for violent action.

## **5.2 *Trigger Causes***

The first condition that can be considered a direct cause of terrorism is the existence of concrete grievances among an identifiable subgroup of a larger population, such as an ethnic minority discriminated against by the majority. This is not to say, however, that the existence of a dissatisfied minority or majority is a necessary or even a sufficient cause for terrorism; for not all those who are discriminated against turn to terrorism.

The second condition that can create motivations for terrorism is the lack of opportunity for political participation. The last category of situational factors involves the concept of a precipitated event that immediately precedes outbreaks of terrorism. While general consensus points to the fact that precipitants (trigger

causes) are usually unpredictable, a common pattern has emerged that highlights particular government actions as catalysts for terrorism. Terrorist retaliations can thus occur as a result of unusual and unexpected use of force by the government, a so-called "action-reaction syndrome" (Crenshaw 1981, 385). In general, provocative events that call for revenge or action, may trigger terrorist action by spoilers on both sides. Contested elections, police brutality and even peace talks are all examples of triggering causes.

**6. MOST RELEVANT ROOT AND TRIGGER CAUSES**

Based on the prevailing scholarly literature and the above-mentioned list of concrete examples of identified root and trigger causes of terrorism, we have identified the top five reasons for each. The specific causes within each category – root and trigger causes – have been ranked from the most general or broad aspects to the more specific underlying factors.

<b>ROOT CAUSES</b>	<b>TRIGGER CAUSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Rapid modernization and urbanization are strongly correlated with the emergence of ideological terrorism</li> <li>2) Lack of Democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law is a precondition to many forms of domestic terrorism</li> <li>3) Historical antecedents of political violence</li> <li>4) Repression by foreign occupation or colonial powers</li> <li>5) Experience of discrimination based on ethnic or religious origins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Events that call for revenge or action (i.e. contested elections, police brutality, etc.)</li> <li>2) Lack of opportunity for political participation</li> <li>3) Concrete grievances among a subgroup of a larger population</li> <li>4) Importance of belonging to a strong group for development of identity</li> <li>5) Peace talks</li> </ul>

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Given the multifaceted and diverse scope of terrorism, distinguishing the root and trigger causes of the phenomenon has proven to be an equally complex

undertaking. Bearing in mind the limited range of scholarly literature that directly address the causes, we can conclude that the question of 'why' and 'how' are still not crystal clear. Additional research is needed not only to serve as a fundamental theoretical framework on the topic, but also to bring us closer to understanding those aspects of causes that can eventually be isolated as specific root and trigger causes of terrorism and thus be sufficiently dealt with.

While the aforementioned authors and scholars have made significant contributions to the field, many have raised more questions than they have provided answers. Thus, while we continue to search for the answers, it is imperative that we do not perpetuate unfounded ideas as the basis for understanding the causes of terrorism. This rings especially true today when the temptation to focus solely on certain forms of religious-inspired terrorism are immense. Investigating the balance between different sets of factors may also contribute to a better understanding of the nature of the phenomenon. Perhaps Kofi Annan said it best - "[w]e should not pretend that [...] the decision to resort to terrorism is unrelated to the political, social and economic situation in which people find themselves. But we are also mistaken if we assume, equally, that terrorists are mere products of their environment. The phenomenon is more complex than that." (United Nations Secretary General, 2003).

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Bjørngo, T. ed. (2005). *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality and Way Forward*, London: Routledge.

Borum R. (2003). *Psychology of Terrorism*, University of South Florida, available online <<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/208551.pdf>>.

Club de Madrid International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security. (2005). *Addressing the Causes of Terrorism, Volume I*. Spain.

Crenshaw, M. (1981). "The Causes of Terrorism." *Comparative Politics*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 379-399.

Council Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism. (2002, June 13). Official Journal of the European Communities (2002/475/JHA), available online <[http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2002/l\\_164/l\\_16420020622en00030007.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2002/l_164/l_16420020622en00030007.pdf)>.

Gupta, D. K. (2004). "Exploring Roots of Terrorism" in T.Bjorgo's (ed.) *Root Causes of Terrorism*, London, Routledge, pp.16-32.

Gupta, R. (January-March 1998). "A Comparative Perspective on the Causes of Terrorism". *International Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1 pp. 23-53.

Gurr, T. R. (1968). "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence." *World Politics*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 245-278.

Gurr, T.R. (1970). *Why Men Rebel*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Hoffman, B. (1999). "The Mind of the Terrorist: Perspectives from Social Psychology." *Psychiatric Annals*, vol. 29, no. 6, pp. 337-340.

Hudson R. (September 1999). *The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?*, Report prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress.

Kegley, C. (2003). *New Global Terrorism, The Characteristics, Causes, Controls*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Krueger, A. and J. Maleckova. (Fall 2003). "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *Journal of Economic Perspective*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 119-144.

Krueger, A. B. and J. Maleckova. (2002). "The Economics and The Education of Suicide Bombers: Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?" *The New Republic*. Available online at <<http://www.alanalexandroff.com/nr-krueger.pdf>>.

Kushner, H.W. ed. (2002). *Essential Readings on Political Terrorism: Analyses of Problems and Prospects for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.

Laqueur, W. (1987). *The Age of Terrorism*. England: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Laqueur, W. (2001). *A History of Terrorism*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Muller, E. R., (2003), *Trends in terrorisme*, Alphen aan den Rijn: Kluwer).

O'Brien, S.P. (1996). "Foreign Policy Crises and the Resort to Terrorism: A Time-Series Analysis of Conflict Linkages." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 320-335.

Pape, R. (2003). "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no.3, pp. 343-361.

Post, J. (1985). "Notes on a Psychodynamic Theory of Terrorist Behaviour." *Terrorism*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 41-57.

Post, J. (1990). "Terrorist Psycho-logic: Terrorist Behaviour as a Product of Psychological Forces" in W. Reich (ed.) *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, States of Mind*, England, Cambridge University Press, pp. 25-40.

Post, J. (March-April 2002). "The Radical Group in Context: 1. An Integrated Framework for the Analysis of Group Risk Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 73-100.

Proceedings of the Oslo meeting. (June 2003) *Fighting Terrorism for Humanity: Conference on the Roots of Evil*, available online <[http://www.ipacademy.org/pdfs/FIGHTING\\_TERRORISM.pdf](http://www.ipacademy.org/pdfs/FIGHTING_TERRORISM.pdf)>.

Rapoport, D. and Y. Alexander. (1982). *The Rationalization of Terrorism*. Maryland: University Publications of America.

Reich, W. (1990). *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, States of Mind*. England: Cambridge University Press.

Ross, J. I. (1993). "Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 317-329.

Ross, J. I. (1996). "A Model of the Psychological Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 129-141.

Sageman, M. (2004). *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Silke, A. (2003). *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences*, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

United Nations Secretary General, (22 September, 2003). "Ability to Reason Vital in Fighting Terrorism, Secretary-General Tells Conference." United Nations Press Release SG/SM/8885, available online <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/sqsm8885.doc.htm>>.

Von Hippel K. (January 2003). "The Roots of Religious Extremist Terrorism." <<http://web.archive.org/web/20040604030327/www.kcl.ac.uk/ip/andrewsteele/sept11/papers/root.html>>.

Whittaker, D. (2004). *Terrorists and Terrorism In the Contemporary World*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Wilkinson, P. (1986). *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: New York University Press.

Wilkinson, P. (2000). *Terrorism versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response*. London: Frank Cass.