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Trends. A Post-Postmodern Terrorism: Examples from Colombia and Spain

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A basic concept of terrorism is that the true targets are living, physically unscathed, political leaders--not people who are killed or injured, property damaged or destroyed. The usual behavioral consequences of successful terrorism--after murder, destruction, wounding, damage, or their threats--are political decisions in the terrorist's favor--e.g., often formal recognition of the right to self-determination, new legislation/policy or legislative/policy modifications, granting or gaining of territory, informal or formal rights to various tangible assets.

Often enough the political decision appears unfavorable to the terrorist but results in the target's unwitting self-damage. For example, political leaders and their representatives engage in antiterrorist and counterterrorist measures that are illegal--and frequently immoral, and unethical. In essence the target of the terrorist--by becoming more like the latter--sows the seeds of it's own illegitimacy. By abiding less by principles that one is entrusted to protect, one finds that these very principles are being weakened and cheapened. There may come a time when there is little left of these principles--hence, the unwitting damage.

Such appears to have been the case in Colombia. Outgoing Colombian President Ernesto Samper has admitted that government agents were responsible for massacres and selective assassinations of at least 49 people between 1991 and 1993 in the name of fighting terrorism. So, too, in Spain, the Supreme Court sentenced a former Interior Minister and a Director of State Security to 10 years in prison for kidnapping in the name of fighting terrorism.

This leads to one final observation. The ultimate political objective of some terrorists is the destruction of everything and anything--reflecting not a sensation-seeking bent, not an anarchistic penchant, but one of nihilism. This may even become a trend of a post-postmodern era that both rejects the certainties of conceptual truth and the uncertainties of competing political narratives. By inducing political leaders to engage in self-subversion, post-postmodern terrorists come ever closer to...a premodern era of Russian nihilism? (See Colombian Government admits responsibility in 49 killings. (July 30, 1998). *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Greenberg, J., Porteus, J., Simon, L., & Pyszczynski, T. (1995). Evidence of terror management function of cultural icons: The effects of mortality salience on the inappropriate use of cherished cultural symbols. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, 1221-1228; Laqueur, W. (1996). Postmodern terrorism. *Foreign Affairs*, 75(5); Medd, R., & Goldstein, F. (1997). International terrorism on the eve of a new millennium. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 20, 281-316; Ross, J.I. (1996). A model of the psychological causes of oppositional political terrorism. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 2(2), 129-141; Turgenev, I.S. (1996). *Fathers and Sons* (Norton Critical Edition, M.R. Katz, Ed.). NY: W.W. Norton & Co.; Whitney, C.R. (July 30, 1998). Spanish court jails ex-officials in Basque abduction. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: Colombia, Nihilism, Spain, Terrorism.)