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Trends. Why Terrorism Will Continue in the Twenty-First Century

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Terrorism has long had a number of advantages as a tool to achieve political objectives. It can shorten the long odds when a small number of technologically unsophisticated people confront large numbers of technologically superior people in contesting a political Issue. When terrorism is successful, violence, its threat, or both leads to psychological consequences for observers and survivors--these consequences influencing those who can affect the political objective desired by terrorists to do so.

The twenty-first century provides ever more opportunities for successful terrorism. Technology--viz., in transportation, communication, and weaponization--is more available to more people, including potential terrorists. Moreover, as in any era of technology transition, those who seek new uses for technology--especially uses that are immoral, unethical, illegal, or various combinations--often find it easier to stay ahead of political authorities who seek to counter such efforts. As well, perpetrators of terrorism will find it easier for blame concerning the consequences of their violence, its threat, or both to be attributed to others--even the direct targets of terrorism. This can occur through the perverse logic that as technology increases in sophistication and availability, targets "should have" successfully avoided any noxious consequences of violence or its threat. A target's unsuccessful avoidance becomes tantamount to deserved blame even as the perpetrator recedes into causal invisibility. Such a scenario can be illustrated by Kenyans and Tanzanians suing the United States (U.S.) Government, not the putative perpetrator--Osama Bin Laden--for the consequences of the terrorist bombing of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

Citizens of the world who are anxious of fast-paced change can rest assured that the hoary technique of terrorism will remain part of the new Millennium. (See Crenshaw, M. (1990). Questions to be answered, research to be done, knowledge to be applied. In W. Reich et al. (Eds.). Origins of terrorism: Psychologies, ideologies, theologies, states of mind (pp. 247-260). Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Groebel, J., & Goldstein, J.H. (Eds.). (1989). Terrorism: Psychological perspectives. Sevilla, Spain: Publicaciones De La Universidad De Sevilla; Medd, R., & Goldstein, F. (1997). International terrorism on the eve of a new millenium. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 20, 281-316; Mutua, M. (August 12, 1999). Victims suing victims. The New York Times, p. A21; Ross, J.I. (1996). A model of the psychological causes of oppositional political terrorism. Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 2, 129-141.) (Keywords: Technology, Terrorism.)

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