11-1-2002

# Trends. Sniping as Terrorism and Terrorism as Sniping

Editor

### Recommended Citation

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Abstract: This Trends article discusses the possible terrorist context of sniper attacks perpetrated in the greater Washington, D.C. area in 2002, and the potential impact on global social cohesion.

The recent sniper attacks perpetrated in the greater Washington, D.C. area are largely viewed as founded on motivations commonly found in serial and mass murderers, e.g., feelings of inferiority with overcompensatory reaction via violence, other instrumental strivings, and feelings of anger with expressive reaction via violence. This take on the sniping attacks has allowed most analysts and observers to divorce the attacks from a terrorist context. But even without a publicly voiced political rationale and regardless of whether political is constituted as religious, non-religious ideological, or some other politically induced consciousness, the accused perpetrators of the attacks may, indeed, be embedded in a terrorist context.

It may well be that global terrorism as public discourse is a catalyst, trigger, or threshold violator for non-terrorist violence. In turn, non-terrorist violence appearing through the intermediary variable of global terrorism as public discourse can shed light on vulnerabilities within target law enforcement and intelligence systems or merely on how these systems work so that their vulnerabilities can then be analyzed by terrorists. And, assuming one supports the position that all of social life is political in that there are finite resources for infinite needs so that there are winners and losers in social life, even the expressive as opposed to the instrumental variants of violence can be said to be terrorism.

In an era of globalization wherein there is increasing interdependence among people as to consequence of their behavior and the information they share, one might well fear a global implosion of social cohesion through the explosion of all violence. As this fear would approach reality, sniping and terrorism would only be symptoms of something more deadly. (See Hart, R. P.; Jarvis, S. E., & Lim, E. T. (2002). The American people in crisis: A content analysis. Political Psychology, 23, 417-437; Huddy, L., Feldman, S., Capelos, T., & Provost, C. The consequences of terrorism: Disentangling the effects of personal and national threat. Political Psychology, 23, 485-509; Lichtblau, E., & Shenon, P. (October 26, 2002). Arrested pair are declining to talk, officials say. The New York Times, p. A13; Post, J.M. (2002). Ethical considerations in psychiatric profiling of political figures. Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 25, 635-646; Rich, F. (October 26, 2002). What Al Qaeda learned in D.C. The New York Times, p. A31; Suedfeld, P., & Leighton, D. C. (2002). Early communications in the war against terrorism: An integrative complexity analysis. Political Psychology, 23, 585-599.) (Keywords: Public Discourse, Sniping, Social Cohesion, Terrorism, Violence.)

1