INTRODUCTION:
This study is an attempt to expose Middle Eastern terrorism and its causes and to dispel the myths surrounding it and to make recommendations for the future.

There are many root causes of modern, Middle Eastern terrorism which include structural, facilitator, motivational, and triggering roots. These roots must be understood so that we can understand the realities of modern Middle Eastern terrorism and dispel the myths, which are potentially leading to an increase in terrorist activities. Some of these myths include strongly linking poverty to terrorism, linking state collapse to terrorism, and the thought that terrorism is a very effective tool that works and should be feared. Middle Eastern terrorism is misunderstood by the general population, and my findings will lead not only to a better understanding of these misunderstandings, but also an investigation of where they originate and how to dispel them.

Ultimately, my research and analysis suggests that we consider the following ways to aid our country potentially leading to an increase in terrorist activities. Some of these myths include strongly linking poverty to terrorism, linking state collapse to terrorism, and the thought that terrorism is a very effective tool that works and should be feared. Middle Eastern terrorism is misunderstood by the general population, and my findings will lead not only to a better understanding of these misunderstandings, but also an investigation of where they originate and how to dispel them.

DEFINITIONS:

Terrorism—“a collective action...a political act taken in the name of a group based on ethnicity, religion, nationalism or ideological orientation” (Bjorgo p. 16). Or, “a set of methods or strategies used either as a means to an end or as an end in itself” the main method is the use of violence against non-combatants in order to achieve a psychological effect of fear on others than the immediate combatants for a political purpose” (Bjorgo p. 19).

True Believer—individuals motivated by ideology or the desire to enhance the welfare of the entire group” (Bjorgo 19). These ideologies are carried out by the use of homicide and suicide as a mechanism to create a perceived reality that abounds with threats and challenges.

Mercenary—who are motivated by self-interest and the idea that terrorism will allow them to gain wealth, power, and prestige. Their goal is to preserve their own lives and maintain the power and wealth they amass.

Captive Participant—Those who are forced to participate as a result of coercion, duress, or the threat of violence.

Structural Causes—Structural causes effect people’s lives at a level that they may not be able to comprehend. Examples of these causes are globalization, modernization, demographic imbalances, class structure, etc.

Facilitator Causes—This cause makes terrorism attractive and possible. Examples include the modern mass media, transportation, weapons technology, weak state control of territory, etc.

Motive or Ideological Causes—The actual grievances people experience personally, motivating them to act.

Triggering Causes—A direct precipitant of terrorist action. This could be a political mishap, an insane act committed by the enemy, or any event that may call for revenge or action.

DISCUSSION:

1. There are three rationales and motivations behind terrorism—ideology (true believer), greed (mercenary), and fear (captured participant)—they are often indistinguishable from each other. Not all terrorists are the same in their motivations.

2. A collective action…a political act taken in the name of a group based on ethnicity, p. 19).

3. There are some “causes” of terrorism that are not always easy to distinguish, but rather to place it beyond the pale of dialogue and negotiation”. Our message should be, even if terrorism is a method for alleviating that grievance, we must try to understand or work with any entity that engages in this way, rather we will destroy the ability of your entity to engage in terror. Any other approach will simply encourage terrorism as a means of negotiation (Dershewitz).

4. The final argument is that while both previous arguments are extremely legitimate and make excellent points, there is a middle ground that can draw from both sides.

DISCUSSION:

According to Karin Von Hippel, an effective counter and anti-terrorism campaign “must incorporate a system that makes several contributions to terrorism. First, it must reduce the appeal of terrorism, and must reduce the perceived advantages of terrorism. Second, it must make it easier for people to try to understand terrorism. Third, it must put terrorism out of their consciousness, and make it a lower priority. The goal is not to just eradicate terrorism, but rather to place it beyond the pale of dialogue and negotiation”. Our message should be, even if terrorism is a method for alleviating that grievance, we must try to understand or work with any entity that engages in this way, rather we will destroy the ability of your entity to engage in terror. Any other approach will simply encourage terrorism as a means of negotiation (Dershewitz).

5. Myth—Terrorism works and should be feared

DISCUSSION:

According to a survey given to 48 Embry-Riddle students, the majority believed that terrorism was effective. Only 2 in 3 believed it wasn’t effective at all. The reality is that terrorism is a much bigger problem than terrorism, and an individual is forty times more likely to be the victim of a homicide than a victim of a terrorist attack. Another study showed that out of twenty-eight terrorist groups, including the complete list of foreign terrorist organizations designated by the US Department of State since 2001, they were only successful with their objectives seven percent of the time. The only way to gauge the differences between the three is to determine the "revealed preferences" of the different groups. When the difference between ideology and profit motive is determined, it is easier to understand the terrorist’s engagement and combat of their adversaries based on their preferred and most favored tactics. Therefore, finding the roots of terrorism can become even more difficult due to the different motivations and reasons behind terrorism, but still very important (Bjorgo p. 19).

6. Myth—Terrorism is linked to State Collapse

DISCUSSION:

According to the survey, eighty-three percent of students believed terrorism was linked to state collapse. The idea was that collapsing states such as Afghanistan and Somalia would be breeding grounds for terrorists, leading to the “weak or nonexistent governance structure, and the inability of the intergovernmental community to oversee and regulate trade or movements of people and goods through land strips and ungoverned enclaves” (Hippel p. 31). While some may think this would be a perfect environment for terrorists to conduct their business, it is actually much more dangerous for them to be there. These places are hazardous to terrorists because they are operating in an insecure and foreign environment, where there is limited security and the infrastructure is unreliable. It is not clear whether terrorists use these parts of states no longer controlled by the government to train and “breed” more terrorism; however, the proof is stacked heavily against it.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. More Responsible News Media Coverage

DISCUSSION:

According to the survey, seventy-five percent of students claimed that news media was their main source of information on terrorism. What this means is, the news media must be extremely careful when reporting about terrorism, since their reports form the basis of a lot of people’s opinions on the subject. Also, when news media interviews terrorists, whether they like it or not, the terrorists are being treated as a legitimate news source that is worthy of a “serious public discourse” (Narco p. 22). This elevates the terrorist to the level of a legitimate political actor, which to terrorists, legitimizes the use of terrorism. Instead of spreading fear and giving terrorists the publicity they desire, Martha Crenshaw, a professor of political science at Stanford, states that news media should realize that “the actions of terrorists are based on a subjective interpretation of the world rather than objective reality” (Hamelin et al. p. 4). This is important because all terrorists have to do is commit an act of violence, then leave it up to the rest of the world to figure out why they did it. The perception terrorists have of political and social events is skewed through their own belief system. “Adversaries use political campaigns and news media messages are all built on the premise that behavior follows attitude, and attitude can be changed by delivering the message in the right way at the right time” (Hamelin et al. p. 4). The news media could be a positive force for good by doing this very thing and changing aggressive terrorist behavior by sending positive messages and focusing on the good that happens as a result of fair play, and not focusing on the fear and terror and horrible things happening because of foul play.

2. No Supporting of Terrors

DISCUSSION:

A second method for improvement in the area of terrorism is to refuse to support terrorism in any way and to punish those who do support them. Palestinian terrorists in the time of John Paul II relied heavily on support for their cause. As their terrorist activity increased, support for them and their cause also increased. There was a direct correlation between the targeting of innocent civilians by terrorists and the legitimization of their leaders who were employing these terror tactics for recognition and support of their cause. If this is the message being sent to terrorists, what would anyone reasonable person expect them to do? Keep committing acts of terror of course. If they have no reason to stop, they won’t. We absolutely must give them a reason to stop and punish them for their actions instead of rewarding them for their actions. If we reward terrorists for their actions, we are partly responsible for their terrorist actions ourselves.

3. Re-establish Government in Collapsed States

DISCUSSION:

What the US can do is effectively promote education and employment opportunities, while respecting the local culture. This may be easier said than done; however, it is imperative that we are doing everything in our power to help these countries without going in and trying to forcefully change things. Support for these opportunities should be directed towards “indigenous civil society organizations, which have a better understanding of how to operate successfully in difficult and often oppressive environments” (Hippel p. 36).