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## Pseudo-Political Terrorism

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper describes a variety of homicides which are motivated by psychopathology but rationalized by political ideas. A psychopath or a psychotic with a political rationale is treated differently from one who does not offer ideological explanations. There are psychopaths and psychotics who are unable to act out murderous impulses without political camouflage. Examples from terroristic activities are offered to demonstrate the use of political cover for murderous behavior. The danger of psychopathic terrorism has increased as a result of technology and the failure to differentiate political and pseudo-political terrorism. Such differentiation may be useful in prevention of terrorism and in negotiation with individual terrorists.

**KEYWORDS:** psychiatry, politics, terrorism, homicide

The sociopolitical significance of terrorism has increased markedly in the past 20 years. This paper calls attention to a variety of homicides which are primarily motivated by psychopathology and justified by political rationalizations. The diversity of personalities involved in terroristic behavior is relevant to identification, management, and prevention of terrorism. Forensic scientists inevitably become involved with management identification and prevention of terroristic acts.

The term "terrorism" is used rather loosely; it is applied to any act of violence committed in the name of political goals professed by individuals or groups. In any act of terrorism, the purpose is to induce a state of terror in some target group. Generally, the effort is to elicit a response from those who are in power by violent acts perpetrated against innocent victims; acts of sabotage against installations and property are also utilized at times.

Wilkinson defines political terror as "the use of coercive intimidation by revolutionary movements, regimes or individuals for political motives" [1]. This "coercive intimidation" is achieved through death and destruction perpetrated for "political motives" claimed to be in the best interest of the society. Thus, political terrorists are individuals who have taken it upon themselves to determine what is in society's best interest and who choose violent means to achieve these goals. Clearly, the authority to designate a person a "political terrorist" is too important to be left to terrorists alone; we must understand what such a designation means.

The Internal Revenue Service was faced with a similar problem when it was unable to differentiate cults from religious groups. The practical consequences were that any group which called itself religious could claim tax-exempt status based upon religion.

In a democracy, political terrorism, like religion, is given certain privileges. Although it

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appears unlikely that we can develop a licensing procedure for political terrorists, it may be useful to gain some conceptual clarification in this area.

One of the privileges extended to political terrorists is a relative exemption from moral responsibility for homicide. The terrorist rationalizes killing innocent victims for some higher purpose. This rationalization is convincing enough to persuade the society to grant the terrorists special status. Leile Khaled, the well-known Palestinian terrorist said, "If we throw bombs, it is not our responsibility. You may care for the death of a child, but the whole world ignored the death of Palestinian children for twenty-two years. We are not responsible" [2].

The rationalization offered by Ms. Khaled for the atrocity in which she participated was reported by the news media throughout the world and given the status of a political statement. A perpetrator of similar deeds who does not provide political rationalization for his or her behavior is given quite different treatment.

A 34-year-old man accused of killing an acquaintance in a robbery gave history of being investigated at the age of 12 on the suspicion of causing the derailment of a train. When I asked about it, he claimed that he was unjustly accused. It was, however, apparent from his description that he was enjoying the memory of that feat, but had no justification for identifying with the act.

The dilemma was solved for him by asking how he would have felt had he been the individual who did derail the train. Now he had no difficulty expressing his pleasure. Yes he would have enjoyed seeing a train wreck, provided no one got hurt. I asked, "Was anyone hurt in the train wreck of which you were unjustly accused?" (At this point we both smiled knowingly.) He professed not to know whether anyone was hurt. When I wondered how he could not have known whether anyone was hurt, since after all, he was the first one on the scene in the remote area where the train wreck occurred, he seemed to view my comment as a sign of excessive concern with details, and became annoyed. This individual was a psychopath who perpetrated a sabotage for this personal enjoyment. He failed to connect his act to any political rationalization; therefore, he would be labeled a sadistic psychopath, not a political terrorist.

Many terrorists are merely psychopaths with a political rationalization. A psychopath, even a psychotic, who invokes a political or social justification for his or her behavior seems to undergo a metamorphosis through the magic of semantics. The ugly psychopathic larva becomes a beautiful political butterfly.

### **Social Change and Terrorism**

Although terrorist activity rarely plays a significant role in social change, terrorists often receive credit for having brought about important social change. Unfortunately, crediting terrorists with such achievements further contributes to the rationalization of their behavior.

The pseudo-political terrorist uses ideological camouflage to cover individual psychopathology. Certain psychopaths cannot act out murderous impulses without superego approval. Superego sanction of otherwise forbidden behavior is granted by identification with a political cause. The terrorist becomes a member of a group; his or her individual superego is temporarily submerged in the group superego. A set of rationalizations is acquired to justify sadistic activities. What was once guilt-provoking now becomes a source of pride.

Although the popular belief is that terrorist activities lead to political changes, the inverse is often true: political changes give rise to terrorism by creating conditions favorable for the expression of individual pathology under a political banner. The disruption of an existing political order by a legitimate political movement creates a fertile soil for terroristic activities. Thus, terrorism in its pseudo-political form is a by-product, not the cause, of political change. When Zionist political movement and paramilitary operations of the Hagannah brought about significant political changes in Palestine, the Stern Gang appeared on the

scene. When a political movement represented by its great leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, brought about long-overdue political changes in American society, the Stokely Carmichaels and the Rap Browns entered the arena.

Pseudo-political terrorism is often counterproductive to the aims of the political movement which gave rise to it. Perhaps the most typical example of pseudo-political terrorism was the epidemic of Zebra killings in San Francisco, in which white persons were randomly shot down on the street by a few profoundly disturbed blacks. During this episode, the public fears were heightened to such a degree that public approval was given for unconstitutional searches of young black men.

Concern has been expressed that consideration of the psychopathology of terrorism might be an avoidance mechanism:

Is psychology a reductive way of avoiding consideration of political and ideological issues by pathologizing the individual? Are we wasting our time by trying to find diagnostic labels rather than learning to communicate with terrorists in a way that will prevent violent behavior? [3]

My view is that we have not paid sufficient attention to this pseudo-political form of psychopathology and have been too quick to label it a political manifestation. We have politicized psychopathology far more than we have pathologized political activism.

An example of failure to differentiate political and pseudo-political terrorists has been of practical consequence in exchange of terrorists between Yugoslavia and West Germany. Four German terrorists who had been arrested in Yugoslavia were to be exchanged for Josip Bilandzic. The first German terrorist was Brigitt Monhaupt, who had been discharged from prison in 1977 after various terrorist activities. Subsequently, she was involved in an attack on the German Federal Prosecutor's office, in which rockets were used. In September of the same year, she was involved in a fatal attack on a police officer.

The second terrorist whom the Yugoslavs arrested was Sieglinde Hoffman. Trained as a terrorist by the Palestinians, she was active in Germany and was involved in the assassination of the Federal Attorney General.

The third member of this group was Rolf Clemens Wagner, who was involved in a number of bank robberies perpetrated by his "revolutionary group." He was also involved in the murders of a banker and the President of the German Association of Employers, Herr Schleyer.

The last member of this group was Peter Juergen Boock. Like Hoffman, he received his training as a terrorist from the Palestine Liberation Front and allegedly is the individual who actually shot the banker [4].

West German authorities considered the arrest of these four top terrorists to be a major development in the struggle against widespread terroristic acts. *Der Spiegel* quotes a German criminologist: "The fact that these four were detained for a few months in Yugoslavia accounts for an attack-free period in the Federal Republic" [5].

The Yugoslavian Government was perfectly willing to extradite the four terrorists, provided that West Germany would give them in exchange the Croatian separatist Josip Bilandzic. The West German Government considered Bilandzic a political figure, whereas they viewed the four West Germans who were held by the Yugoslavs as ordinary criminals. The Yugoslavian government did not share this view and therefore released the four terrorists without even giving the German Federal Criminal Office (BKA) any information about them.

The activities of West German terrorists are of special interest in this discussion. They have been involved in a highly successful terrorist operations causing the West German Government many difficulties. They have perpetrated a number of killings and were the subject of extensive coverage in German news media.

They have used political rhetoric, but examination of their pronouncements and demands reveals nothing which resembles a coherent political orientation. Mere use of this rhetoric

has given them the status of political terrorists in the news media, in the international terrorist community, and with the Yugoslav Government. It would be simplistic to characterize the Yugoslav response as a tactical move or as retaliation for the failure of the German Government to deliver the Croatian political terrorist.

The Yugoslavs were not alone in the failure to differentiate political and pseudopolitical terrorists. Shortly before Schleyer's murder by the Red Army Faction (RAF), *LeMonde* (the French counterpart of the *New York Times*) devoted a great deal of space to an article by Jean Genet, a 66-year-old giant of French literature. Genet explained the violence of the RAF as the result of the brutality of the Western German system, stating that "only violence can break human brutality." He concluded by "congratulating the RAF members for the heroic violence" [6].

### **Terrorism and Democracy**

West Germany is one of the most democratic and free nations in the world. A counterphobic attitude related to the Nazi past created a great sensitivity to political repression. West Germany is also the most advanced welfare state in the world. Therefore, it is unreasonable to explain the German terrorist killings by the "brutality" of the West German system.

Could it be that the hypersensitivity of the West German Republic to repressive measures accounts for flourishing of terrorism in that country? In such a setting, murderous psychopaths, endemic in every society, can assume political posture. Could it be that terrorism is associated with governments which are not repressive but to some degree impotent? East Germany is not troubled by terrorist activities.

The Symbionese Liberation Army was a pseudo-political beachhead in the United States. The United States, not encumbered by a totalitarian past, proved itself much more effective than West Germany in dealing with this phenomenon.

The very freedom which is the cornerstone of a democracy is also the "window of vulnerability" to terrorism. This is illustrated by a lawsuit filed by Hans Alexander in a West German court against the measures designed to protect the German Attorney General (see Refs 6 and 7). Attorney General Kurt Rebmann lived in a small neighborhood of Stuttgart. Whenever he left his office he was accompanied by police officers carrying submachine guns; along the way, small tanks assumed position. The suburb where he lived was surrounded by police, and whoever wanted to enter this neighborhood had to show identification to the police officers. Rebmann's car was accompanied by five police cruisers. Throughout the night, various police activities went on in the neighborhood which disturbed Rebmann's neighbors. One of the neighbors pointed out, "A residential area has been placed under a siege state" [6].

The legal document filed on behalf of Hans Alexander was 60 pages long and described the burden to which the neighbors have been subjected, as well as the danger to the neighborhood in a terrorist attack involving rockets and other shootouts. "What is worse," said Alexander, "is that we cannot see the end of it. One cannot live under this type of disruptive stress for years" [6]. The lawsuit demanded that the Government "reestablish bearable conditions" [6]. The neighborhood was united in a demand that Attorney Rebmann move out.

The Federal Republic has gone to extreme lengths in the trials of terrorists to avoid any possible accusation that West Germany is a police state. In this case, the residents of the Stuttgart suburb of Vaihigen and the Attorney General Rebmann had to live in a siege state so that Germany does not have the appearance of a police state. As Rebmann put it, "In these difficult times a great many people have to make sacrifices for the good of the country" [7]. A similar situation exists in U.S. cities in which a small criminal subculture imposes a state of siege upon the citizens. The terrorists and criminals dominate society not only during the actual terroristic episode, but in the interim as well. It is a rather strange paradox that

democratic countries' dedication to freedom enables the minority of criminals and terrorists to oppress the majority.

West German officials and their families lead lives similar to those of prisoners—under constant guard and with limited freedom of movement. The home of Foreign Minister Genscher was surrounded by a high fence with barbed wire and policemen with submachine guns ready to fire. To protect government officials from the terrorists, the West German Government designed special light tanks which constantly patrolled the government district.

The impotence of the government in dealing with terrorism in West Germany was illustrated by a lead story in *Der Spiegel* [8]. The article was highly critical of German police in general and of the Federal Criminal Office in particular (the equivalent of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation). Three terrorists, known to be involved in various killings, had on four occasions hired Karin Reger, a helicopter pilot, to take pictures of various installations under the pretense that they were making a movie. They flew over a prison where a number of terrorists were held and took movies in obvious preparation for an effort to liberate their colleagues. Ms. Reger became suspicious and notified police, who placed the trio under observation. The police filmed the terrorists carefully, dusted their car for fingerprints, obtained a copy of a signature on their rental agreement, secured the soda bottles they drank to obtain fingerprints, and so forth.

When all this careful police work was done, there was little doubt that the trio was a terrorist group and not a group of film-makers. The pilot had recognized that their equipment, a video camera, was not appropriate for film making. Suspicions, however, were insufficient grounds for arrest without evidence of wrongdoing; therefore, the police could not arrest the suspects. Even though they were carefully followed, they succeeded in eluding the police.

### **Legitimacy**

Psychopathic terroristic activities of the recent past too often have been viewed as political undertakings. Frequently they are expressions of psychopathology behind the guise of political pursuits. Political movements have political goals; political phraseology does not convert a psychopathic gang into a political movement.

Legitimacy is an important issue in the fight against terrorism. Terrorist activities enjoy some degree of legitimacy which derives in part from their idealistic aims: to liberate a country, to overthrow an unjust government, to improve the conditions of the poor, and so forth. The terrorists have a moral excuse for violent behavior.

The responses of the targets of terrorism, on the other hand, are often perceived as repressive. Such a view is based upon the acceptance of the terrorists' claim that their actions are dictated by political goals. Terrorists claim that terrorism is the only means available to them to achieve political results. This often is untrue. The Palestinians, for example, have shown their capacity to engage in full-fledged military operations, as demonstrated by the war in Jordan and Lebanon [9]. Furthermore, the Palestinians enjoy the full support of the Arab world, which certainly has at its disposal many means other than terrorism to achieve political goals.

It appears, therefore, that terrorism fulfills other purposes than advancing professed political goals. Exposing the hidden psychopathic agenda of terrorists might diminish the power of their rationalizations and thereby the legitimacy of their actions.

### **Technology and Terrorism**

It would be erroneous to assert that terrorism, as we have been experiencing it in the recent past, is new. It would be equally misleading to say that we are not confronted with uniquely new dangers. Technology does change the meaning of age-old phenomena. For instance, contraception has been practiced for centuries. The introduction of the pill, how-

ever, drastically changed the meaning of this practice as a result of its effectiveness. Relatively ineffective terrorism could be tolerated, but technology transforms terrorism from a mere nuisance into a powerful force.

Terrorism is closely associated with weapons. "The extreme form of power is All Against One, the extreme form of violence is One Against All. And this latter is never possible without instruments" [10].

Guns and bombs make the task of the terrorist much easier. During the first six months of 1978 there were 618 bombings in the United States and Puerto Rico. "These bombings resulted in the death of ten persons and the injury of sixty-seven others. The value of property damage as a result of these incidents was set at \$5,645,000.00."<sup>2</sup> The ever-increasing likelihood of acquisition of nuclear weapons by terrorists further complicates the picture.

Both political and pseudo-political terrorism have been made more dangerous by the fantastic increases in destructive capacity accessible to the state and the individual. No doubt, the caveman could terrorize another caveman with the stone ax. There were, however, obvious limitations in his destructive capacity. The modern state and the individual terrorist have implements at their disposal which can create extensive, even catastrophic, damage. Thus, the spirit might have been always willing to indulge in terrorism, but the flesh was too weak to make the terroristic enterprise sufficiently terrifying to the victims and gratifying to the perpetrators.

### **Guerilla Warfare**

Activities of guerilla warfare differ from activities of terrorists. Resistance movements exemplified by Yugoslav, Polish, and Russian partisans during World War II or the Cuban movement led by Fidel Castro differ dramatically from the activities of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in target selection. Guerilla warfare is waged against an enemy who is militarily superior; however, the guerilla forces enjoy significant support from a large segment of the population. They have military-like discipline, aims, and purposes. Individuals engaged in guerilla warfare are involved in egosyntonic behavior, that is, behavior consistent with their own ego ideals. Guerilla fighters, like other soldiers, do at times engage in atrocities to gratify their own pathological needs superimposed upon political motivation. In guerilla warfare, just as in any other warfare, atrocities are an undesirable by-product; they are not the primary means of achieving the goal.

Viet Cong, World War II partisans, and some Latin American guerillas are not to be confused with the Baader-Meinhof group or the Symbionese Liberation Army. The ideological component in the motivation of the latter was rather small, whereas the element of individual psychopathology was predominant.

Political discontent should be differentiated from personal discontent, although both can lead to terroristic activities. The widespread discontent prevalent in the United States with the Vietnam War did lead to only minimal terroristic activity. The futility of terrorism as a political method has been recognized by Che Guevara, who wrote:

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between sabotage, a revolutionary, and highly effective form of warfare, and terrorism, a measure that is generally ineffective and indiscriminate in its effects since it often makes victims of innocent people and destroys a large number of lives that would be valuable to the revolution . . . [11].

### **The Pseudo-Political Terrorist**

A bona fide political movement sometimes resorts to violence as part of organized activities in pursuit of an attainable goal. Pseudo-political terrorism uses a political movement to

<sup>2</sup>O. Franklin Lowie, Special Agent in charge, F.B.I., unpublished letter to the author, 18 Sept. 1978.

achieve the primary goal of violence. Pseudo-political terrorism is thus a psychopathological entity. A typical example was the 1972 atrocity perpetrated in Tel-Aviv.

On 31 May 1972, three members of the United Red Army, a Japanese group operating in the service of the PLO, landed in Israel's Lod Airport, took out submachine guns and hand grenades from their suitcases, and opened fire on the passengers in the airline terminal. Twenty-five persons were killed and seventy-six were wounded. Most of the victims were Puerto Rican pilgrims who came to visit Christian holy places. The only surviving Japanese terrorist of this attack mutilated himself later in prison.

The atrocity perpetrated in the Lod Airport cannot be adequately explained in political terms. What political considerations would motivate Japanese men to kill Puerto Rican pilgrims? Similarly, the political aims of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) are not sufficient to account for the activities of that group.

Due to the extreme position of the Palestinian organizations, accepting their demands means the annihilation of his or her country for the Israeli citizen. Palestinian terrorists cannot expect that their acts, deleterious as they may be to Israeli morale, will lead to massive public pressure on the government to accept their ultimate objectives [12].

It is very doubtful that there is a political solution to the PLO terrorism against Israel. Significant political changes are not likely to lead to a disappearance of the existing terrorist organizations; they are likely to continue their activities under a different set of justifications.

Pseudo-political terrorists justify violence as a means to an end, even though violence is to them an end itself. The terrorist's satisfaction comes not from initiating social changes or acquiring power, but from the process through which the terrorist claim they are working to achieve their goals. As Hannah Arendt points out in her important essay, "On Violence," "Violence can destroy power. It is utterly incapable of creating it" [10]. The psychic needs of the terrorist demand that the end toward which he or she is striving constantly recede into the future.

In my work with homicide offenders I found useful the differentiation among egosyntonic, egodystonic, and psychotic forms of homicide. Egodystonic violence is not acceptable to the perpetrator, the society, or the victim. There is a constant pressure to give egodystonic violence egosyntonic appearance. Jack Ruby, after he killed Oswald for egodystonic reasons, provided the retrospective justification, "I killed him to save Mrs. Kennedy a trip to Dallas" [13]. At another point he explained, "I killed him to show that Jews have courage" [13]. A Dallas jury agreed with Ruby's rationalizations and found him guilty of first-degree murder.

In terrorism, the psychopathic "rebel without a cause" acquires a cause. A cause transforms a violent psychopath into a political activist [13].

I have examined many violent psychopaths who in describing the killing of three or four people in the context of a robbery showed unmistakable signs of pleasure. The robbery was merely a rationalization to terrorize or kill. Often the acts of violence and killing were neither necessary nor even useful to the professed goal of robbery. Nevertheless, these psychopaths used such rationalizations as "dead men don't talk," or claimed that the victims resisted. True enough, from a standpoint of a criminal, an execution of a victim might be a rational act—it has some utility. At times the adaptive value of killing (as in self-defense) is used to camouflage or rationalize the noninstrumental pursuit of homicidal violence.

In the recent past, there has been a marked increase in terroristic homicides perpetrated by small groups which have minimal, if any, connection to a political movement. The Baader-Meinhof group is an example of this variety. The homicides perpetrated by this type of terrorists were motivated more by intrapsychic needs than political considerations. Ideology in these cases served to camouflage the underlying psychopathology.

A further distinction has to be made between killings and perpetration of atrocities. What constitutes an atrocity does vary from one historical period to another. Dismembering a person by a team of horses was not contrary to the collective sense of ethical behavior in medi-

eval England. It was, therefore, not an atrocity by the community standard. The same behavior at the present time would be an atrocity.

The behavior of the terrorists constitutes a significant departure from predominant ethical standards governing killing of adversaries. It is, in fact, a major weapon of the terrorists to perpetrate acts which horrify and constitute an atrocity. It is not significant for my purposes that this particular form of behavior might have propagandistic value. The question I would like to raise is: What are the psychic factors which make it possible for an individual to engage in perpetration of atrocities?

Bowlby's concept of psychobiological system has been useful in the discussion of individual violence [14]. A terrorist can be viewed as a psychobiological system ready for the perpetration of atrocities. Political goals are used to activate the system.

Abraham Kaplan of the University of Hâifa makes a similar distinction [9]. He differentiates between reasons for an action, which are the purposes it is meant to serve as the actors see them, and causes which are the distinctive conditions that bring it about. He offers as an example the assassination of President McKinley:

Leon Czolgos, gave the reasons of an anarchist equalitarian. "It is not right," he declared, "that the President should have everything and we should have nothing." The reason for the assassination might lie with the President, but its causes must be sought in the psychopathology of the assassin [9].

The pseudo-political terrorist is a psychopath with a strict conscience; he or she can murder only if equipped with a rationalization which transforms an egodystonic murder into an egosyntonic killing. The capacity to commit egosyntonic murder based upon a belief system is characteristic for terroristic personalities.

But a strong belief system is in itself insufficient to bring about murder. After being liberated, the victims of Nazi persecution professed a strong belief in their right of revenge, and yet, very little killing of the former oppressors occurred. The survivors lacked the capacity to kill even though they believed themselves justified to kill.

Rationalization and belief system are necessary but insufficient factors to explain terroristic killings. A combination of psychopathic personality structure with activating rationalizations is essential for terroristic homicide to occur.

Terroristic homicide is a variety of egosyntonic homicide [15] which can be further subdivided into political, pseudo-political, and psychotic varieties. In the first category are terroristic assassinations committed to the furtherance of adaptive political goals, carried out by relatively well-integrated individuals. The pseudo-political homicides are perpetrated by psychopaths or well-compensated psychotics who use ideological rationalizations to cover up the underlying psychopathology. The third variety encompasses homicides perpetrated by overt psychotics.

The differentiation might be of some value in management of terroristic episodes and in dealing with terroristic movements. The episode management utilizes three techniques, namely negotiation, therapeutic intervention, and the use of force. Negotiation consists of reciprocal modification of external reality. Concessions are made by both sides with the goal of episode resolution.

Therapeutic interventions involve changes of the inner reality of the participants. Terroristic episodes as experiences of high intensity invariably bring about psychic changes in the participants. Both sides implicitly or explicitly pursue efforts of bringing about changes within their counterparts. A terroristic episode is a triangular relationship consisting of the terrorist, the victim, and the authority target. The management of a terroristic episode requires an understanding of the forces which created this relationship. Political terrorists are more likely to be amenable to negotiation than pseudopolitical or psychotic terrorists. Reconstruction of a terroristic homicide is a variety of psychological autopsy [16].



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