Terrorism and its psychological impact

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Introduction

'The world will never be the same again', that is what many people thought after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. That day the United States of America was hit by extremely violent and spectacular attacks and it became clear for many people that the Western world had become an easy target for a well-organized enemy. With that, the attacks had also effectuated a major psychological impact. They did not only make people afraid of further attacks, they also influenced the way communities viewed each other and how they related. Terrorism, therefore, does not only impact the perceptions and the behavior of people who are direct or indirect victims of acts of terror, but also those of the communities the victims as well as the perpetrators originate from.

Moreover, it also has a psychological impact on terrorists and the authorities fighting them. The perpetrators have often gone through a long process before they have decided to turn to a terrorist organization. There are a number of psychological theories that can explain how people turn into terrorists and how they live with the acts they commit. Besides, psychological theories can explain how the authorities react.

In the present article the psychological processes of perpetrators, victims and the fighters of terrorism are discussed by means of three questions:

1. How do people become terrorists, how do they arrive at their deeds and how do they deal with the consequences?
2. What is the psychological impact of terrorist attacks on the victims, their environment and society?
3. How can terrorism be dealt with?

Before dealing with these questions, a definition of terrorism is required.

What is terrorism?

There are many definitions of terrorism. According to Marsella (2004) most of them tend to gravitate around certain points:

- use of violence;
- by individuals or groups;
- directed against the civilian population;
- intended to create fear;
- as a means to make other individuals or groups shift their political or social position.

This definition implies that terrorists do not seek personal gain, but a higher objective, such as more voice, equal rights for a certain group of people, attention for their cause or way of life. Another implication of this definition is that, in principle, the actions are not directed against the victims themselves, but at the ultimate objective of reaching a large public. The means to do that are attacks at a relatively small group of indiscriminate individuals that happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. These attacks also serve as a signal that everyone can be hit. In general, actions of terrorists are seldom random, but frequently accurately directed at what they want to reach. It is therefore important to understand what terrorists want to reach (Crenshaw 1990). As said above, their target is not destruction in itself but the creation of fear. According to Reid (2002) the strategy of terrorists involves the following aspects:

- disruption: the creation of chaos, fear and confusion among the persons belonging to the target group, preventing them from pursuing their normal lives;
- deflection of purpose: ensuring that the target group has to focus on the terrorist actions and related activities;
- draining of resources: ensuring that the resources of the target group have to be employed against the terrorist activities, for their prevention or dealing with the victims;
- attention gathering: directing the attention to the terrorist organization, lending it a certain measure of notoriety, but at the same time generating a certain awe, popularity and legality among sympathizers. It is for this reason that the responsibility for terrorist acts is almost always claimed and that they are not committed anonymously.

Finally, Reid describes organizational profit as an objective. Terrorist organizations may attempt to win sponsors through their actions; funds they need to sustain their actions. A lot of money is needed for that and popularity helps them get it.

According to Hallett (2004) terrorists differ from criminals in two aspects. First, their actions are often more spectacular with a view to achieving the intended publicity effect. The attacks on the Twin Towers, partly carried out in front of the world's eye, and the simultaneous explosions of multiple bombs (like in Madrid in 2004 and London and Sharm-el-Sheikh in 2005) makes the assaults spectacular in that it links them to a very effective organization capable of doing this. Secondly, the perpetrators do not act out of self-interest, but on behalf of (in their eyes) the repressed or discriminated. Where normal criminals act out of personal gain, the terrorist are convinced they act in the interest of a certain cause. And where criminals usually commit their crimes furtively, terrorists seek publicity.

The above seems to explain what actions can be classified as terrorism, but as terrorism is a term with strong negative connotations, linking it to a particular action in

practice always brings along discussions. What some see as terrorism, others consider justified military action. What is law enforcement for some is state terrorism for others (Muldoon 2003). When Palestinians detonate a bomb in an Israeli city, they are not terrorists according to their own people but subjugated people resisting an unjust occupation. For them the Zionist entity is the only terrorist organization. They only claim to offer resistance. The Israeli government subsequently adopts a similar but contrary position. In its view the Palestinian actions are acts of terror, whereas it is only carrying out legitimate military operations itself. Actions directed against civilian targets should in its view not be considered as terrorism but antiterrorism (cf. Kronenwetter 2004: 7). Thus, terrorism is in the eye of the beholder.

In the remainder of this article actions carried out by states against other states or the own population will be left out of consideration, although recent history shows that state terror, in such places as Russia (Stalin), Germany (Hitler), and China (Mao Ze Dong) can be much more deadly than the combined attacks of the large terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda. In this article the focus lies on "insurgent" terrorism (i.e., the strategy of the weaker party to strike out at the established order).

What motivates terrorists?

Research into the motives of terrorists is relatively scarce. In Groebel's words (1989: 25), 'Most data are either not available at all, are only fragmentary, or cannot be tested with respect to their reliability and validity. Terrorists are rarely open to direct observations and usually do not volunteer for scientific interviews'. For these reasons many statements about terrorists must be made with the necessary caution.

McCauley (2002) distinguishes three perspectives in the research into terrorism: the personality traits of terrorists, emotions as the drive for committing acts of terror and more goal-oriented and rational grounds for terrorist attacks. These three perspectives are discussed below.

Terrorists as disturbed personalities

For a long time it was believed that terrorists differed substantially from other people. In order to come to their deeds, the reasoning was, they cannot be other than abnormal people. According to McCauley (2002), however, research shows that many terrorists are not disturbed personalities as described in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Personality research further shows that terrorists differ in only few respects from non-terrorists. A thorough research into the Baader-Meinhof Gruppe, active in Germany in the 1970s, showed, for

83

example, that they were average people (e.g., McCauley 2002: 5-6).

It is also suggested that terrorists are psychopaths - in general, intelligent people who show socially and morally deviant behavior. Psychopaths tend to be impulsive, irresponsible and demonstrate no loyalty towards others. Apart from that psychopaths in general are not prepared to become victims themselves of their actions. The actions of the perpetrators of many recent attacks (New York, London, Madrid) show that they were not irrational people, but, on the contrary, acted in a very disciplined way in the context of a larger collective. A large number of them showed they were indeed prepared to sacrifice their lives. The present-day view in the research into terrorism is that terrorists do not arrive at their deeds as a result of a personality disturbance, but because of other processes (cf. McCauley 2002).

Terrorism induced by emotion

There are ideas that terrorism is driven by emotions such as anger, hate and frustrations generated by a perceived unfair treatment from a ruling majority. These emotions can lead to feelings of revenge. According to Cota-McKinley et al. (2001: 343), revenge is one of the most important keys to understanding terrorism. In this context it can be described as 'the infliction of harm in return for perceived injury or insult or a simply getting back to another person'. Cota-McKinley et al. base their conclusions about revenge as the main drive for terrorism on the often surprising readiness of individuals to sacrifice themselves and to suffer in the terrorist attacks they carry out. They reason from the supposition that people are prepared to sacrifice themselves exclusively for emotional considerations.

There is much anecdotal support for this supposition. A number of people, for instance, join a terrorist organization because they feel unjustly treated by the ruling system that is trying to deal with terrorism. Thus, there are scores of examples of people who would never have become terrorists if they had not clashed violently with the ruling system, which provided them with a reason for revenge (cf. Collins 1997; Morrisey 2000). It is not necessary for potential terrorists to have first-hand experience of injustice; they can also arrive at their deeds when they hear from the media that people within their group are repressed. According to Kinder (1998) it is identification with the group that turns people into terrorists. When they see that their own group is dealt with unfairly or discriminated against people can decide to commit acts of terror against the oppressors. Thus, in 2006 there are probably many foreign terrorists in Iraq to help "their brothers" in the struggle against the Coalition Forces. In their eyes attacks on the Americans and Iraqis that cooperate with them are justified to defend the integrity of their own nation and religion. They act out of a sort of revenge against Western

suppression of Iraq. The question remains, however, whether emotions can be the drive for committing acts of terror in the longer term. Although feelings of revenge may be the reason for a number of people to join a terrorist organization, being a member becomes a way of life after some time with its own rationality as a motive to continue committing acts of terror. For still others, emotions, such as feelings of revenge, have never been the motive for becoming terrorists in the first place, and they have joined for other reasons.

Terrorism on rational grounds

In general, terrorism can be seen as a form of target-oriented behavior. The higher objective often involves an ideal that the terrorists try to attain or an enemy they wish to defeat. Hoffmann (1993) distinguishes three broad categories of terrorists, based on their motivation:

- Rationally motivated terrorists: they are people who try to achieve certain objectives with their actions, such as the release of prisoners, ending certain production methods, or creating a state of their own. These people want to be heard and with their actions want to be on the agendas of those in power. The moment the objectives have been realized the rationale for their actions disappears in principle and they will stop them. In general, these terrorists weigh up the cost-benefit ratio of intended actions and they take care not to cause unnecessary victims as this can affect their negotiation position and support for their actions.
- Terrorists that act out of psychological distress: they are people who are searching their own identity and are trying to develop and retain a certain degree of control and self-esteem by joining a terrorist group. In particular, this involves young people who are easy to influence. The affiliation with terrorist groups, the process of being a terrorist and the appreciation and respect this brings along pleases them. They are not so much interested in reaching the objectives of the group, and often these objectives become increasingly extreme as a result. They do not feel the need for debate or negotiation because they want to stay terrorists.
- Terrorists with a cultural motivation: they are people who act out of fear of losing their own cultural identity. By committing acts of terror they make clear to others that they disapprove of their behavior. In particular religious aspects are important here. Often they act on a divine and dogmatic conviction which brooks no opposition. In doing so, they strive for an uncompromising ideal that is unattainable. They often have a categorical "good versus evil" conception of the world. By embracing the dogmatic idea of "we are right and they are not", this group never tests its own ideas against those of others.

Within one and the same terrorist group different people may have different motivations. Rationally motivated terrorists who in the course of time make a sincere effort to negotiate compromises, will be considered traitors by the "hardliners" (the people who have nothing to gain from a solution). This causes factions, which, if negotiations actually lead to results, will want to continue their actions. When, for instance, in the late 1990s the IRA sincerely wanted to lay down arms and start peace negotiations, factions, such as the Real IRA, continued their attacks.

Not only the target is a major motivator for terrorists, also the members of the organization that terrorists are involved with are very important. In general, people are members of many groups, such as family, work, clubs for spare time activities. All these groups influence the way people think. Terrorist organizations do everything to bind their members psychologically and to isolate them from all other groups of which they are members. They do this by physically separating them or through extremely strong fixation on the objectives of the terrorist organization. In the former case terrorists live separated from their families, they usually do not work and the group with which they plan and carry out their actions is the only one with which they are related and to which they feel an unconditional loyalty. They will do anything for this group and would rather die than desert it. The combination of a small group and a sacred objective lends great meaning to their lives. According to Volkan (1997) terrorist groups provide the safety of the family by replacing individuality for group identity. In the latter case psychological isolation takes place by effecting an extremely ideological fixation on the ultimate objective of the organization. This makes it possible to continue one's own life with its daily contact with family, work, etc., and still furtively remain loyal only to the terrorist organization. In such a case it is often a surprise for their direct environment to find out that their close relations are involved in such activities.

In trying to achieve their objectives terrorist organizations have a tendency to radicalize. This is brought about by a number of psychological factors. In the process towards extreme violence a number of phases can usually be distinguished. In the first phase individuals recognize that, as a group, they are faced with difficult circumstances that frustrate their basic needs, making them perceive the present society as illegitimate and unjust. At a certain moment a number of individuals sharing the same feelings of discontent find each other and name their dissatisfaction. On the one hand, this gives a certain degree of recognition, security and identity, and, on the other, an idea may come up that something must be done to tackle the problem. What emerges then is a sense of urgency. Often there are one or two people who take charge and manage to name this sense of urgency or crisis. Sprinzak (1991) uses the term "crisis of confidence" when the group protests and demonstrates against the ruling political system, but still accepts the values of the system. They try to be put in the right within the existing conven-

tions. When all this is to no avail, it is possible that the group goes one stage further. It loses confidence in reforms and develops a competing ideological and cultural system, meanwhile resorting to small-scale violence. Sprinzak (1991) calls this a 'conflict of legitimacy'. In this case the violence is mainly directed at those they fight. Animal welfare activists, for instance, direct their actions at those organizations that in their eyes abuse animals or maltreat them for their own objectives. Environmental activists direct their actions at the polluting industries and at the governments that support them. They are actions in which as a form of collateral damage there may be a few victims. Making victims, however, is not an end in itself, and the violence is relatively small-scale. Some organizations move on to the third phase, in which the group embraces terrorist violence against the authorities and everyone who supports them. In that case Sprinzak (1991) uses the term 'crisis of legitimacy'. All means are admissible to reach the ultimate goal. Making victims has often become an end in itself. The terrorists believe in acts of terror as an instrument to destabilize society and at the same time they feel a need to shake up the population, to reveal the Achilles heel of those in power and to generate self-confidence from their activities.

When groups evolve to the later phases and become terrorist organizations in the process, they often lose sight of the reasonableness of their actions (Hallett 2004). They see themselves as, for example, freedom fighters involved in a good cause. For the sake of realizing this good cause, everything is justified. They have no feeling anymore for aspects that should in all good reason be considered when carrying out their actions, such as:

1. Proportionality: the ratio between the target and the means. To what extent are the acts committed proportionate to what they are going through.
2. Discrimination between the perpetrators and the innocents: who are they actually trying to hit? By making victims indiscriminately among groups that are not well protected in order to create fear, they hurt many innocent people who have nothing to do with the injustice extended to them.
3. Well-intentioned: what exactly is it they want to reach with their actions and to what extent are the objectives clear and justifiable? And to what degree are the actions in accordance with objectives they want to attain?

Losing sight of these aspects while committing brutal onslaughts in which many indiscriminate victims fall for the sake of a struggle for unclear objectives, causes terrorist groups to isolate themselves more and more from others. Thus, a recent poll shows that al-Qaeda loses popularity in Muslim countries that have suffered attacks of this organization (PEW Global Attitudes Project, 15 July 2005; http//pewglobal.org/reports).

The individual members of a terrorist organization often find themselves on a slippery slope, with their values and norms gradually changing (see McCauley 2002). Individuals themselves hardly ever notice that they are changing while the organization is becoming more radical. They rarely have the idea that in this process of radicalization they have at some point made a conscious choice. There are several psychological models to explain this process. In a group of like-minded persons, for instance, group polarization may take place (Moscovici & Zavalloni 1969). In mutual discussions it is determined on the basis of relevant arguments what is acceptable and what is not. In a group of like-minded persons, however, all the arguments point in the same direction. With that, the balance necessary for a well-considered formation of opinion falls away. As the terrorist group is often the most important group in the lives of the terrorists, as was seen above, the individual members are not corrected in their opinions. Furthermore, group pressure increases the tendency not to voice any doubts that may be felt and to keep them to oneself. Thus, group members reinforce each other in the idea that what is happening is good.

Research also shows that people can be brought to commit the most brutal of deeds through a process of small steps (cf. Milgram 1974). The principle works as follows. When people are pressured slightly into committing a small breach of norm, they will have the tendency to justify this by referring to the importance of their act. In doing so, they change their views of what is admissible and what is not (cf. insufficient justification, Smith & Mackie 1995: 323). Thus, they justify their behavior. When they go a bit further, they will also justify this behavior with the motto "*if it is wrong what I have done just now, it was also wrong what I did the first time, so I am not doing anything wrong*". In this way they move on, bit by bit, without noticing that they are crossing a line somewhere and they cannot go back again.

The model of moral disengagement that Bandura (2004) developed can also help explain why terrorists can disengage themselves morally from their deeds. He describes a number of processes that make it easier to justify acts that are morally reprehensible. The process of *advantageous comparison* enables terrorists to justify their acts of terror by labeling what has been done to them as worse than what they do themselves. They can also vindicate their deeds by emphasizing that there is no alternative and that inaction makes things worse. The use of *euphemistic language* implies the creation of a reality to make certain matters more acceptable. The use of the term freedom fighter, for instance, puts an entirely different light on actions than the word terrorist. What also often takes place is *displacement of responsibility*. Moral checks work best when people accept that they themselves are fully responsible for their deeds. When a legitimate authority assumes this responsibility, it will become easier for many people to disengage themselves from the consequences of their actions. Terrorist organizations are often

tightly led, which allows the members to act on behalf of the leadership or - in religious movements – on behalf of an even higher power, without feeling responsible. In line with this there is the principle of *diffusion of responsibility*, in which responsibility for actions does not clearly lie with the person who commits them. Often decisions are the outcome of group processes and actions are carried out by more than one person. It becomes easier to distance oneself from the consequences of acts of terror when the individual terrorist is only a small cog in the wheel. There is also frequent *disregard or distortion of harmful consequences*. It is easier to commit acts of terror while not seeing the victims by keeping distance. This can be done by detonating bombs by remote control or by seeing the victims in such a way that there is little room for compunction about one's deeds. The latter can be done by *attribution of blame*: people can do awful things to others by blaming them for it. In fact, in their eyes the victims asked for it themselves. Another way to make victims more easily is *dehumanization*: people do not consider members of other groups as people with similar feelings as they themselves have. As a consequence they feel much less compassion for them.

Impact of terrorism
Terrorism has important consequences for the victims and their environment, for the society in which the attacks take place and for the functionaries who are responsible for the security in a country. In the following section these three groups are discussed in greater detail.

Victims
Major attacks often leave the victims completely shattered. Norris (2002) shows that unexpected, sudden and violent traumatic experiences that have been consciously thrown upon people have a greater negative impact than natural disasters. The fact that there are others who apparently are able to commit such acts has an impact on people's perception of the world and values. In the literature several factors are described that increase the impact of acts of terrorism. According to Waugh (2001), the following components of terrorism are extremely traumatizing:
- the use of threats or actual use of excessive violence;
- intentional, conscious activities to inflict damage;
- the intention not only to cause psychological disorganization among the victims but also to the environment;
- the choice of victims for their symbolical value (e.g., their innocence).

The effect of an act of terrorism depends on who gets killed. The impact is greater when they are women or children. Apart from that, the location of the attack is very important for the effect. The attack on the government building in Oklahoma City in 1995 had a large impact on the sense of security of many Americans. This was caused by the realization that if this could happen in Oklahoma City, it could happen anywhere. The uncertainty about who will be a target and when and where a terrorist attack will take place, increases the fear. A meta-analysis by Rubinos & Bickman (1998) reveals two event-related variables that connect a terrorist act and the ensuing psychopathology, namely the number of people directly involved in the incident and the extent of human culpability in that event.

Ditzler (2004), too, mentions a number of factors that influence the psychological impact of acts of terror. First of all, giving little or no warning decreases the perceived control over the environment and increases the feeling of vulnerability. People like to be able to predict and control their environment. If they cannot do this a feeling of learned helplessness begins to emerge, which creates a certain degree of passivity. Secondly, the perception that such an attack can happen again any moment increases the impact. In that way people do not feel safe anywhere anymore. An element in this is that the authorities have lost control, which reduces their credibility. Thirdly, it is psychologically unsettling when people are confronted with unexpected risks that bring along serious threats of their personal safety for which they are not prepared. For those who are prepared, such as security personnel, this is different. Fourthly, the exposure to gruesome or grotesque situations, such as seeing the dismembered bodies of victims, has also a great impact on those who witness them. An attack that exposes people to the horror of seriously wounded and dying people will remain a collective memory for the environment for a long time. A fifth factor of influence is the degree to which there are casualties that require extensive treatment. This causes the victims to be confronted with the attack daily, but also for others they are reminders of what has happened. Finally, there is the potential for unknown health effects. Sometimes means are used that have unknown effects. According to Wessely et al. (2001), the long-term social and psychological effects of a chemical or biological attack, real or imagined, are probably as damaging as the acute effects, or even more so. They often lead to medically inexplicable physical symptoms that puzzle patients, doctors, scientists and policy makers.

Danielli et al. (2004) summarize the few studies that have been conducted into the long-term effects of terrorist attacks. They show that a substantial part of the victims of attacks develop post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) after some time. Similar findings are reported from various continents. Thus, Abenhaim et al. (1992) found that of all the survivors of attacks on public targets in France between 1982 and 1987 nine percent of the lightly wounded or unharmed had developed PTSD, as compared to 31 per cent of

the heavily wounded. Curran et al.(1990) found that of the people involved in a bomb attack in Northern Ireland 50 per cent of the survivors had developed PTSD after six months. Kawana et al. (2001) discovered psychological after-effects five years after the Sarin attack in a Tokyo metro station. A third of the survivors of the Oklahoma City attack were reported to suffer from PTSD, and 30 per cent had other disorders (North et al. 1999). Studies into the consequences of the 9/11 attacks show that the incidence of PTSD is strongly related to the extent of direct exposure to the attacks and that therefore the PTSD problem is concentrated in the New York region. People who were not directly involved quickly learn how to live with it and have no problems anymore with the attacks, in contrast to those who experienced it in their immediate environment (Danielli et al. 2004) Studies by Gleser et al. (1981), Green et al. (1983) and Shore et al. (1986) all point at the number of victims as a moderator between traumatic incidents and psychological problems for two reasons:
- more people were exposed;
- bereavement over loss of life.

Not only victims can develop problems. Also their next of kin in a number of cases cannot cope with the situation. Sprang (2003) in this respect points at the phenomenon of complicated bereavement. It is the process of mourning the loss of loved ones. Usually bereavement is seen as a normal reaction on the demise of a next of kin and not a disorder. Conversely, complicated bereavement emerges when the shock of the unexpected loss is so stressful that it overwhelms the coping capacities of the individual who does not know how to deal with it. Some of the contributing factors, related to terrorist attacks, are (Rando 1995):
- fundamental loss of security and confidence;
- confusing and pointless loss;
- no opportunity to say goodbye.

Complicated bereavement often comes with secondary losses, such as the loss of employment, a relation that cannot stand the strain, isolation, etc.

There are, however, not only negative effects of terrorism. Thus, research has shown that there are those who feel stronger after a time than before (characterized as posttraumatic growth: Tedeschi & Calhoun 1996). People who have survived an attack testify in a number of cases to a clear appreciation for life, a reorganization of the things they think are important in life and a realization that they are stronger than they had always thought. Longitudinal research after 9/11 has shown that the problems many people had immediately after the attacks had disappeared after some time (Danielli et al. 2004). According to the authors this suggests that at least one of the components of stress in time and effects appears to be limited.

Society

In many societies there are groups that try to achieve certain objectives with violence, such as imposing their norms and values to those societies or secession of their region from a subjugating power. In societies such as these there are occasional outbursts of violence and this situation can last for generations. Although the majority of the population in such regions is not involved in the acts of terror, they often feel sympathy for the objectives the terrorists try to achieve and their acts are condoned. This makes it possible for the terrorists to shelter among the population and to prepare and undertake their actions from there. When acts of terror have been committed it is easy for the entire community from which the terrorists stem to be blamed for them and attacks on properties of that group to be carried out. Thus, soon after the murder of Theo van Gogh on 2 November 2004 (a murder which was called a terrorist attack from a Muslim extremist) mosques and Muslim schools in the Netherlands were set on fire as a reaction. This polarizing of attitudes of entire communities is supported by several psychological mechanisms. The process of *social identification* implies that groups are formed on the basis of salient characteristics and that people are categorized accordingly (Taylor 1981), e.g. Muslims and Christians. Subsequently, through the process of *stereotyping* certain characteristics are attributed to people who belong to a specific group, solely based on the fact that they belong to that group. Finally, the process of *social identification* implies that people try to lend their own group a positive image by attributing positive characteristics to it, while they typify the outgroup negatively by attributing negative characteristic to them. In a society in which groups resort to violence against each other, there is little need for subtleties. These three mechanisms combined create a negative image of the other party, with which one refuses to communicate anymore. The only thing one sees is the other party's violence and it is attributed to their violent characteristics. There is no awareness that all this can be the result of one's own behavior. Because both parties do not communicate there are few possibilities to break up the negative spiral. As a result a certain behavioral pattern begins to develop that only confirms the negative stereotypes (self-fulfilling prophesy). Terrorist attacks and the ensuing retaliations give both parties enough "evidence" for the unreasonableness of the other party, which only strengthens their resolve to continue the struggle.

People in such societies grow up with low-intensity, prolonged conflicts characterized by sporadic and variable levels of violence. This has two related effects. On the one hand, it causes human costs to continue, as it is hardly worthwhile to put too much energy in moving the country forward. It is, for instance, pointless to build up a company if it can be plundered or destroyed at any moment. On the other hand, the conflict hides these costs because it has become a way of life. So, the potential violence obstructs daily life while at the same time becoming a part of it.

The authorities

A society that is hit by a terrorist attack feels insecure and demands action from the authorities. Often the idea takes hold that the authorities have failed to prevent the attack and that they are not capable of adequately protecting their population. This puts pressure on the authorities to do something to satisfy their population and make them rally behind them, especially when the impression is that the leaders should and could have done much more. In such circumstances it becomes tempting to announce tough measures, to create the impression of decisive leaders who cannot be trifled with and who seem to know what has to be done. In times of crisis, when they feel insecure, people demand clear guidance. Announcing tough measures in itself is not a problem as long as it is accompanied by a thorough examination into the perpetrators, so that the authorities can arrest and try them. Tough measures, however, can also turn into revenge and retaliation to set examples, especially when a careful approach is not successful and the population and the authorities become frustrated. Thus, the authorities can order razzias to catch terrorists, to shell a village where the terrorists are supposed to hide out, or invade a country that seems to support the terrorists. In the first instance, these actions seem justified in the struggle against terrorism; on the long term, however, they can prove to be counter-productive and to cause more harm than good because they make innocent victims, kindling feelings of revenge in many people. The result is an increased recruitment of terrorists. Why, then, do authorities still choose this kind of measures? Janis (1989) provides a number of explanations by referring to certain rules that decision makers actually apply when taking decisions. These rules obstruct careful, vigilant decision making. First of all, the authorities have the tendency to choose a tough approach because it provides them with a safety valve for the very negative emotions (*emotive rules*) they and their people feel. It gives them the feeling that the terrorists are paid in kind. Secondly, by choosing this kind of action the authorities try to show, certainly on the short term, that they do not take things lying down, and thus make the population rally behind them (*self-serving rules*). So, they think to gain by acting tough. Thirdly, a number of *cognitive rules* will bias the decisions. The wish to retaliate has an impact on the cognitive aspects of the decision making. Thus, the time to take good decisions will be limited due to the pressure to do something. There may already have been a scenario for what to do and the authorities are merely trying to find a further basis for it. Thus, the gathering and processing of information and the process of seeking and considering alternative action will be one-sided. The information gathering will mainly be directed at short-term successes and much less on the disadvantages on the long term. After all, "tough action" may lead to exactly what the terrorists had in mind, namely an accumulation of hatred towards the authorities. The question is of course whether all authorities are so short-sighted in taking their decisions. Here the *affiliative*

rules play a role. In general, people act in accordance with what they think that others who are important for them think is right and do not easily strike a dissonant note. Especially in crisis situations there is a tendency to tow the party line and not voice any criticism, which would point at disagreement. Because of the initial tendency to take tough measures the "hardliners" will therefore prevail over the more thoughtful "doves". People who doubt the use of tough action will often be reticent when the atmosphere is such that there is a risk of being dubbed unpatriotic or naive.

Fighting terrorism

In the literature there is no agreement on what constitutes an effective approach of terrorism. Different authors emphasize different things. Some say that retaliating terrorism is effective under the following two conditions: it has to take place immediately after the terrorist action so that all parties see that the authorities do not take things lying down, and it has to take place on the basis of accurate intelligence so that the right persons are caught and not innocent people. Reid (2002) states that there are several measures that can be taken to counter terrorism and its consequences. He acknowledges that it is difficult to dismantle a terrorist organization by eliminating the leadership, but he suggests that much can be done to lower the effectiveness of terrorists. Thus, it can be made more difficult to hit targets and to lower their value for the terrorists and an attempt can be made to keep effective weapons out of their hands. What does not help, according to Reid, is giving in to the terrorists' demands, or hoping one will not be attacked by them by adopting a neutral position, by not attracting their attention or by refusing to resort to violence.

Dershowitz (2002) describes, what he calls, two paradoxes of terrorism. The first is that by sincerely trying to understand the root causes of a terrorist movement and by beginning a dialogue with them, the authorities may lessen the threat from that particular group, but in doing so they may encourage other potential terrorist groups to come into action since terrorism is apparently worth the while. The second paradox is that the more brutally and repressively the authorities treat the terrorists, the more they make them into martyrs and the more others will take over the torch. According to Dershowitz the first paradox is more powerful than the second, and he therefore pleads for tough actions against all terrorist organizations. In fact, however, two scenarios are presented here that both lead to the impossibility of rooting out terrorism. This is also in accordance with a number of studies that show that there is great concern about the effectiveness of counter-terrorism. Enders & Sanders (1993) indicate in their survey of effect studies that twenty years of counter-terrorism have never led to a reduction of the phenomenon. It often brings about heavier attacks, or, when certain targets cannot be

attacked anymore, other types of attack or attacks on other targets. A tougher approach also often leads to the breaking up of coalitions that develop differences of opinion about the way in which to deal with terrorism. The question is why this effect is so low. Three explanations can be given for this. First of all, terrorists often have a breeding ground in the communities of which they are a part. Therefore, it is not only 'madmen' who do this. Terrorists are often the activists that come from the silent supporters. These supporters have more or less sympathy for the objectives of the terrorists, but for various reasons they do not take part in the actions. Secondly, countering terrorism increases the cohesion of the ingroup and their perseverance. Terrorists can improve their position by getting the authorities to overreact. When this happens other people among the supporters are mobilized and their own position is strengthened, which is what they hope for. Thirdly, terrorists are convinced they are fighting for a good cause and they are prepared to sacrifice a lot for that. Most of them do not make a calculating consideration to stop when their losses outweigh their profits. That is what makes them different from normal armies that surrender when they perceive the battle lost. A conflict with terrorists, therefore, is not the same as a conventional military conflict, where taking out the enemy means the termination of the conflict. In a conflict with terrorists new terrorists will stand up time and again.

The question that authorities are facing, or should be facing, therefore, is the effect they create when they want to fight terrorism. The problem is to fight terrorism without losing the sympathy of the local population among which the terrorists are hiding. Military responses to terrorism will never be enough to stop the problem because they do not tackle the causes. What is also ineffective is to dehumanize the terrorists and the use of tactics that go against one's own values. It has a hardening effect. The treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, where unconventional interrogation techniques are employed and people are incarcerated without any form of trial, does more harm than good to the cause of fighting terrorism. Often terrorism has a breeding ground among the local population. A very aggressive treatment creates a feeling of injustice, not only among the terrorists, but also among other people, which may lead to support for the terrorists. In one way or other the authorities, therefore, must manage to separate and distinguish the terrorists from the population. Therefore, Marsella (2004) proposes a multi-frontal attack. He states that the deeper causes for terrorism often lie in complex historical and cultural backgrounds. His approach implies that a solution cannot be found by demonizing specific individuals and certainly not cultures, but in gaining an insight into the origins of a conflict and what keeps the terrorist movement going. This approach does not mean that terrorism is approved, but that its background is taken seriously. Marsella doubts that terrorism can be beaten by vigilance, counter-terrorism and the elimination of terrorist resources only, because it springs from dissatisfaction

and rejection of inequality and indifference and from the widespread belief that violence is admissible in case of oppression. An approach in which the authorities carry out razzias and take innocent people in the process, often yields the opposite effect. What is necessary is to ensure that the broad support for them disappears by offering the community from which terrorists stem a better future, and simultaneously an approach in which only terrorists are dealt with and not all sorts of other people. In order to fight terrorism it is in the end important to tackle as many roots of despair as possible and to further the satisfaction of needs. This implies the fostering of pluralism, democracy, economic development and decent material circumstances for all people and having an eye for the psychosocial needs of individuals and the society.

A complicating factor in all this is the media. Being able to provide very many people with fast and accurate information, they have, in general, an enormous influence on the public, which trusts them. When the media blow up or misrepresent certain facts this has an impact on the public. Different parties have different interests in the way in which the media report on acts of terror. The media are a party themselves for their livelihood and free news gathering (Elmquist 1990). It is in their interest that as many people as possible get the news through their medium, as this guarantees an income. Because they are in competition with other media, it is important to present the news as attractively as possible. Sensationalism is part of all this. In general, terrorists try to seek publicity, get acknowledgement, create fear and chaos, find supporters, show they can lash out at the ruling system, etc. It is, therefore, in their interest to get as much exposure of their actions as possible. This may be the objective of terrorists who try to attract attention. *The Hofstadgroup* received a large degree of attention in the Netherlands in late 2004 and possibly also popularity among certain groups because of the widely publicized murder of Theo van Gogh by Mohammed B. An action by the police which was broadcast live on TV to arrest several members of the group in the *Laakkwartier* in The Hague, contributed to this notoriety. Terrorist groups often provoke such media exposure in order to recruit potential members and sponsors. A sensational rendering of the facts is in their interest as it makes the organization look heroic or it allows their members to be portrayed as martyrs. The authorities (government) want to use the media to inform and reassure the population, to instruct them and to gain support. A factual representation of what has happened, without sensation is in their interest. Often there is a tendency to keep the media at a distance in the case of actual actions. This is in conflict with the interest of the media, which, as a result, make up their own story. The victims, finally, most of all have a need of privacy in order to cope with their suffering, sorrow and often feelings of shame about what has happened to them. The media are of little importance to them, they must be treated with caution. In conclusion, it is clear that those who profit most from the media are the terrorists and that the media in their turn profit from terrorism and the news it generates.

Summary and conclusion

In this article the psychological aspects of terrorism have been explored. It can be concluded that terrorists mostly act rationally. They know exactly what they are doing and why they are doing that. The reason why they have become terrorists, however, can be based on emotional motives. Another finding is that the process of radicalization of groups is a gradual one. Some groups become terrorists groups because they have not found justice via legal procedures.

Terrorism has an impact on victims, their immediate environment and the larger society. People who have been victims of or witnessed a terrorist attack run a considerable risk of suffering from PTSD. People at a greater distance may be afraid at first, there may be outcries of anger or frustration, but after a while life returns to its everyday routine again. The authorities feel the pressure to act decisively, but they should try to prevent (1) actions that hurt innocent people, and (2) actions that make martyrs out of terrorists. So, a thoughtful but still decisive approach is indicated. At least, the authorities should not give in to the feelings of frustration and hatred that can live among the broader population.

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