What is Terrorism?

CIA's Counterterrorist Center:

- It is premeditated—planned in advance, rather than an impulsive act of rage.
- It is political—not criminal, like the violence that groups such as the Mafia use to get money, but designed to change the existing political order.
- It is aimed at civilians—not at military targets or combat-ready troops.
- It is carried out by sub-national groups—not by the army of a country.

U.S. Department of Defense: Terrorism is "the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally *political, religious, or ideological*."

- ***Acts of terrorism usually are committed by groups who do not possess the political power to change policies they view as intolerable.***

Specific Elements

- Terrorists choose targets and actions to maximize the psychological effect on a society or government.
- Their goal is to create a situation in which a government will change its policies to avoid further bloodshed or disruption.
- Terrorists plan their acts to get as much media exposure as possible.
- Terrorists often justify their acts on ideological or religious grounds arguing that they are responding to a greater wrong or are promoting a greater good.

Types of Terrorism - Six Major Types:

- ***Nationalist terrorists*** seek to form a separate state for their own national group, often by drawing attention to a fight for "national liberation" that they think the world has ignored.
- ***Religious terrorists*** seek to use violence to further what they see as divinely commanded purposes, often targeting broad categories of foes in an attempt to bring about sweeping changes.
- ***State-sponsored terrorist groups*** are deliberately used by radical states as foreign policy tools—as Hoffman puts it, as "a cost-effective way of waging war covertly, through the use of surrogate warriors or 'guns for hire.'"
- ***Left-wing terrorists*** are out to destroy capitalism and replace it with a communist or socialist regime. Because they see most civilians as suffering from capitalist exploitation, left-wing terrorists sometimes have limited their use of violence to avoid hurting the victims they say they want to save. Left-wing terrorists sometimes focus instead on such tactics as kidnapping tycoons or bombing monuments.
- ***Right-wing terrorists*** are among the least organized terrorists, often associated with neo-Nazi street rioting in Western Europe, especially in the early 1980s. These groups, often dominated by skinheads, seek to do away with liberal democratic governments and create fascist states in their place.
- From the 1870s until about 1920, ***anarchist terrorism*** was a major global phenomenon. Revolutionaries seeking to overthrow established governments launched a wave of bombings and assassinated a series of heads of state. Some experts see signs of a new interest in anarchist violence arising out of the recent wave of protests against globalization.

Terrorist methods

- **Bombings** make up about half of all terrorist acts. In some cases, a bomber may strap explosives to his or her own body and detonate them on a bus or in a crowded area (**suicide bombings**).
- **Assassinations and kidnappings** – Terrorists may seek to create alarm by assassinating government officials or other prominent individuals. Terrorists may also kidnap individuals and hold them hostage until certain demands are met.
- **Hijackings** – Some terrorists hijack, or seize control of, airplanes, buses, or other vehicles. Once in control, hijackers may take passengers as hostages and threaten to kill the passengers if their demands are not met. In some cases, hijackers may threaten to blow up an airplane, or they may intentionally crash a plane into a target.
- **Biological attacks** – The use of biological agents (substances) to inflict harm is sometimes called **germ warfare or bioterrorism**. Bioterrorists may seek to contaminate food or water supplies; to distribute toxins; or to spread dangerous diseases, such as anthrax or smallpox. However, many biological weapons are difficult for terrorists to prepare and use effectively.
- **Chemical attacks** involve the intentional release of toxic chemicals. Terrorists may attempt to buy, steal, or manufacture chemical weapons and then disperse them in crowded areas. However, many chemical weapons are difficult for terrorists to prepare and use.
- **Nuclear attacks** – Terrorist groups might seek to acquire nuclear devices from an underground weapons supplier or from a government that has such devices. Alternatively, terrorists might try to obtain radioactive materials—such as weapons-grade plutonium or uranium—and manufacture their own weapons. If terrorists are unable to acquire or build nuclear weapons, they might instead try to cause explosions at existing nuclear facilities. Terrorists might also bundle radioactive materials with conventional explosives to create radiological dispersion devices. Such devices—sometimes called "**dirty bombs**"—could give off invisible radiation capable of causing sickness or death. The radioactive contamination could keep people out of a vital area, such as a downtown business section, for months or even years.
- **Computer-based terrorism**, also called cyberterrorism, involves the sabotage of computer information systems. Cyberterrorists may design and circulate computer viruses, which can disrupt computer operations and destroy data. Cyberterrorists may also seek to steal or alter sensitive or valuable information, or to attack systems that provide important services.
- **Other forms of terrorism** –Some governments use terrorist methods-such as torture and murder-to intimidate their opposition and increase their power. The use of such methods by oppressive governments is called **state terrorism** or state-conducted terrorism. War crimes, genocide, and other international violations may also be considered acts of terror.

The beginnings of modern terrorism

- The word terrorism first appeared during the French Revolution (1789-1799). Some of the revolutionaries who seized power adopted a policy of violence against people they considered enemies of the revolution (**Reign of Terror**).
- In the **1930's**, the **dictators** Adolf Hitler of Germany, Benito Mussolini of Italy, and Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union used terrorist tactics to discourage opposition to their governments. Many authoritarian governments continue to use state terrorism today to frighten and control the population.
- In **Northern Ireland**, **Roman Catholic extremists** have used terrorism in efforts to end British rule and to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. At the same time, **Protestant extremists** have used similar methods to demand the continuation of British rule.
- In **Spain's Basque region**, a group called Euskadi ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom), abbreviated **ETA**, has used violence to push for the creation of an independent Basque state.
- In **Chechnya**, rebel groups have used terrorism in an attempt to win independence from Russia. Chechen groups have taken hostages and conducted suicide bombings against Russian targets.
- Before the independence of **Israel** in 1948, a Jewish group called Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization) used terror to speed the end of British rule in Palestine and create a Jewish homeland. Since 1960, Palestinian groups, including **Hamas and Islamic Jihad of Palestine**, have carried out campaigns of terrorism aimed at establishing an independent Palestinian state. Such groups have conducted numerous attacks—including a wave of suicide bombings in the early 2000's—against Israel. Israel has responded with military strikes that have taken civilian lives.
- Many terrorists have had religious motives rather than political ones. In 1995, members of a **Japanese religious cult released the nerve gas sarin** into the Tokyo subway system, killing 12 people and injuring thousands.
- In the United States and other countries, **extremists opposed to abortion** have bombed and burned down clinics and murdered doctors who performed abortions. People who strongly oppose abortion generally do so because of religious beliefs.
- Some groups in the United States and other countries have used terrorism to promote **animal rights and other causes** relating to nature and the environment. Such groups—including the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front—have attacked lumber companies and laboratories that conduct research on animals. Terrorism for nature-related causes is often called **eco-terrorism**.
- Individuals with unusual or unclear agendas have also committed acts of terror. From 1978 to 1995, an American known as the Unabomber sent bombs through the mail. Because he disliked modern industrial civilization, he targeted scientists and engineers in the computer industry and other high-technology fields. **The Unabomber**, identified as Theodore J. Kaczynski, was convicted in 1998.
- In 1995, a terrorist bombing destroyed the Murrah Federal Building in **Oklahoma City**, killing 168 people. Two Americans, Timothy J. McVeigh and Terry L. Nichols, were convicted for their roles in the attack. McVeigh and Nichols believed that actions of the U.S. government had deprived citizens of their freedom.

The changing face of terrorism

- In the late 1900's, many terrorist groups began forming **networks** and operating on an increasingly **global scale**. Some of these groups, particularly in the Middle East, held a deep hatred for the United States and for Western countries in general. Concerns that terrorists might obtain weapons of mass destruction increased dramatically.
- **Middle Eastern terrorism** intensified in the 1970s in response to defeats of Arab nations in wars with Israel over the Palestine issue. Convinced that further wars were futile, a number of countries, including Egypt, sought peace with Israel. This enraged groups within those countries dedicated to the defeat of Israel, who then turned to terrorism.
- In 1993, a bomb exploded in the parking garage of the **World Trade Center** in New York City. A federal court convicted four men, including two Palestinians and an Egyptian cleric, of planning the bombing.
- In 1998, terrorists bombed **U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania**. American officials linked the bombings to Osama bin Laden, a Saudi-born millionaire and Islamic extremist. Bin Laden's group, al-Qa'ida, has been suspected in numerous other attacks, including the bombing of the **U.S. Navy warship Cole** in Yemen in 2000. Terrorists who claimed links to al-Qa'ida conducted a series of train bombings in **Madrid, Spain, in 2004**.
- On **Sept. 11, 2001**, about 3,000 people died as a result of the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history. Qa'ida hijackers seized two commercial airplanes and deliberately crashed them into the two 110-story towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Less than an hour later, another hijacked plane crashed into the Pentagon Building just outside Washington, D.C. Shortly after that, a fourth hijacked airplane crashed into a rural area in Somerset County, Pennsylvania.
- In response to 9/11 U.S. President George W. Bush called for a worldwide campaign against international terrorist networks. He announced that the campaign would involve tightened security, widespread intelligence efforts, economic restrictions, and military action. He declared that he would target terrorist organizations and any governments that supported them. Bush's antiterrorism effort is commonly called the **"war on terror."**
- At the time of the attacks, bin Laden and al-Qa'ida were being protected by the Taliban, a militant Islamic group that controlled the government of **Afghanistan**. Military strikes led by the United States caused the Taliban to fall from power in Afghanistan in December 2001. Numerous Qa'ida members and officers were captured or killed. However, bin Laden was not found.
- Since the September 11 attacks, counterterrorism has become a top priority for governments throughout the world. In October 2001, the U.S. Congress passed the **USA Patriot Act**, which granted government authorities greater power to conduct searches, use wiretaps, and detain and question suspects. Other nations, including India and the United Kingdom, introduced similar antiterrorism measures.
- In March 2003, the United States led a **military campaign against the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein**. The Bush administration claimed that Hussein supported terrorist organizations and could potentially supply such organizations with weapons of mass destruction. The invasion caused the fall of Hussein's government in early April.