

Terrorism Lectures 3 and 4 - Has the Threat of Terrorism been Exaggerated?

Hi everyone and welcome to our lectures on whether the threat of terrorism has been exaggerated. In these lectures I'm going to do my best to provide a fair shake to both main camps in this debate so that you leave today's class with a solid understanding of arguments suggesting that terrorism is, indeed, a significant threat and also arguments suggesting that the threat of terrorism has been exaggerated.

GO TO FIRST SLIDE

Terrorism is a Significant Threat

Alright, now, we'll start out by discussing several arguments that suggest that terrorism should still be considered a significant threat.

Terrorism Can and Does Kill a Lot of People

The *first* reason why terrorism can still be considered a significant threat is that at least *some* terrorists are capable of *killing people* through their attacks. And, as the pandemic demonstrated on a daily basis, most governments and most ordinary people care a great deal about trying to *prevent* unnecessary deaths and consider the potential *causes* of unnecessary deaths to be quite threatening and, in turn, important and significant.

The raw numbers on the deaths caused by terrorism can seem pretty scary, since they have averaged about 21,000 per year during the previous decade, with 2014 being the deadliest of all given that over 44,000 known deaths were caused by terrorism during that year.

The period between the year 2000 and 2013 was probably the *deadliest* period ever seen when it comes to terrorist attacks. During this time period, *Al Qaeda* is thought to have killed about 8,600 people in multiple countries, including, but not limited to, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the United States. The *Taliban* are thought to have killed about 8,800 people, mostly in Afghanistan. *Boko Haram* are thought to have killed about 3,500 people, mostly in Nigeria. And the *Islamic State* are thought to have killed about 3,100 people in Iraq and

Syria, though they became significantly *more active* and inflicted far more deaths *after* 2013 than they did before that year.

If we shift our focus to groups that have been conducting attacks for several decades, we should note that Anti-Israeli terrorist groups, like the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Hamas, the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and Fatah, have killed about 4,820 Israelis since 1948.

The Tamil Tigers, another group that operated for several years, is estimated to have killed up to 4,100 civilians in Sri Lanka between 1983 and 2009.

Finally, the Provisional Irish Republican Army killed about 1,700 people between 1969 and 1997, with about 1,000 of those being members of the British security forces and the rest being civilians.

Now, you probably noticed when I mentioned the various *dates* that a lot of these examples refer to what a well-known terrorist group did multiple years, over a *decade*, or even *multiple decades* ago. But even though not all of these *particular* groups are still active today, their past actions indicate that a *similarly* ambitious and capable group *could* inflict a large number of deaths at some point in the future and, on this basis, it is not *unreasonable* to conclude that terrorism is still a significant threat.

In other words, it is reasonable to consider terrorism to still be a significant threat because at least some terrorists are *tactically effective* because they are, unfortunately, capable of killing a sizeable number of people if they choose to do this.

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Terrorism Disrupts the Stability and Security of Nation-states

Now, a *second* reason why terrorism can still be considered a significant threat is that terrorism can disrupt the stability and security of nation-states. And while this disruption is, in part, related to the *deaths* that terrorists *actually* inflict through their attacks, it is *also* driven by a *more widespread* concern about the deaths that terrorists

could inflict if governments fail to give into their demands and if, therefore, their strategic objectives are not accomplished.

For example, even though the Tamil Tigers ultimately *failed* to accomplish their main strategic objective, which was to convince the Sri Lankan government to relinquish control over part of its territory so that the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka could use this territory to establish their own independent nation-state, their *violent attempts* to accomplish this objective were *highly* disruptive to Sri Lankan society. Indeed, since they were willing to target *anyone* who was part of the Sinhalese ethnic group and since that ethnic group made up about 85 percent of Sri Lanka's total population, their attacks produced widespread fear among millions of people.

Iraq and Afghanistan are probably more familiar cases to most of you because terrorist attacks in these countries, whether mounted by the Taliban, Al Qaida, the Islamic State, or a less famous group, have been covered by the news media for most of your life. The thousands of attacks carried out in these countries during the twenty-first century made them, in effect, *ungovernable failed states* despite considerable diplomatic support, hundreds of billions of Euros worth of money, and hundreds of thousands of western military personnel and security contractors being sent to these countries to try to stabilize them and make them secure enough that *local* police and military forces could take over and maintain public order on their own.

But, as it turns out, when this outside support was eventually reduced after *many* years, terrorist groups quickly overran much of Iraq and all of Afghanistan. In the latter case, the Taliban's final offensive established political control over Afghanistan in just *ten days* because the Afghan police and army were unwilling or unable to even slow them down, let alone stop them.

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If we shift our attention to another Middle Eastern case, right-wing and left-wing terrorist groups in Turkey have threatened the stability of that country for decades. And, by continuing to pose a threat to

stability, they have encouraged a sizeable portion of Turkish society to support the political ambitions of highly authoritarian, security-obsessed politicians and political parties, like the country's current president, Recep Erdoğan, and the very heavy involvement of the country's military in its political process.

Politicians like Erdoğan and senior members of the Turkish military have publicly claimed that it is their legitimate right and duty to remove any threats to the stability of Turkish society, which has meant not only attacking and killing a large number of Kurdish civilians who they presume to be supporters of the most active terrorist groups in Turkey, like the Kurdistan Workers' Party, but also sympathetic journalists and politicians who were perceived to be too weak to protect Turkish society from these groups.

For example, the Turkish military overthrew the Turkish government in 1960, 1971, and 1980, which involved throwing a civilian government out of power and temporarily handing political power to one or more senior military leaders, and mounted multiple quasi-coups and planned coups since 1990, which involved the Turkish military applying a great deal of pressure on a civilian government to resign and where the Turkish military had already drawn up plans to overthrow the government if their demands were not met. And, just to be clear, these coups weren't all bloodless. For example, during the 1960 coup, the Turkish military decided to execute the country's prime minister, finance minister, and foreign minister.

With all of this in mind, it is highly unlikely that authoritarian politicians or the Turkish military would have so much power in Turkish society if that society did not feel that it was constantly under threat from terrorists since it is this threat that makes many millions of ordinary Turkish citizens accept and even actively support anyone who claims they will do whatever is necessary to protect them from potential future terrorist attacks.

Israel's politics is, likewise, completely shaped by the perceived threat posed by terrorism, with former generals and colonels often

holding senior positions in the Israeli government because, as with Turkey, a sizeable portion of Israel's citizens prioritize electing politicians and political parties who they think are going to be able to protect them above whatever stance these politicians and parties may have on most, if not all other policy issues, like taxation and healthcare.

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Likewise, in several African countries, like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, and Nigeria, the threat posed by local terrorist groups has made it much harder to govern these societies. Mali is a particularly notable case because a North African affiliate of al Qaida came so close to overthrowing that country's government in 2012 that the United Nations Security Council authorized a French-led military intervention that saw the deployment of about 4,000 French troops who eventually helped kill three of the five senior leaders of the terrorist group and convince the surviving two to flee to Libya or Algeria.

Turning now to South Asia, even the very large and powerful country of India has found it difficult to effectively govern the territory of Kashmir due to the violent activities of Islamic terrorists who are based there. These groups have also demonstrated their ability to disrupt Indian society as a whole by carrying out attacks far away from Kashmir, such as the 2008 Christmas attack in Mumbai that, like other attacks carried out by Islamic terrorists in India, greatly aggravated pre-existing tensions between India's Hindu majority and its Muslim minority population. As in many other countries that have experienced terrorist attacks by Islamic groups, members of India's Muslim minority population found themselves discriminated against and suspected of being supporters of the groups involved in the attacks simply because of their religious faith.

And, while the Taliban have always been primarily focussed on gaining control over Afghanistan, they have long-maintained large training and supply bases in the mountainous regions of western Pakistan, just across the border from Afghanistan, that have made it

impossible for the Pakistani government in Islamabad to govern these parts of its territory.

Although these are known as the *Federally Administered* Tribal Areas, the federal government in Pakistan has very little presence in them and certainly does not *administer* them. The country's leaders have long felt that they cannot afford to crack down on the Taliban, even though the United States and other western countries have been pressuring them to do this for *decades*, because this would be highly unpopular with many segments of Pakistan's population that are sympathetic to that group's strategic objectives.

Finally, to highlight one of the most important *European* cases where terrorists may have severely undermined the stability and security of a country, we can focus on the history of *Yugoslavia*. Although the country was *conceived* of as a united homeland for *ALL* of the Slavic peoples who lived in South-eastern Europe, the country was always dominated by the social and economic elite of *ONE* Slavic people, the Serbs. This, naturally, served as a basis for grievance for many Croats, Albanians, and Macedonians, some of whom decided to form terrorist groups and carry out attacks against the Serb-dominated government and each other's respective ethnic groups.

These attacks further weakened the bonds of Slavic solidarity and, when the German and Italian militaries invaded in 1941, the Yugoslavian resistance collapsed fairly quickly – in part because many people in the tension-filled country were unwilling to fight for it.

Terrorism also played a role in the *final* breakup of Yugoslavia that started in the 1990s and continued into the twenty-first century as a range of groups, including Croats, Slovenians, Macedonians, Albanians, and Bosnian Muslims, used violence as part of their efforts to break chunks of territory away from Serb control and establish them as independent nation-states.

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Terrorism Challenges the Political and Legal Status Quo in Negative Ways

Beyond this, terrorism may continue to pose a significant threat because it challenges the political and legal status quo in many countries in negative ways. I've already mentioned how the governments of certain countries, like Israel and Turkey, that face regular terrorist attacks have become more authoritarian or have been heavily influenced by members of the armed forces over time.

However, many democratic states that have experienced far fewer and generally less deadly terrorist attacks have also changed in ways that make people who care about human rights and civil liberties deeply concerned. For example, although the Provisional Irish Republican Army never posed a particularly serious threat to the overall security of the UK, the British Government responded to this threat by allowing their security forces to hold suspected terrorists for lengthy periods of time without charging them with a crime and subjecting them to, at times, quite vicious interrogations.

Moreover, this government allowed its security forces to arrest and hold suspected terrorists who they knew they could *never* charge and convict of a crime due to a lack of evidence.

Beyond this, in direct response to the violence of the Troubles that escalated throughout the 1970s, the UK adopted the Diplock Court system to deal with suspected terrorists. In contrast to normal British trials, where the accused person's guilt or innocence is decided by a jury of ordinary people, the Diplock Courts gave judges the power to make these decisions.

The United States' government, for its part, responded to the September 11th attacks by passing the Patriot Act that allowed law enforcement and espionage agencies to use wiretaps of people's phones and to conduct searches of people's homes, businesses, and vehicles much more easily than in the past, which greatly increased the frequency that these privacy-violating evidence-gathering techniques were used. And the vast majority of the suspected

criminals that these techniques were used against were suspected of crimes that had nothing to do with terrorism. In other words, the fear of future terrorist attacks against the United States motivated its government to adopt new laws that undermined the human rights and civil liberties of its entire population.

Similar changes have occurred in numerous other democracies, including throughout Europe, during the twenty-first century.

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Attempts to Counter Terrorism are Costly

Finally, yet another reason why terrorism can still be considered a significant threat is that, if a society agrees that it should be stopped or reduced, then the process of trying to *counter*-terrorism is financially expensive.

Hiring more police, military personnel, border patrol and customs agents, airport security personnel, spies, and intelligence analysts is, itself, incredibly expensive but this is merely one of the more obvious financial costs associated with counterterrorism.

Governments and private organizations have also spent vast sums of money on installing metal detectors and more advanced scanners to try to keep bombs and other weapons out of buildings and off of aircraft and have even gone so far as to design or redesign buildings at enormous cost to make it harder for terrorists to attack or damage them.

Two of the more clear-cut examples are the American embassies in Canada and Iraq.

The Embassy in Canada's capital city, Ottawa, was redesigned after the September 11th attacks to add a new parameter of concrete and steel barriers that took up an entire lane of traffic around the building. These were justified on the basis that they would keep car bombs further away from the building so that they would do less damage to

the building if they detonated, but the changes *also* caused major traffic issues in downtown Ottawa that have never been resolved.

The U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad takes counterterrorism architecture to an entirely new level because it not only has the *largest* and most *expensive* security force of any embassy in the world but it was also designed to be the size of an entire city block in order to force would-be attackers to fight their way through multiple layers of security and defensive parameters before they could get direct access to the embassy's main building deep at the heart of the compound. This compound cost over 750 million dollars to construct and, at its highest staffing level in 2012, it reportedly cost six *billion* dollars a year to run it, with much of that being due to the need to pay for its large and mostly private security force.

Of course, whenever a government increases spending on one policy issue area they are forced to do one or more of three things. First, they can pay for this increased spending on security by *reducing* spending in other issue areas, like education, healthcare, and protecting the environment. Second, they can *increase taxes* to generate more revenue to pay for the increased spending. Or, third, they can pay for this increased spending by *borrowing money*, which adds to the country's debt and the costs of paying interest on that debt, which means that, over time, more tax revenue is going to have to be used to pay this interest and pay down the principle of the debt in order to reduce it and this will, again, mean that money will eventually need to be diverted from one or more important policy issue areas.

Scholars who believe that terrorism remains a significant threat believe that governments are justified in their decisions to devote vast resources to fighting terrorism. On the other hand, scholars who believe that the threat of terrorism has been *exaggerated* disagree on this and many other points that we will get into during the second half of today's class.

TAKE A BREAK FOR 5-10 MINUTES

The Threat of Terrorism has been Exaggerated

Alright, now that we've gone through a series of arguments and rationales in support of the notion that terrorism *IS* a significant threat, let's take a look at arguments and rationales in support of the notion that the threat of terrorism has been *exaggerated*.

Terrorism Does Not Kill *That* Many People

Now, the *first* argument put forward by supporters of this perspective is that terrorism does not kill *enough* people for it to be considered a significant threat.

As I mentioned earlier in today's class, during certain years during the past two decades, terrorists have been responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people around the world, which, undoubtedly *appears* like a very large number of people and, therefore, a very large *threat* to human life that governments should do everything possible to try to mitigate.

On the other hand, scholars who are *sceptical* of the notion that terrorism is a significant threat argue that, if placed into a broader context, the deaths caused by terrorism may not seem as scary as they first appear to be.

For example, while almost 3,000 people died in the deadliest day of attacks – by far – ever produced by terrorist violence, which occurred on September 11th, 2001, about *three times* as many Americans died of malnutrition in 2001 and about *14 times* as many Americans died in car accidents that year. And yet we don't consider car accidents or malnutrition, as general phenomena, to be particularly scary.

Likewise, if you compare the total number of Americans killed by terrorists in the ten years AFTER the September 11th attacks, which is *101*, with the total number of Americans killed in homicides due to *ANY CAUSE* during this same period, which is *174,907*, you'll see that terrorism makes up just *0.06 percent* of all homicides in America. And yet, despite this, most people in the United States are not nearly as scared of the causes of the vast majority of homicides in that

country as they are of the extremely small chance that they might be killed by a terrorist.

Globally, the number of deaths caused by terrorists is much lower than the number of deaths caused by things like disease, poverty, climate change, and violence inflicted by states on their own citizens and people in other countries. For example, even in the year that saw the most deaths at the hands of terrorists ever, which was the 44,000 deaths caused by terrorism in 2014, climate scientists estimate that over 400,000 people suffered premature deaths due to climate change.

Despite this, the threat posed by climate change has not received anything like the attention given by politicians and the news media to the threat of terrorism.

Likewise, the annual number of terrorist deaths starts to appear paltry if we take note of the fact that over 25,000 people die of hunger and malnutrition around the world every single day.

Taking all of this into account, scholars who are sceptical of the notion that terrorism is significant threat argue that, when placed in proper context, the threat to human life posed by terrorism seems greatly exaggerated.

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Terrorism is Not Particularly Disruptive to the Stability and Security of Nation-states

In addition to this, scholars who are sceptical of the notion that terrorism is a significant threat argue that there is no compelling evidence that terrorism has seriously undermined or threatened to undermine the political or economic survival of democratic states. And this would include Israel, a democracy that has been targeted by terrorist attacks for well over half a century.

I should also point out that, in the examples I mentioned earlier in today's class, such as the cases of significant disruption in places like Sri Lanka, Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Afghanistan and in other places that

I haven't mentioned already, like Chechnya, the government and society of these territories only came under severe threat when the non-state actors that opposed them started using violent techniques other than terrorism, such as widespread guerrilla warfare or even a conventional invasion and occupation of a piece of territory.

So, in the case of the rapid fall of Afghanistan in 2021, the previous Afghan government didn't flee the country because the Taliban "terrorised" them by setting off a bunch of suicide bombs in a very short period of time.

Instead, the previous government fled and allowed the Taliban to take over because a large Taliban army was sweeping across the country, taking control of an ever-greater number of provinces as they went and making use of a great deal of conventional military vehicles and other equipment that they captured along the way, just like, say, the British, American, and Soviet armies did in Germany during the final stages of World War II.

With this in mind, sceptics of the claim that terrorism continues to pose a significant threat frequently argue that terrorism alone is very unlikely to pose an existential threat to the security and stability of an otherwise functioning nation-state and that non-state actors that confine themselves to the use of terrorism do not need to be taken as seriously as those that have adopted other approaches to warfare, like guerrilla warfare.

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Terrorists (Usually) Cannot and Do Not Want to Challenge the Political and Legal Status Quo

Moreover, critics of the notion that terrorism is a very significant threat have argued that one of the reasons why the threat is taken too seriously is because the motivations and capabilities of terrorists are often misunderstood or misrepresented.

Terrorists are often depicted as wanting to accomplish extremely scary strategic objectives, like forcing Western societies to radically

change their values, level of respect for human rights, and the nature of daily life.

For example, shortly after the September 11th attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush claimed that the attacks demonstrated that al-Qaida “hates not our *policies*, but our *existence*,” and concluded that “These acts of mass murder were intended to *frighten our nation into chaos*,” and designed to curtail, “our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”

But, as we discussed at some length during our *previous* lectures on terrorism, terrorists tend to be *strategic* in the sense that they seek to use violence to *accomplish tangible political objectives* that *could* be met if governments decided to cooperate. Indeed, al-Qaida’s *actual* strategic objectives, which included to “expel the United States from the Persian Gulf,” to “sever US-Israeli relations,” to “sever US-apostate relations,” and to “spare Muslims from ‘Crusader wars,’” *could* have been accomplished if the Government of the United States had been willing to alter aspects of its foreign policy. And, *even if it had done this*, daily life for ordinary people living within the United States would not have changed in any appreciable way.

Moreover, terrorists are often depicted as being highly capable and skilled, which, if true, would certainly make them seem more terrifying.

But this image does not reflect what scholars have learned about actual terrorists and would-be terrorists.

Most terrorists in Europe and the United States, the ones that people living in Western countries should probably be most concerned with, tend to be “operationally unsophisticated, short on know-how, prone to making mistakes, poor at planning, and limited in their capacity to learn.” In fact, the vast majority of terrorist campaigns “fail within one year and are mostly ineffectual,” meaning that most terrorist campaigns do not accomplish their strategic objectives.

This is due in part to the fact that there remains an *incredible* disparity in the quantity and quality of resources, skills and funding that Western state-based security forces and terrorists have access to.

Even the terrorists who committed the attacks on 9/11 – the highest casualty terrorist attacks in history – could be considered to have been *incredibly lucky* rather than *diabolically capable* because several of the terrorists committed “basic errors in tradecraft that nearly sabotaged their plans.”

Two of the hijackers were completely unprepared for their assigned roles of piloting the suicide aircraft and couldn't get training in the United States because they couldn't speak good enough English to take a pilot training course.

Prior to 9/11, one of the hijackers abruptly returned to Yemen to visit his family without permission, which meant he might not have been allowed back into the United States to carry out the hijacking. Another ran the same risk *five times* when he decided to take overseas trips to visit with friends and family.

And another hijacker befriended people with no connection to the plot and boasted to them that he would soon become famous.

Another of the hijackers who actually took a pilot training course proved to be *so incompetent* that, after just two days of training, his flight instructor reported him to the FBI as a potential hijacker. He called attention to himself by, among other things, insisting on receiving advanced training for flying large commercial jet aircraft, which is not how pilot training works. Instead, you start by learning how to pilot very small single engine propeller aircraft and then slowly move your way up to larger aircraft with more engines and more advanced jet engines as you accumulate years of experience piloting smaller aircraft.

Beyond this, he asked his instructor how much fuel a jumbo jet could carry and how much damage it would cause if it crashed into anything.

But, infamously, the FBI did not take these warnings seriously enough to pre-emptively arrest him or any of the other hijackers before they could carry out their plan. If the FBI *had done its job*, then it is highly likely that at least some of the hijackers would have been arrested and they may have revealed enough information on the plot to allow law enforcement agencies to stop the other hijackers before 9/11.

With all of this said, while “a second 9/11” remains the kind of event that Western governments focus on trying to avoid – that is an attack organized by a large group of attackers with international connections that produces a fairly large number of casualties, many of the terrorists arrested in Western countries since 9/11 were acting alone or with a very small group of followers, rather than being part of a sophisticated global network.

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Unnecessary Attempts to Counter Terrorism are Costly

Now, just so we’re completely clear: the scholars who argue that the threat posed by terrorism has been *exaggerated* do not think that terrorism should be completely ignored or that governments should not take the threat of terrorism seriously. Rather, again, they tend to argue that the threat is currently taken *more seriously than it should be* and that the *costs* associated with fighting so hard to *counter* the threat of terrorism are highly problematic as well.

For instance, given that counter-terrorism techniques that involve the use of violence, such as drone strikes, raids on suspected terrorists’ homes or compounds, or the invasion and occupation of countries suspected of harbouring or sponsoring terrorists are all likely to produce *numerous deaths*, every time a government uses an *unnecessary* counter-terrorism technique of this type, they put lives at risk for no good reason.

If we focus on the U.S.-led “War on Terror” as a whole, it is fairly easy to make the case that the number of deaths caused by the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and numerous smaller-scale military operations since 2001 is *far, far* higher than the number of deaths caused by terrorism since the 9/11 attacks. The Iraq Body Count Project puts the number of *civilian* deaths caused by the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the widespread instability that followed at just over 209,000 and, if *combatant* deaths are added to this figure, then the *total* deaths produced by these events stands at approximately 288,000.

At the same time, over 241,000 people have been killed during the War in Afghanistan since 2001, with over 71,000 of those being civilians.

Moreover, during just one five-year period of the long-running Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which took place between September 2000 and January 2005, Israeli security forces killed approximately 3,000 Palestinians, over half of whom were civilians.

And, as of a couple of days ago, approximately 28,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza as well as several hundred in the West Bank, with a major of these being civilians.

Now, to be certain, scholars who believe that the threat of terrorism has been exaggerated are not claiming that *all* of the uses of military force during these particular conflicts or during any of the other counter-terrorism operations during the past two decades were unnecessary *wastes of human life*.

Instead, the reason why I wanted to highlight the human costs of counter-terrorism operations is that these scholars believe that all efforts should be made to *refrain* from exaggerating the threat posed by terrorism so that *no unnecessary* counter-terrorism operations take place so that, in turn, *no unnecessary* lives are ended prematurely.

A closely related reason why scholars who think the threat of terrorism has been exaggerated advocate for their position is that counterterrorism operations can be highly destabilizing since they tend to damage the political structures, economy, and critical infrastructure in the countries where they take place.

Indeed, one of the main factors that contributed to so many deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Palestinian territories during the past two decades is that the use of military force by governments who were trying to defeat terrorist groups in these places also created dangerous power vacuums by removing the political leaders and local security forces that had previously maintained control over these territories and also destroyed roads, power plants, hospitals, lots of private businesses, and other structures that not only provided essential services that kept people alive and relatively healthy but also served as vital sources of employment, especially for relatively young men who were then motivated to seek alternative forms of employment, such as with violent non-state groups that decided to launch terrorist attacks.

All of this destruction also gave millions of ordinary people living in these territories several new reasons to feel aggrieved and angry at the governments that did this to them and local actors who were perceived to be collaborating with these governments and, therefore, provided good reasons to potentially get involved in terrorism.

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Furthermore, yet another reason why scholars who think the threat of terrorism has been exaggerated advocate for their position is that counterterrorism operations tend to be very expensive, and this vast expense may not be justifiable if the threat of terrorism has been exaggerated.

During the first ten years after the September 11th attacks, the United States spent over \$1 trillion on homeland security, with the vast majority of that money dedicated to preventing terrorist attacks inside the United States.

And even though most of this spending occurred during the George W. Bush administration, the Obama administration also spent lavishly on counterterrorism. For example, in his final year in office, 2016, President Obama requested that the U.S. Congress allocate \$50.4 billion in that year's budget for the country's homeland security agencies, such as the Department of Homeland Security. Of that amount, \$36.6 billion, or about 73 percent, was earmarked for "Preventing and disrupting terrorist attacks."

And high spending in this area has continued through the Trump and Biden administrations as well.

Of course, one *consequence* of such massive spending on counterterrorism is that government money is *NOT* being spent on *other* crucial areas such as health, education and climate change research or even aspects of security or law enforcement that do not relate to terrorism, like countering organized crime.

Another consequence of working under the belief that terrorism is a significant threat is that some of this heightened spending on counterterrorism has been devoted to purchasing vehicles and equipment for local police forces in the United States that is designed to allow police to undertake counterterrorism operations if a very well-armed terrorist suddenly appears in, for instance, a small town in rural Nebraska. This equipment includes armoured personnel carriers and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles, or MRAPs, that are not only bullet proof but also capable of taking one or more hits from rocket propelled grenades or roadside improvised explosive devices, which are not *frequently* encountered inside the United States.

In other words, these vehicles are designed for use in an active warzone but they have been purchased by numerous local police forces across the United States, many of whom have felt, perhaps understandably, that they should try to make *good use* of this expensive equipment, even though they don't regularly have many terrorists around to deal with. This, in turn, has contributed to the

perceived militarization of policing and a stronger willingness by police to use deadly force on a routine basis in many parts of that country.

And this leads directly to *yet another* reason why scholars who think the threat of terrorism has been exaggerated advocate for their position, which is that, many countries where terrorism *IS* considered a significant threat, like the United States, the UK, and Australia, have experienced an erosion of civil liberties during the past two decades as new laws and have been passed and new technologies have been developed and proliferated to allow governments to track, catch, and stop terrorists more easily than they could before.

As I mentioned earlier, laws passed since the September 11th attacks have provided law enforcement and intelligence agencies vast new powers to place people under surveillance, often without receiving a warrant from a judge to do this, and to detain people for very long periods of time without charging them with a crime.

And while the American Patriot Act is the best known of these laws, not all of them were knee-jerk responses to 9/11. Even in 2014, the Australian government passed new legislation that expanded police powers to detain terrorism suspects without charging them, ostensibly to deal with the threat posed to Australia by the Islamic State.

These new forms of legislation have, not surprisingly, led to the arrest, investigation and detention without charge of many people who had no information on terrorism and no clear connections to terrorism. For example, a former senior U.S. State Department official in the George W. Bush administration claimed that the *majority* of prisoners detained at the Guantanamo Bay Prison, which is located on an American military base in Cuba, were not in any way involved in terrorism.

In addition, this legislation has led to the violation of privacy of *millions* of individuals in democratic countries whose phone records

and email correspondence are *routinely* monitored and collected by intelligence agencies.

Again, all of this has been justified on the basis of a threat that many scholars believe has been greatly exaggerated.

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Governments Focus on the Wrong Kinds of Terrorists

Finally, still another reason why critics of the notion that terrorism is a significant threat advocate for their position is that, by exaggerating the threat posed by *one particular source* of terrorist attacks – that being groups or individuals who happen to be *Muslim* – governments and many news media organizations have failed to take the potential threat posed by *non-Muslim* terrorists *seriously enough*.

This is another product of the obsession with preventing another 9/11 type attack, which is remembered not merely for its *scale* but also for the fact that it was organized and carried out by Muslims who were born in another country.

It is actually somewhat strange that the American government and American society in general are *so hyper-focussed* on preventing another 9/11 and for presuming that *this* is the most likely kind of future threat that terrorists could pose to their country because the *second* largest terrorist attack in American history occurred just six years earlier when two American citizens named Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols used a truck bomb to destroy the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma and kill 168 people.

McVeigh and Nichols certainly weren't working with or on behalf of Muslim terrorist groups, like al-Qaida. They were *right wing* home grown terrorists who were driven by, among other reasons, a desire to strike at the U.S. federal government because of their belief that it had grown *tyrannical* and was trampling on key rights enshrined in the U.S. constitution like freedom of religion and the right to bear arms.

And while the scale of their attack was much larger than the average terrorist attack in the United States, their general motivation was not in any way *abnormal* or *unconventional* because attacks by *right wing* terrorists have been, *by far*, the most common kind of terrorist attack in the United States since the September 11th attacks.

In fact, in 2020, terrorist attacks mounted by right wing groups accounted for over *90 percent* of all terrorist attacks inside the United States. Most of these groups claim that they are fighting against government tyranny or what they feel is the illegitimate loss of rights among heterosexual, white, Christian Americans who were born inside the United States and the corresponding illegitimate *increase* in the rights available to immigrants, visible minorities, religious minorities, and gay people living in the United States.

These right wing groups are not only much more *active* than Islamic and other kinds of terrorist groups but also much deadlier overall because, even though their attacks tend to be small scale, they commit *so many more* attacks than other kinds of terrorist groups that they have ended up being responsible for over *three quarters* of all deaths due to terrorism in the United States since 9/11.

But, again, critics of the notion that the threat posed by terrorism is very significant argue that *this kind* of terrorism has been *largely ignored* by governments and the news media because they have exaggerated and hyper-focussed on the threat posed by *Islamic* terrorism during the past two decades.

Conclusion

Alright, that's it for today, class. I'll see you back here in a couple of weeks for our lectures on the effectiveness of terrorism.