

acquiring their weapons systems. It also casts doubt on the argument that certain terrorist groups are concerned with the symbolic importance of the weapons they use. To date at least, groups engaging in MCT attacks have achieved this symbolic impact through their choice of targets, not their choice of weapons.

- (2) A very small number of groups engage in MCT attacks regularly; only three groups have initiated more than one MCT attack. This finding indicates that group-level factors can only partially explain when groups will use MCT. At best, these factors can explain what groups are willing to engage in MCT. Given the fact that even these groups use the strategy very rarely, it is necessary to also examine the contextual factors that give rise to particular MCT attacks. A similarly small number of countries have been the target of MCT attacks. Including Iraq, only five countries have suffered MCT attacks (Iraq, India, Russia, Sri Lanka, and the United States). In four of these countries, there are serious conflicts with a high number of civilian casualties. The fifth, the United States, is a superpower, which is consistent with the argument that terrorism is the weapon of the weak against the strong.
- (3) The data show that a clear plurality of MCT events has been perpetrated by terrorists from the Islamic world targeting the non-Islamic world. Even though these attacks have run the gamut of religious and ethnonationalist motivations, this plurality nonetheless raises interesting questions about the rationales for justifying mass terror that groups may be finding in Islam and the Islamic world's interaction with the non-Islamic world. (For further discussion of rationales and the related concept of "readings" of the opposition, see Stohl's contribution earlier in this Forum.)

These tentative conclusions suggest two more general insights that can be derived from our analysis. First, the willingness of traditional terrorist groups to engage in MCT indicates that they may be more likely to acquire and use WMD than has been assumed by the majority of analysts. Second, the analysis of MCT illustrates the destructive potential of conventional means of attack. It is crucial, therefore, to understand the motivations that lead to MCT in general as opposed to WMD terrorism specifically.

The Interplay between Terrorism, Nonstate Actors, and Weapons of Mass Destruction: An Exploration of the Pinkerton Database

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During 2003–2004 a research group led by Gary LaFree and Laura Dugan at the University of Maryland coded and computerized a database originally collected by the Pinkerton Corporation's Global Intelligence Services (PGIS) comprising more than 69,000 terrorist events recorded for the entire world from 1970 to 1997. For nearly thirty years, PGIS trained researchers to record all terrorism incidents they could identify from wire services, US and foreign government reporting sources, foreign and domestic newspapers, information provided by PGIS offices around the world, and data furnished by PGIS clients. The data retrieval protocol remained substantially consistent during the entire twenty-eight years of data collection.

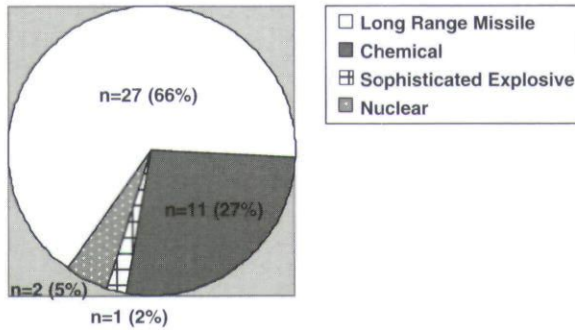


FIG. 1. Weapons of Mass Destruction (PGIS Database 1970–1997)

The PGIS database is more than seven times larger than any other existing open source terrorism incident database. There are three main reasons for this. First, unlike most other databases on terrorism, the PGIS data include religious, economic, and social acts of terrorism as well as political acts. Second, because the Pinkerton data were collected by a private business rather than a government entity, the data collectors were under no pressure to exclude some terrorist acts because of political considerations. Third, and most important, unlike any other open source database, the PGIS data include both instances of domestic and international terrorism.

This contribution to the Forum briefly summarizes a preliminary examination of the data from the perspective of issues pertinent to nonstate actors, terrorism, and WMD. In this exercise, we use the PGIS data to explore several issues related to past terrorist events and the ability and willingness of nonstate actors to use WMD.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

In light of evolving definitions of WMD, we examine not only nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons but also sophisticated explosives and long-range missiles that are intended to kill a large number of people and to create mass disruption. Whether these weapons truly represent WMD is a point of contention. However, because conference participants agreed to abandon our seemingly irreconcilable definitional argument concerning WMD and focus instead on a broader concept of mass impact terrorism (MIT), we believe that our inclusive definition of WMD more accurately reflects this notion of mass impact terrorism.

Figure 1 shows that despite our inclusive definition, incidents involving these weapons remain a rare occurrence. In fact, only forty-one of the 69,000 cases in our database used such weapons.⁶ Most involved long-range missiles capable of carrying warheads; chemical attacks typically included the use of mercury, acid, napalm, cyanide (found in water supplies), and chemical bombs, often intended to disrupt the targeted nation's economy.

Means of Acquiring and Using WMD

We employ two methods for discovering which terrorist groups are more likely to obtain and use WMD. First, it follows logically that groups that have used these weapons in the past both (a) have the ability to acquire them and (b) will be more likely to use them in the future. Second, we believe that groups that have attacked

⁶Among the forty-one incidents involving WMD, eight were unsuccessful, indicating thwarted attempts where the actors, weapons, or plot were discovered before the event could take place. Fatalities are not necessary for an event to be labeled successful.

targets in countries away from their base of operations are also more likely to use WMD. The database identified seventeen groups that have used WMD in the past; among these, eleven, including three Palestinian groups, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Dev Sol, Hizballah, and Sendero Luminoso, have struck in at least six countries other than their own.

Desire to Use WMD

Not all terrorist groups with the capability to inflict mass destruction have the desire to do so.⁷ For this reason, we also identify the groups that (a) have killed a large number of people in previous attacks⁸ and (b) tend to achieve maximum lethality per incident. On the first front, only nine of the seventeen groups that have used WMD have also killed at least fifty people in one or more of their attacks. According to the database, the Peruvian group, Sendero Luminoso, has exceeded this threshold twenty-one times, more than tripling the mass killing incidence of any other WMD group. Further, eighty-two groups that have not used WMD have committed attacks killing at least fifty-four people; however, only seven have done so five or more times.⁹ The Nicaraguan Democratic Force and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil top this list, having done so on twenty-seven and twenty-six occasions, respectively. Compared to the groups that have used WMD, the non-WMD groups display higher frequencies and incidences of mass killing attacks.

We also examined the database for groups that tended to kill a high average number of people per incident. Among the groups that have used WMD, the most lethal appear to be the Tamil Tigers and UNITA, averaging approximately eight deaths per incident. Sendero Luminoso, which committed the most total incidents (3,374) and inflicted the largest number of fatalities (over 11,000) from 1970–1997, averaged just over three deaths per incident. Among non-WMD groups, four averaged over thirteen fatalities per attack, including the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, Mozambican National Resistance, Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, and the Hutus (whose average of 42.8 mostly reflects an outlying incident that killed over 1,000). Further analyses will control for number of incidents as well as outliers. Nonetheless, there appears to be wide variation in the mean number killed among both WMD groups (from 0 to 8) and non-WMD groups (from 0 to 43).

In Sum

The purpose of this analysis was to provide an exploratory look at a recently computerized database, examining the interplay between nonstate actors, terrorism, and WMD. In this brief overview, we have concentrated on the following risk factors: (1) previous use of WMD, (2) a history of willingness to launch attacks outside of the country of origin, (3) willingness to kill large numbers of people, and (4) attempts to achieve maximum lethality. Along the way, we have identified certain groups that fit these criteria and thus may be candidates for mass impact terrorism in the future. In short, although making no statistically formulated arguments, the data discussed here nonetheless serve as a point of departure for a better understanding of a host of issues of concern in both the academic and policy fields.

⁷For example, the IRA often warns their intended target before each attack to allow time for civilians to evacuate the area.

⁸We use the 99th percentile of all incidents involving at least one death as the criterion for having killed "many people" in the past. For groups that have used WMD, the qualification is fifty deaths; for all other groups, it is fifty-four.

⁹In fact, 77 percent of non-WMD groups have committed mass fatality attacks only once. Also, thirty-nine terrorist attacks (16 percent) in this category were committed by groups not identified in our database.

Avenue for Future Research

An interesting observation deserving of further examination regards groups that inflict mass casualties only a few times or, more interestingly, only once. For example, of the nine groups that have both used WMD and killed at least fifty persons in an incident, only four have inflicted mass casualties more than once. Similarly, of the eighty-two non-WMD groups that have killed at least fifty-four, fewer than half ($n = 40$) have done so more than ten times. In fact, 23 percent ($n = 19$) of these groups committed an incident of mass killing only once. With the ability to inflict this level of impact, it becomes important to discover the reasons why some groups suddenly desist.

Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and WMD

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Traditional approaches treat terrorism separately from organized crime for at least two reasons. First, considering terrorism as a form of crime is controversial, and opinions are divided both theoretically and in the policymaking world. Second, terrorists and criminals are driven by different motivations: political, ideological, religious, and ethnic "causes" versus money, respectively. Based on this difference, many find it fairly easy to distinguish between these two phenomena.

Not all so-called terrorists, however, operate on the basis of political, ideological, religious, or ethnic goals. Not anymore, anyway. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), for example, used to be a politically motivated guerrilla organization. Presently it profits from drug trafficking; the organization benefits monetarily from this enterprise and is unlikely to give such activity up easily. Its members have always acted criminally in order to support themselves financially; ransom-motivated hostage-taking was and still is a significant part of the FARC funding. But they seem to have crossed a line. The political rebels have become pirates, while still pretending to be rebels to recruit new members, maintain a "legitimate" public image, justify, many would argue, some of their own acts to themselves.

Terrorist organizations often maintain groups composed of organized criminals that help the "political" wings function. Hizballah, Hamas, and al-Qaeda all operate sophisticated fund-raising networks in the Middle East, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. These fund-raising operations are often based on voluntary contributions for the "cause," but they also frequently involve extortion, blackmail, and other criminal activities. Hizballah, for instance, has for a long time maintained a significant presence within the Arab community in the tri-border area in South America. In this place, where the borders of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay come together, judicial, law-enforcement, and military authorities have been unable, and at times corruptly unwilling, to control the traffic in illicit products crossing the three borders. Although the situation in this region has been shifting over the years as a result of outside pressures, mainly from the United States, the focus on this criminal enclave or "black spot" (Stanislawski 2004) is still not strong enough to curtail the area's attractiveness to "global bads." Criminals trade there with terrorists who are able to receive whatever they might need: materials, weapons, and information.

This tri-border area is not an exception; there are many such criminal enclaves (Sullivan and Bunker 2003) or "black spots" across the globe, hiding illicit activities.

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