

Chapter 9 summaries

Definitions

- There is considerable disagreement as to what does and does not constitute cyberterrorism.
- Some authors, such as Denning and Conway, have suggested that the term 'cyberterrorism' should be restricted to attacks which could result in violence or severe economic damage.
- Post (1984) distinguished between two main types of terrorist groups – anarchic-ideologue groups and nationalist-separatist groups.
- Conway (2007) argued for a four-tiered system to classify online terrorist activity, including 'use'; 'misuse'; 'offensive use' and 'cyberterrorism'.

Cyberterror attacks

- To date, terrorists have mostly used the internet for purposes such as propaganda, recruitment, fundraising, information gathering and dissemination and networking.
- A cyberterror attack involving serious disruption, injury or loss of life has not yet occurred, and some researchers argue that it is unlikely to do so in the near future.
- Denning (2007b) suggests that likely targets for such attacks include water supplies, power supplies (including electricity, oil and gas), communications grids, banks, transportation, essential government services and emergency services.
- Denning (2007b) argues for a five-level categorisation of terror attacks, ranging from general experience of cyberspace to execution of a cyberterror attack.
- Terrorist organisations may hire external hackers, or recruit them to their organisation.
- Rollins and Wilson (2007) suggest that a cyberterror attack may be used to amplify a traditional terror attack.

- Wilson (2005) indicates that there are three possible methods of attack – physical attacks, electronic attacks or computer network attacks.
- There are several advantages for terrorist organisations using cyberterror attacks, particularly anonymity, acting from remote locations, use of security holes and allowing small organisations to function as more serious threats (Yar, 2006).

Hactivism, recruitment and networking

- Hactivist attacks are high-profile, but should not be confused with cyberterrorism.
- Hactivists focus on causing frustration and disruption for specific groups, while cyberterrorists attempt to cause destruction or terror.
- However, cyberterrorists may attempt to employ tactics more commonly associated with hactivists, such as denial of service attacks.
- The accessibility of online propaganda and terrorist organisation presence enables individuals to join organisations easily.
- A variety of media is created by terrorist organisations, and distributed through social networking sites, video-sharing sites, bulletin boards and other online formats.
- This media is used for recruitment, propaganda and networking.
- Online communication allows terrorists to interact cheaply, rapidly and effectively, while also disseminating responsibilities away from a central headquarters.

Fundraising and gathering/dissemination of information

- Terrorist organisations may use an online presence to raise funds through the sale of items, or the direct donation of money or goods.
- Terrorist organisations can also gather information online, through publicly available information or hacking techniques.
- Information is also disseminated by terrorist organisations through the use of various online media.

- Information disseminated can include threats, videos of terrorist leaders, videos of terrorist activities, propaganda, training materials and spreading false information.
- Information disseminated online may bypass normal media, thus avoiding censorship

Radicalisation

- Becoming a terrorist is a gradual process, involving several stages.
- The process of being exposed to and sympathising with radical ideology is sometimes called 'radicalisation'.
- Holding such radical views does not necessarily mean that a person is engaged in violence.
- Holding specific demographic traits is not a useful predictor of terrorist activity, as many others will hold those traits without choosing to engage in terrorism.
- It is possible that a combination of factors is required for a person to be radicalised, including feeling a need to belong and to develop personal identity, social isolation and perception of injustice.
- Social learning theory may explain some cases of terrorism, though not all (Victoroff, 2005).
- Terrorists recruited online may experience similar psychological processes to those recruited offline, and those recruited through interactive forums may develop a social identity associated with terrorism more strongly than those who only passively view non-interactive content.
- Terrorist leaders may experience extreme cognitive simplicity in an ideological domain, while demonstrating enhanced planning and organisational skills (Locicero and Sinclair, 2008).

Motives of terrorism and cyberterrorism

- Terrorist organisations have different motives, but the goal of terrorist acts is to create fear and uncertainty among people other than the direct victim of an attack.
- Cyberterrorism is generally motivated by similar goals, but may also hope to demonstrate the vulnerability of an organisation, make political statements, steal information or bring about negative publicity or direct losses.

The psychology of cyberterrorists

- There is relatively little empirical research on the psychology of terrorism, for several practical reasons.
- Empirical evidence has failed to support the existence of specific personality traits in terrorists.
- Kruglanski and Fishman (2006) distinguished between terrorism as a 'syndrome' or a 'tool'.
- A syndrome is a 'psychologically meaningful construct with identifiable characteristics on individual and group levels of analysis' (p. 193).
- A 'tool' represents 'a strategic instrument that any party in a conflict with another may use' (p. 193).
- There is little evidence for terrorism as a syndrome, but the concept of it as a tool is useful, especially in relation to cognitive factors such as decision making and perception.
- Group dynamics are another very important aspect of terrorist organisations.
- Terrorism is probably determined by a combination of many factors.
- While it was previously thought that terrorists would hold an abnormal psychological profile, this does not generally seem to be the case.
- Cyberterrorists may be very different to those who engage in traditional terrorist activities, due to the different nature of the attack (possibly non-violent and low-risk for the terrorist).

- Cyberterrorism may also encourage the formation of new terrorist groups.

Effects on victims

- As there has been no successful cyberterrorism attack to date, it is difficult to predict what the effects on victims might be.
- Those affected by traditional terrorist attacks can experience high rates of mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- But the perceived likelihood of a cyberterrorist attack can also affect society, raising fear levels.
- Media reporting of cyberterrorism and cyberterrorist risk should be carefully undertaken to avoid unnecessary fear.