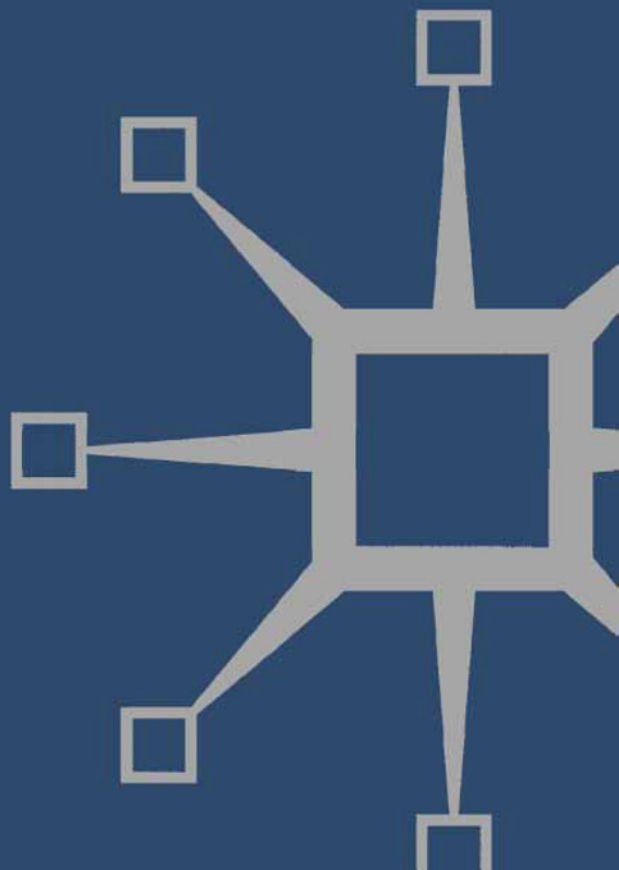


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Terrorist's Creed

Fanatical Violence and the Human
Need for Meaning

Roger Griffin



‘...an original, insightful, and innovative contribution to the literature on terrorism.’

– *Jeffrey M. Bale, Monterey Institute of International Studies*

‘...among the most original and sweeping theoretical works to come from the terrorism studies genre in the last decade.’

– *Jeffrey B. Cozzens, White Mountain Research LLC*

‘It is rare to find a work of such originality in a field like terrorism studies, which is dominated either by journalistic cliches or a crudely logistical analysis. Griffin locates terrorism in a richly conceived context that is ethical and epistemological as much as it is political.’

– *Dr. Faisal Devji, University of Oxford*

‘In an analysis that is at once philosophical, psychological, political, and historical, Roger Griffin brings to the study of modern terrorism the same breadth of knowledge, acquaintance with specialized literature, and empathic insight he brought to his study of Modernism and Fascism. This new book builds upon the foundation of Griffin’s study of modernism and the responses to it which determined the epochal nature of the twentieth century. For him, “terrorism” is a product of a fear of loss of meaning in the world combined with the conviction that the world must be remade if meaning is to be saved. Thus, terror is a response to a historical situation that regularly recurs, but modern terrorism can be understood only within the context of the threats to meaning posed by modernism itself. The book has a practical aspect as well as a theoretical one. It tries to provide insight into the “inside” of modern terrorism – what motivates, sustains, and reproduces “the terrorist.”’

– *Hayden White, Professor Emeritus of Historical Studies,
University of California*

‘...both innovative and original...’

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‘Since 9/11 there have been any number of detailed studies of terrorist groups, many of them by counter-terrorism professionals or reporters specialising in a particular region. Meanwhile, a small band of academics have tried to step back from the present so as to metaphysically locate what all or most terrorists are seeking to achieve, whether they realise it or not. Roger Griffin is a well-known expert on political violence and European Fascism. He brings a great deal of conceptual clarity and prodigious learning to a subject where emotion and prejudice are often uppermost. This is a valuable contribution to understanding the terrorism phenomenon.’

– *Michael Burleigh, author of Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism*

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Roger Griffin

Professor in Modern History, Oxford Brookes University

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*To Mariella and Vincent,
my antidotes to terror*

Of war and peace the truth just twists,
Its curfew gull just glides.
Upon four-legged forest clouds
The cowboy angel rides,
With his candle lit into the sun,
Though its glow is waxed in black —
All except when 'neath the trees of Eden

The savage soldier sticks his head in sand
And then complains
Unto the shoeless hunter who's gone deaf
But still remains
Upon the beach where hound dogs bay
At ships with tattooed sails
Heading for the Gates of Eden

With a time-rusted compass blade,
Aladdin and his lamp
Sits with Utopian hermit monks
Side-saddle on the Golden Calf,
And in their promises of paradise
You will not hear a laugh —
All except inside the Gates of Eden

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And that is where the problems start. Those of us working in the human sciences are all dwarfs standing on the backs of giants, or stage-divers borne aloft by many pairs of hands. In writing a book so far beyond my habitual comfort zone of comparative fascist studies, I feel particularly puny and assisted. Its completion has been reliant on the wonderful academic resources and institutions which have formed coral-like over the centuries as a vast barrier reef, teeming with the weirdest life-forms of independent intellectual and spiritual life, protecting society against the storm-waves of collective fanaticism and charismatic politics, and the predatory deep-sea Krakens of ignorance, superstition, and despotism. They are organisms worth preserving against all totalitarianisms, secular or religious, who are prepared to destroy them entirely by dynamite fishing for non-existent shoals of 'new men' or new believers.

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1

Forethoughts: The Liquid Fear of Terrorism

Apocalypse in the subway

MIT astrophysicist John Koestler drives at top speed from Lexington, Massachusetts to a subway station in Manhattan determined to avert a major catastrophe. Two days earlier he witnessed a horrendous plane crash right next to the motorway where he was gridlocked. This, he is now convinced, in a bizarre episode of premonition, was predicted along with all the major calamities to occur on earth since 1959 in a list of continuous numbers which encrypted the precise location, date and number of victims. The next disaster is due to occur today at Lafayette Station, near New York's Little Italy. Despite telling the FBI to seal off the area in a phone tip-off the night before, Koestler is disconcerted to find the station still open, so he pushes his way onto the crowded platform to see what he can do. There his eyes alight on a man – in his twenties with a generically foreign complexion and an incongruous woollen hat – lurking behind a column and behaving suspiciously, his jacket bulging with some object he is keen to conceal.

Convinced the man is a suicide bomber and is about to wreak carnage, Koestler gives chase through the dense throng of commuters and pursues him into a crowded carriage, closely followed by armed police who initially treat him as the suspect instead. Finally persuaded to turn their attention to the man he has cornered in front of the locked interconnecting door of the last carriage, a cop orders him to put his hands up. A bunch of stolen DVDs fall on the floor. It has been a false alarm. But the fulfilment of the prophecy announced in the coordinates and death toll for that date on his list of major disasters immediately ensues with chilling inevitability. An electrical malfunction in the track-switching mechanism (due, we will learn, to the same solar flare activity which caused the plane to crash and which will soon consume planet Earth entirely) forces a train on the other track to career off the rails and mount the platform out of control, cutting a gruesome swathe of death through the thronged commuters, a catastrophe recreated in graphically realistic CGI detail. The final crane shot from outside the station, with an American flag fluttering forlornly in the foreground, reveals a scene of urban death and destruction unmistakably designed to trigger painful memories of 9/11 in the US psyche.

Alex Proyas' *Knowing* (2009) is a science fiction film starring Nicholas Cage. Commentators have seen encoded within the narrative apocalyptic echoes of the *Final Destination* film series, the best-selling Christian fundamentalist *Left Behind* novel and DVD series (over 65 million book sales by 2010), and even the salvationist doctrine of Scientology (*scientia* means knowledge, or knowing) with its guardian angels and higher forces directing human destiny. What concerns us here, though, is what the airplane and subway disaster scenes in the film tell us about the way terrorism has entered the collective imagination of the West in (late? high?) modernity. And when I say 'us' I am not referring to the many thousands living daily in a tragic life-or-death situation in which they are exposed to a statistically high risk of terrorist outrage and political or religious murder – for whom reading a book like this would generally be an absurd cultural luxury far removed from their minute-to-minute concerns of survival. I have in mind the countless millions who are objectively more likely to win the national lottery than become victims of a terrorist outrage, yet whose lives are gnawed at by the subliminal fear of terrorism and by apocalyptic presentiments about the end of the world (perhaps a cosmic projection of the end of *their* world?) given such powerful allegorical expression in *Knowing*.

The trauma of 9/11, which within minutes had become one of the most important global media events ever generated by the 'society of the spectacle',¹ left such a powerful subconscious state of alert in New York that in 2005, when a Cirrus SR20 crashed into Manhattan's Belair Building through pilot error, the city 'went through it all again', witnessing a wave of panic during which 'the mobile phone networks jammed as people rushed to telephone their loved ones', and causing the Pentagon 'to scramble jets over several US cities including New York, Washington, Los Angeles and Seattle'.² Three years later, on 27 April 2009, when a low-flying VC-25 (the iconic plane used for the presidential Air Force One) circled low over New York City for a photo opportunity, it unleashed enough mayhem on the streets below to lead to the resignation of Louis Caldera, director of the White House Military Office.³

September 11th 2001 was the day when terrorism mutated as a fact of modern life, first for US citizens and then in an emotional pandemic spreading throughout what used to be called 'the First World', most of which had been for decades habituated to living at a safe distance from political hotspots. It was no longer something remote that happens elsewhere and to other people, like famines or revolution. Instead it could potentially occur whenever an individual passed over the invisible threshold from private into public space. As headline-grabbing terrorist attacks in the haunts of First World citizens proliferated along with their choice of civilian targets – airport lounges, theatres, night-clubs, pubs, restaurants, rush-hour traffic, shopping malls, sporting stadia, beach-resorts – metropolises acquired a shadowy aura of nameless menace. It was seared into adult consciousness that any public space could become the site for anyone to become the victim of someone else's utopian cause, the banal furniture of urban existence – a supermarket, a railway station, a disco, a bus – suddenly turning out to be the last things a commuter, shopper, tourist, or school-girl might ever see on their way to a destination

they would never reach because it happened to intersect with the itinerary of someone's private war on society. A decade on, the insecurity bred by this momentous event, simultaneously real and mythic, more ontological than concrete when contrasted with the risks of death by heart attack, traffic accidents, or muggings to which the average Westerner is exposed, had subtly altered the experience and texture of modern life for millions.⁴

The absent towers now cast a long shadow. In 2001 42,196 US citizens died in road accidents, a figure that remains stubbornly constant year on year, yet the threat of dying in a car has never wormed its way into the day-to-day sense of security of the inhabitants of modernity. Less than 3,000 died in the 9/11 attacks, but since that day there are millions in the modern world for whom, however secure their material circumstances, a permanent subjective threat of terrorist violence now lurks, spasmodically waiting to pop out of the back of the mind in the bustle of urban routine like a phantom tooth-ache. In an important essay on the need for academics to get a historical 'grip' on terrorism to restore a sense of proportion, Isabelle Duyvesteyn compares the modern psychosis about terrorism to the late nineteenth century in Europe when sporadic anarchist violence had, thanks to its sensationalist coverage in the press, succeeded in creating 'an all-pervasive fear that gripped whole societies'. The collapse of scenery in a Parisian theatre unleashed pandemonium as people rushed in terror to the exits to avoid the imminent explosions.⁵ In this context the subway scene in *Knowing* could be cited as evidence to support the striking thesis explored in five monographs⁶ by the world's most influential expert on the sociology of modernity, Zygmunt Bauman, namely that under its impact reality is becoming 'liquid'. He highlights the paradoxical feature of being a citizen in a 'materialistic' civilization which has on average, at least in the First World, objectively extended longevity and maximized consumption while minimizing threats to physical well-being and the risk of violent or avoidable death: modern life is pervaded by a state of groundless anxiety bordering on paranoia.

Certainly there is an increasingly conspicuous nexus of collective, global threats to the future of our planet or species to be worried about – the demographic explosion, ecological depredation and disasters, irreversible climate change, the depletion of food and energy resources to name but a few. Then there are culture-specific dangers – the shift of the hubs of economic and productive domination from the Europeanized and Americanized world to Asia, unpredictable migratory pressures and mass immigration, the loss of the paradoxical Cold War securities, the unforeseeable evolution of Islamic societies, the running sores and open wounds of trouble spots such as Israel and her immediate neighbours, as well as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and North Korea, and the descent into anarchy and guerilla warfare in some central African states. Such concrete problems are given a particular resonance in the context of the social, experiential and technological forces and factors that ever since the nineteenth century have been progressively 'disenchanted' or 'disembedding' reality to produce a sociological and psychological quicksand under even the well-heeled feet of the earth's fully 'modernized' inhabitants. Modernity may look solid materially, but it provides no foothold, no ground, no existential or psychological *terra firma*. We are all at sea, even if some

of us are more temperamentally predisposed to notice it or admit it to ourselves than others, and more prone to ontological sea-sickness than our companions in the temporary life-boat chance has thrown us into.

In the context of the 'liquid fear' identified by Bauman, one reason why terrorism especially since 9/11 has had such a profound resonance in the modern (i.e. Western) psyche is arguably because it crystallizes and renders palpable the liquefying impact of modernity on reality and the anxiety this induces. Not just each successful act of terrorism, but every foiled plot and trial relating to it that hits the headlines confirms one of the ongoing subplots of contemporary history, the story that it could all be snuffed out in a moment, at least from the solipsistic vantage point of our own lives. To quote car accident statistics is irrelevant, because we have learned to live subjectively with that risk. But the terrorist threat is of a different order. If an unknown sociopath had once sabotaged your car by cutting the hydraulic pipe to the brakes, even if you got out of the ensuing accident unscathed, the terrifying memory of hurtling towards a road junction impotent to slow down would undermine the subliminal sense of security with which you had always driven. Even the slightest unresponsiveness of the brakes might induce in you involuntary panic. You no longer trust the car. Driving precipitates liquid fear.

The Titanic syndrome

9/11 and its sequels in Bali, Madrid, and London and numerous near-sequels have had a similar effect, undermining the sense of security and the taken-for-granted solidity of reality which once underlay the lives of millions in the urbanized democracies of the West. It has triggered what Bauman calls 'the Titanic syndrome', namely 'the horror of falling through the wafer-thin crust of civilization into that nothingness stripped of the elementary staples of organized, civilized life'. It is a nothingness akin to death itself within the limits of the human *imaginaire*, or the closest our mortal minds can get to grasping emotionally the inconceivable prospect of personal non-being. For Bauman the true horror of the *Titanic* disaster was not embodied in the iceberg, but in what went on in the bowels of the ship between the moment when it was struck and the moment when it sank, 'something all the more horrifying for staying concealed most of the time (perhaps all of the time) and so taking its victims by surprise whenever it crawls out of its lair, always catching them unprepared and inept to respond'. The sinking of a luxury liner on its maiden voyage became a living metaphor for the return to the surface of the repressed awareness that 'civilization is vulnerable: it stays but one shock away from inferno'.⁷ The sense of civilization's fragility and imminent destruction (dramatized in such graphic CGI detail in Roland Emmerich's 2009 disaster movie *2012* and its kin) is, at least on one level, an unconscious displaced metaphor for the fact that one day our own all too solid flesh shall melt.

It would be insensitive to trivialize, intellectualize, or spirit away through a preoccupation with symbolism the horrendous human and material destruction of that day and the immense physical suffering and emotional pain it caused to the immediate victims and their loved ones. Yet, on one level the Twin Towers can be

seen not just as a pair of functional skyscrapers, but as the static, vertical *Titanic* of a triumphalist post-Cold War liberal (capitalist? Western?) civilization, some of whose doomed passengers fell into the thin air of a radiant blue September morning instead of the black, freezing waters of the Atlantic. The irresistibly haunting quality emanating from Richard Drew's photographs of one of the approximately 200 victims who jumped from the towers that morning to escape the lethal flames and smoke turned 'The Falling Man' into an iconic image of the disaster,⁸ inspiring Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* (2007) exploring the psychological and symbolic aspect of terrorism, and prompting an American theologian to declare that 'perhaps the most powerful image of despair at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not found in art, or literature, or even popular music. It is found in a single photograph'.⁹ Certainly, the instant of static, geometric perfection distilled from the obscene kinetic event of a man plunging head-first to his death in a yoga-like pose framed by the vertical lines of the North Tower is deceptive and artificial, since he was actually tumbling grotesquely as he fell. Living horror has been effaced by abstract form. Moreover, the man was eventually identified with some measure of certainty as 43-year-old Jonathan Briley, who worked in the top-floor restaurant. However, the aesthetic perfection of the image of a single, and still nameless victim of 9/11 who is about to be smashed to unrecognizable pulp on the street below turned him into the equivalent of the 'unknown warrior' of a war, permitting the empathetic imagination to come as close as it ever may to the experiential horror of that morning for those trapped in the building, a synecdoche of the entire tragedy that had struck the US 'out of the blue'.

Within the context of Bauman's study of the modern liquefaction of fear, the image's powerful resonance is comparable to the morbid fascination with the experiences of the passengers between the moment the ocean-liner struck the iceberg and when it finally broke apart and sank, a fascination demonstrated in a stream of eyewitness accounts which filled the newspapers of the day and 85 years later helped make James Cameron's film one of the most viewed films of all time. Bauman suggests the enduring fixation with the fate of the *Titanic* is not just with the event itself but with what it symbolizes *existentially*: 'This single momentous, obsessing act flung to the surface the suppressed recognition of the acute fragility not just of the Western project of progress but of our own existential insecurity and mortality. It brought forward the deferred confrontation with our day of reckoning juggled away in routine existence, like a ghostly drowned victim bobbing up on the surface of the lake to confront in a nightmare its murderer who for years thinks he or she has "got away with it"'.¹⁰ In a directly analogous way, we (even a female 'we') can recognize in the 'falling man' a presentiment of ourselves in a future moment when we (are forced to) execute our own *salto mortale* into the void from the false security temporally found in the Iron Cage of rational existence, even if the bars are decked with computer screens, games consoles, and flat-screen TVs. *Hypocrite voyeur. Mon semblable, mon frère*.¹¹

The implication of this lengthy train of thought is this: beyond any immediate strategic objectives, the aim of terrorism is to disseminate terror, and the virtual resonance chamber which dramatically amplifies the impact of terrorist strikes

in the heartlands of stable First World societies, thereby helping to realize the goals of the terrorists, is the liquid fear that is endemic to societies under a Western modernity which has destroyed communal existential certainties. It is a fear sometimes raised to fever pitch by a media-dominated society addicted to rolling news and images of catastrophe small and great. A 'safe' distance from the war zones, functioning modernity has created a bizarre situation in which both potential terrorists and the demonized Others ('the Enemy'), a handful of whom may one day by a freak of chance be their immediate victims, and the countless more who are the real targets of the attacks, namely the spectators who find the spectacle of terrorism so compelling and are duly terrorized, cohabit the same social space, even if they experience them through utterly different lenses. Commenting on the 7/7 London suicide bombings, Bauman remarks that:

A dozen or so Islamic plotters, ready to kill, proved to be enough to create the atmosphere of a besieged fortress and raise a wave of 'generalized insecurity'. Insecure people tend to seek feverishly for a target on which to unload their gathering anxiety and to restore their lost self-confidence by placating their offensive, frightening and humiliating sentiment of helplessness. The besieged multi-ethnic and multicultural cities are turning into habitations shared by both the terrorists and their victims. Each side confirms the worst fears of the other and adds substance to their prejudices and hatreds. Between themselves, locked into a sort of liquid modern version of the *dance macabre*, the two sides won't allow the phantom of a siege ever to rest.¹²

Such reflections cast light on one of the principal purposes of this book. It is written to call a unilateral halt to the macabre dance of mutual incomprehension and demonization between terrorists and their targets, not, of course, the victims, but the spectators who survive to have their sense of security further eroded and their achievements in life relativized. It sets out to do this by making terrorists more comprehensible, less alien, less demonized, and certainly more human to the vast majority who live outside the charmed but cursed orbit of their fanaticism. It aims to dispel some of the irrational anxieties which surround violent events whose 'rational', objective threat to society is amplified by a particular constellation of apparently irrational but on closer inspection intelligible social and historical factors. These factors have in the past impeded the academic understanding of such phenomena as the witch-craze, the French Revolution, 'la Grande Peur', the Terror, Bolshevism, revolutionary nationalism, fascism, and the Holocaust.

The aim of this book, then, is to demystify terrorism. If it cannot fully allay the liquid, irrational fears which exacerbate the perfectly *rational* anxiety provoked by the threat of terrorism along with myriad other daily threats to our security and our well-being, then it hopes at least to turn it into something more solid, less disturbing. The last chapter will suggest that fear can even be channelled into something more humanly productive altogether. This book presents the murderous commitment to a terrorist cause as primarily neither pathological nor criminal, but as an intelligible, analysable, reconstructible response, however

pervaded with utopian, mythic thinking, to a particular *objective* cultural threat or existential dilemma, or combination of the two. It intends to lay the spectre of fear and dissipate the atmosphere of nebulous *angst* that still envelops the subject in some quarters of the media, state security, government, and even academia, prompting reductive categories of analysis, simplistic diagnoses, and xenophobic misperceptions of 'alien' cultures and religions, not to mention the impulsive urge to wage wars against demonized enemies who in some notable cases, once killed, prove subsequently to have had no link to terrorism as such. At the same time it wants to underscore the legitimacy and solid empirical basis of certain fears by throwing into stark relief the ideological mainsprings of terrorist threat to peaceful civic coexistence. These, as we will show, may lie deep within the visceral urge to defend a culture and whole way of life against destruction, to regain a lost (and often mythically reconfigured) homeland, or to ensure that certain scripturally based interpretations of established religions will prevail over 'heresy' and decadence, or that a 'new religious movement' takes history by storm.

Clearly this is an investigation that does not propose to discuss the strategic, instrumental, military, or political aspects of terrorist objectives, or even the biographies or testimonies of terrorists themselves. Instead, the focus will be on bringing the subject more firmly within the orbit of humanistic understanding by considering the *non-instrumental* rationales, the symbolic, existential, *metapolitical* motivations of terrorist acts. One of the world's best-selling video-games is the series *Assassins Creed*, which has sold 31 million units since its launch in November 2007. As a form of ritualized vicarious violence dramatized through a blend of history with science fiction it is only loosely based on one of the most famous premodern terrorist organizations, the Assassins, and shows no interest whatsoever in the highly elaborate 'creed' which sustained the original murderers. By contrast, this book is precisely concerned with the *creed* of terrorists, their credo, what they believe, what *they* have convinced themselves they are doing when they commit an act of terrorism. Christians, Jews, and Muslims have had creeds to commit to memory (known in Western Christianity as part of the catechism and order of service). They are formulaic statements of the articles of their faith, their morality, the essential truths in their path or struggle for salvation. Apart from the ten or so versions of the Christian creed, there have been secular creeds as well, most famously the 'American's Creed', while under Mussolini impressionable youths were taught 'the Fascist catechism'. In the context of this book, the creed will not be the sort written down as a ritualized verbal formula. Instead, even when not published as a manifesto, it will invisibly inform calculated, premeditated acts of violence which often appear unintelligible, pathological, or plain 'mad' to outsiders.

My principal sources for undertaking this investigation are four-fold. Fortunately, a number of social and political scientists have offered insightful analyses of the motivation of terrorists, though since 9/11 explorations of the religious drivers of fanatical violence, especially Islamist ones, have been considerably overrepresented in comparison with work on secular extremism. Second, supplementing the abundant specialist literature on terrorism itself, there is a wealth of literature originating in a variety of disciplines which help illuminate the processes

by which human beings create cultures and total world-views by which to live, explain how they react to threats to their culture, trace the devastating impact of modernity on identity and beliefs, and provide causal explanations for ideologically motivated extremism, violence, and fanaticism, all of which can be enlisted for their explanatory power in confronting terrorism. My third source is less orthodox. There have been occasional attempts to consider how terrorism is portrayed in narrative¹³ and cinematic¹⁴ fiction, but to my knowledge there have been no sustained attempts to use the insights drawn from fiction to complement the Human Sciences in identifying the metapolitical, non-instrumental dimension of the terrorist radicalization process.

Fourthly, this book draws on two decades of specialist research into fascism, and in particular my extensive investigation in *Modernism and Fascism* (2007)¹⁵ into the complex relationship of Fascism and Nazism to modernity (defined as a force which breaks down cultural cohesion) and modernism (conceived as a general term for all attempts to restore a sense of meaning and purpose to existence, aesthetically, socially or politically). On the basis of this previous work I will propose for simplicity's sake two distinct ideal types of terrorism, Zealotic and Modernist. What distinguishes them is the nature of the creed or metapolitical cause for which their protagonists risk their lives and commit extreme acts of violence. Are they fighting to preserve a (mythically conceived and idealized) traditional community from destruction at the hands of military, political, religious or cultural enemies (inner or outer) in the spirit of fanaticism associated with the Zealots under the Romans, and the assassinations carried out by their lethal terrorists, the Sicarii? Or are they setting out to purge existing society of decadence and create the space for a (utopian) new society freed of the injustices and evils of the present, a goal which I will argue is related to the modernist revolt against Western modernity in various spheres of society. It will become clear in the later chapters that in particular circumstances, these two species of terrorism lend themselves to a hybridization process in which the violence is aimed simultaneously at preserving or restoring a tradition and at bringing about its utopian metamorphosis into a new society, a hybrid devastatingly exemplified by Islamism.

It is by concentrating almost exclusively in this book on the *creed* of terrorists, and on the metapolitical dimension of terrorism, that I hope to identify a distinct pattern in the socio-psychological process of radicalization which can produce such extreme acts of apparently absurd, gratuitous violence. In particular, I am exploring the link between the fanaticism that enables an individual to carry out an act of terroristic violence (something far more personal than combat in a modern army) and the human need for meaning that makes some either prepared to risk their lives to defend the culture or religion that is their reservoir of meaning, or to search desperately to create something transcendental to believe in and live for when their world has slipped into absurdity. Radicalization is thus portrayed in these pages as a psychodynamic process of extraordinary intensity, transforming someone who initially feels powerless and irrelevant in the face of an alien culture or a tyrannical state, or else hopelessly adrift on the boundless ocean of absurdity or decadence, into a fanatical devotee of a cause. It is a cause which, even if not

religious, is sufficiently 'sacred' for him or her to shatter social and religious taboos and so be prepared to kill and even be killed to fulfil the mission that is demanded.

Another claim of this book is that the 'radicalization syndrome', which underlies the upsurge in terrorism that has changed the entire climate of contemporary politics, makes considerably more sense when its historical roots are traced to cases of violence committed by small groups of dedicated killers against an enemy culture long before the onset of modernity. By the last chapter, after a broad sample of terrorist episodes have been examined in the light of the two species of terrorist radicalization, Zealotic and Modernist or their hybrid, the liquid, the irrational, and the nebulous elements should have largely drained out of the topic, shrinking it to one of manageable proportions fully accessible to humanistic understanding. By the time the fundamental pattern has been exposed which links the creed of the Sicarii asserting the need to resist Judea's Hellenization to the cyber-manifesto of Breivik declaring a future war on Europe's Islamization, terrorism may hopefully have yielded up some of its mysteries as a form of human activity, an activity which imbues existence with total meaning for the agent.

Liquid meanings: The need for definition

However, before we can proceed, another element of 'flux' in investigating the nature of terrorism as an object of study has to be 'fixed', namely the definition of the term itself. Certainly 'terrorism' is unusual in the political sciences because what it combines with the suffix 'ism' is not a noun, proper name, or adjective which distinguishes its ideology or delimits its context, but a powerful emotional affect, or, to be more precise, the psychological *effect* of 'terror', of a debilitating fear which deliberate acts of violence (or the threat they pose) are designed to have not on those directly caught up in them but on their target audience (rulers, politicians, the military, the public whose opinion and 'mood' is to be changed). But its ambiguous, 'polysemic' nature has little to do with its unusual formation or the nature of terrorist violence as such. Instead, as Max Weber showed in his theory of the *ideal type* and subsequent generations of methodologists and philosophers of science have confirmed, it has more to do with the semantic problems posed whenever the inquiring mind selects a single term as the focus for studying a segment of reality (Weber gives the example of 'capitalism').¹⁶

Like any generic 'ism' that captures the interest of the human sciences – fascism, modernism, ideology and all their kin – terrorism is a deeply heterogeneous¹⁷ and also multicausal¹⁸ phenomenon which frustrates the analytical requirement for a neat, uncontentious, self-contained object of study. Instead, the more it is studied the more connotations it spawns.

By 1988 it already admitted '109 definitions of terrorism that covered a total of 22 different definitional elements',¹⁹ and doubtless the protean quality of the term has been on steroids since 9/11. In 2004 Walter Laqueur, one of the most well-known and prolific authorities on terrorism in the Anglophone world, had reached the conclusion that trying to define it was pointless since 'the only general characteristic of terrorism generally agreed upon is that terrorism involves

violence and the threat of violence',²⁰ (and there is already a world of difference between just these two components). Three years later one of the authors of the seminal *Mapping Terrorism Research* lamented the continuing failure to achieve 'a consensual definition of terrorism' which was hindering progress in its transdisciplinary study.²¹ Another expert in the same volume cites the result of a survey of literature on terrorism by a National Research Council which concluded that it remained 'an essentially contested concept', with 'a multiplicity of overlapping efforts' to define it, 'some more satisfactory than others, but none analytically sufficient'.²²

As Weberians would stress, equivalent observations could be made about any intensely studied generic term in the human sciences, but there are two additional complicating factors that make this fish particularly slippery for conceptual nets. The first is the prevalence of implicit victim or 'law and order' perspectives and the resulting moral and legal condemnation that flows from the emphasis on the negative experience of 'terror' in the context of attacks on civil society, the state, and the status quo. Terrorism is certainly morally indefensible for the 'target' audience in terms of most value systems and doctrines of human rights, religious or secular. Yet to make the devastating impact of terrorism on its victims and hence its moral iniquity the starting point for its investigation can lead to blind spots about its dynamics and deeper socio-psychological causes in the same way that Nazism remained largely unintelligible to two generations of historians until it started to be understood (but certainly not justified except by revisionists) in terms of its *own* goals and values. As for the 'state' perspective, it is worth remembering that both Nazis and Stalinists referred to resistance movements as terroristic,²³ just as the Indian government still dismisses as terrorism 'Maoist' attempts to mobilize politically those millions dispossessed by their country's 'democratic' drive for industrial progress.²⁴ The profoundly pejorative, not to say demonizing, connotations of the term accounts for the reluctance of most terrorists to adopt the label, preferring to give their movements ones that evoke 'resistance' or 'defence' or 'militancy' against oppression, or an ideological or religious idealism, such as The People's Will in Tsarist Russia, Mujahideen (People struggling or performing jihad for Allah), Lohamei Herut Israel (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel), Hezbollah (Party of God), Euskadi Ta Askatasuna or ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom), Red Army Faction (dissenting warriors for socialism), Third Position (the struggle for a world neither capitalist nor communist).²⁵

The second 'awkward' fact that hinders the formulation of neat definitions is that when 'terrorism' first entered political discourse over two centuries ago it was not to describe violence directed *against* the state, but violence inflicted *by* the state on its own citizens (often in the name of crushing what authoritarian states now routinely refer to as 'terrorism'). On 30 January 1795, when the heads of those alleged to have betrayed the Revolution were plopping bloodily into overflowing baskets in Paris, London's *The Times* reported, 'There exists more than one system to overthrow our liberty. Fanaticism has raised every passion; Royalism has not yet given up its hopes, and Terrorism feels bolder than ever.' Thus terrorism originally referred exclusively to what is now called 'state terror'.

This is, of course, an entirely legitimate and pressing field of enquiry – especially given the readiness of the US and its allies to have recourse to techniques of coercion and terror on occasion in the pursuit of their own ‘war on terror’ – and has already been the subject of much illuminating research.²⁶ It has also given rise to some formidable exposures of the systemic inhumanity of some democracies which make difficult reading for those who harbour naive assumptions about the respect for universal human rights that prevails in the citadels of power of democratic states.²⁷ However, state terror lies outside the scope of this book, as does the use of terrorism by organized crime (which some anarchists would have thought was a pretty good definition of the state).²⁸

In penetrating beyond the shrouds of fear, misunderstanding, and incomprehension still wafting around terrorism and exploring its metapolitical dimension, this book will thus focus exclusively on violent attacks *against* the status quo which broadly conform to the following ideal-typical (and hence heuristic, non-definitive, and *non-essentialist*) definition:

Terrorism is a generic term for extremely heterogeneous acts of violence originating from an asymmetrical relationship of force with the perceived source of oppression or decadence, and carried out within civic space (or at least outside the traditional contexts/spaces of military conflict), generally targeting non-combatants. The violence has a direct object, the human or material targets of the attack which are typically destroyed, and an indirect object, the third parties for whom the violence is a ‘message’, a performative, semiotic act conceived to force them to change their behaviour, policies, actions, or way of thinking by undermining their sense of security and disseminating fear of further outrages. Terrorist acts thus have a purpose beyond their immediate destructiveness as part of a campaign to exploit the particular psychological impact of unpredictable attacks by an invisible ‘enemy’, namely a diffuse sense of anxiety, insecurity, and terror, so as to achieve pragmatic, instrumental goals. At the same time they have for the terrorists themselves utopian/metapolitical objectives invisible to outsiders, and their enactment thus fulfils a particular transcendent ‘mission’ or suprapersonal goal to which the terrorist feels fanatically committed.

A more discursive definition in the context of this book would highlight the idea that terrorism is identified here with:

The deliberate use by a movement, group, or individual of extreme violence against either human or symbolically significant material targets associated by the perpetrators with a demonized ‘Other’. This (frequently highly mythicized) ‘enemy’ can assume a variety of forms: e.g. a foreign army of occupation, an imperialist civilization perceived to be destroying the militant’s culture and society, a domestic regime perceived as a coercive, unrepresentative and ‘alien’ state, the human symbols or material emblems of an ‘evil’, ‘filthy’, and morally indefensible institution (e.g. an administration, a social movement, a commercial corporation, an academic institution, or an entire system, society, state, or civilization), or an ‘out-group’ (representatives of a particular ethnic, religious, linguistic minority, sexual orientation, gender, etc.) whose culture or values are considered ‘decadent’ (i.e. subversive of the ideal moral or social order) or threatening to the hegemonic ‘home’ culture .

The purpose of terrorist violence is to inflict personal suffering or strategic damage on the enemy, institution, or regime in a spectacular way that disseminates profound anxiety and exacerbates a generalized subjective sense of instability and crisis. In contrast to most violence in conventional warfare, the immediate casualties and damage caused are thus not the prime objective of terrorist attacks, which is to inflict psychological pressure on a third party who have become the 'audience' or 'spectators' of the outrage (religious sect, ethnic community, section of civic society, academic community, business, state authority, military force, etc.) to make it prepared to change its behaviour, policies, or values to put an end to the attacks. The tactical purposes of such a strategy are highly varied: to defend the purity or integrity of a way of life, tradition, ethnicity, culture or religion from destruction (whether by 'purging' it of enemy forces or by creating a new homeland); to undermine the unquestioned sense of security and legitimacy enjoyed by the 'ordinary' citizens of a hated 'system' so as to allow an alternative society (sometimes utopian and ill-defined) eventually to be established in its place; to force a regime to change a particular policy which is symptomatic of a wider change in values; or to terrorize a particular outgroup and force it to become socially invisible or move away so as to restore a mythic national integrity or racial purity. In one way or another, terrorism aims to disrupt the (perceived) historical continuum, and force a segment of society, a regime, or even the entire world to enter a new era, thereby changing the course of history.

Simultaneously, terrorist violence has non-instrumental, expressive ends. It is conceived deliberately to achieve a symbolic blow or victory against a demonized Other in a subjective ideological, metaphysical, cosmic war or struggle between good and evil, decadence and renewal invisible to outsiders. This symbolic, non-instrumental aspect of terrorism is inseparable from its significance to the terrorists themselves not just as a tactical or instrumental event, but as a performative act of resistance or defiance against a perceived evil which has demanded (especially in cases of martyrdom for the sake of the cause) a profound existential commitment. As such, terrorist acts usually contain a hidden symbolic or psychological meaning within the subjective inner world and cosmology of the terrorists themselves over and above any pragmatic function they may have within the campaign against the targeted outgroup, institution, or regime. This 'metapolitical' dimension of terrorism emanating from the world-view or creed of the terrorist may remain largely impenetrable and incomprehensible to an outsider, but provides an essential ingredient to the rationale and 'logic' of terrorist acts and campaigns to their protagonists.

The place of this book within terrorism studies

Like all definitions in an academic context, the two offered above are tentative and tendentious, and especially so in this case since they have been consciously conceived to help establish the dual rationale of this book. This is firstly to contribute to the demystification and 'cutting down to size' of terrorism as a topic fully capable of investigation by the empirical, rational methodologies of the Human Sciences – and so contribute through this approach to the 'solidification', and hence reduction, of the liquid fear still emanating in public space from terrorism as an inexplicable source of violence and threat, some of which continues to seep into academic discourse. This I propose to do by concentrating exclusively and

hence one-sidedly on the utopian, metapolitical, and existential dimension of terrorism's causation seen from the terrorist's own perspective which is deliberately alluded to in both definitions. Secondly, it is to propose a schematic model on the basis of this approach of the subjective process of radicalization that turns an 'ordinary' human being with no overt criminal or psychopathological predisposition into a person willing to kill and even be killed for a 'higher', *suprapersonal* cause.²⁹ The premise behind both these objectives is that it is only when the subjective, symbolic, existential dimension of terrorism for the *terrorist*, when his or her world-view, cosmology and creed, is taken into account and given due weight in investigations that the topic opens itself up fully to academic attempts to make it humanly intelligible and causally explicable in terms of its intrinsic meaning and purpose for the protagonist. As Jean Rosenfeld put it in an important essay on 'the Religion of Osama bin Laden':

Whether a terrorist movement is secular or religious, it acts purposively to further goals that are symbolically constructed and understood by its intended audience. The point I wish to emphasize is that it is the symbolic world of terrorist movements that must be rationally understood if we are to understand and rationally assess a group's motives, goals and actions.³⁰

In *Waging War without Warriors* Christopher Coker makes a parallel point. The West's almost exclusive preoccupation with 'utilitarian, rational' aspects of violence has, he claims, created a blind spot about what violence 'signifies', or 'expresses', and 'what the warrior is': 'Expressive violence is not only aimed at an enemy but also expresses a way of life.'³¹

It should be stressed at the outset that this book is exploratory and 'heuristic' in its purpose. It has no intention of reducing terrorism to some mythic 'essence' or suggest the *primacy* of the subjective or expressive dimension of terrorism over its external features as a political, social, military, instrumental, strategic, or historical phenomenon, or over in-depth reconstructions of individual terrorist episodes or movements, all of which are perfectly legitimate scholarly tasks.³² Nor has it any cryptic revisionist or *apologetic* intent in focusing on the inner 'cosmological' world of the terrorist and the private existential issues his or her commitment resolves, any more than taking the ideology of a Nazi or religious fundamentalist seriously means justifying the acts carried out in the name of their 'faith'. The aim is 'simply' to complement the already abundant literature on the political, strategic, and instrumental aspects of individual specimens of terrorism and the numerous surveys of its 'external' history as a socio-political and paramilitary phenomenon, while also contributing in a more direct manner to the far less prolific literature on terrorism's deeper historical, social and psychological dynamics. In doing so it attempts to go some way towards meeting the need in terrorist research flagged up three years after the physical dust of 9/11 had settled, namely 'for a better understanding of the motivations, thought processes, mindsets and historical consciousness of terrorists' without which 'insightful and thoughtful analysis' in this area is impossible.³³

The timeliness of such an investigation is further underscored by the authoritative survey of the 'state of the art, gaps, and future direction' of the discipline published two years after 9/11 in *Mapping Terrorism Research*. In his seminal chapter on Al Qaeda, Jeffrey Cozzens, one of the world's foremost experts on jihadism, criticizes the excessive concentration, typical of a functionalist approach to politics,³⁴ on the immediate strategic goals and tactics of the paramilitary 'war' terrorists are engaged in while ignoring their 'grand strategy'.³⁵ This in turn can only be understood, he claims, by taking account of the 'non-instrumental' component of the conflict, or the 'big picture' of what they are fighting for,³⁶ and hence the 'ideological framework' which determines their actions. This is the world-view of 'Global Salafi Jihad' (GSJ), also known as Salafism or 'Global Jihad', 'a world-wide revivalist movement' of which Al Qaeda 'is only the most high-profile manifestation'. To make sense of Al Qaeda means taking *seriously* the 'apocalyptic beliefs, the idea of salvation through conflict, dualism, and the notion of a persecuted elite' that motivates its most fanatical followers. It is a principle which applies not only to GSJ, but to all warfare against states or societies, since 'the grand strategic level of warfare – whether that of state or non-state actors – cannot be fully understood apart from the protagonist's culture, or the ideologies that express them'.³⁷

To correct the distortion of a predominantly 'instrumentalist' and 'functionalist' understanding of terrorism, Cozzens advocates the *complementary* use of an approach based on 'culturalism'³⁸ which in the case of Al Qaeda reveals 'a less apparent and more personally relevant "Al-Qaeda" that is reflected in nearly every stratum of operative... that embraces its world view and seeks to implement it through violent jihad'. Beneath the surface of overtly political and military externalizations of its ideology, 'its underlying religious framework and intertwined culture of jihad [the 'expressive dimension' of their struggle] compels its operatives to fight as "rational true believers"'.³⁹ Nor does Cozzens see the value of a theoretical framework based on 'culturalism' as restricted to the study of Islamism. He suggests 'it could be useful in generating new lines of academic enquiry as well as directing Western anti- and counter-terrorism efforts onto what is arguably a comprehensive [and I would add *comprehensible*] representation of the threat they face'.⁴⁰

Joshua Sinai's essay in the same volume also stresses the need to give more weight to the subjective realm of values and beliefs in studies of terrorism, stating that '[i]deas, and, in the contemporary period, especially radical religious ideologies, are among the major drivers that mobilize individuals and groups into committing acts of terrorism and provide them with cultural and religious underpinning and guide for action.' He goes on to highlight two major gaps in current understanding:

However, there are problems in the terrorism discipline in understanding why individuals and groups turn to religious fundamentalism for their ideological solutions, especially when progress in so many areas is made possible through the modern, secular, pluralistic, and democratic paths. Because this process is

not clearly understood, the analytical literature *does not place religiously fundamentalist radicalization within the context of modernization theory*, which is necessary to understand such phenomena.⁴¹

In adopting its own resolutely 'culturalist' approach to terrorism, one of the main features of the present volume is that it seeks to show how insights drawn from the study of radical 'modernist' responses to modernity can be used effectively to locate terrorism within modernization theory, and in particular to explain why terrorists so violently reject the vision of progress which Sinai imagines to be achievable through 'modern, secular, pluralistic and democratic paths'.

In this context it is intriguing that he leaves an important thought incomplete in the passage we have cited. He refers to those who turn their back on democracy and secular modernity for 'their ideological solutions', without specifying what the *problems* are that they are trying to solve ideologically, thereby cutting off in its prime a fruitful line of inquiry. Clearly in extreme situations of civil strife, state persecution, or enemy oppression these can be primarily political and social, but the culturalist approach emphasizes that they can be *simultaneously* existential, and in the absence of objective conflict and suffering they may even be *primarily* existential. It is precisely by focusing in generic terms on the role played by 'ontological', essentially *metapolitical* problems of identity and transcendent purpose in the genesis of fanatical creeds and the violence that flows from them, and by reflecting on how modernity may be experienced as the root cause of such problems rather than their solution, that this book hopes to add a new dimension to 'explaining terrorism' in terms of the creeds of the terrorists' themselves. What Jeffrey Bale states about the pattern of Al Qaeda attacks is also true of all terrorism, namely that they 'must be viewed from the enemy's own point of view',⁴² which demands the deployment of the faculty of 'methodological empathy' with the agents of atrocities. In adopting this approach, this book highlights the need for a historical contextualization of terrorism that reaches far beyond the nineteenth century, which is where the one scholar in the 'mapping' exercise who rightly underlines the neglected 'role of history and continuity in terrorism research' starts her narrative.⁴³ It is by considering the ancient, premodern prototypes of modern terrorism that emerged in the last two millennia that the existence of two very distinct terrorist relationships to modernization is thrown into relief: one which seeks to ward off the culture-cidal threat it poses to an existing cultural tradition, and another which seeks to transform a particular aspect of existing modernity or even create an entirely new society. As will become clear, a third relationship exists in which 'conservative' and 'revolutionary' terrorist projects are hybridized into goals which simultaneously preserve and renew a cultural, national, or religious 'essence'.

The terrorist's creed

It should be clear from what has been said that, while it explores single-mindedly the world-view that underpins and rationalizes acts of terrorism, this book

does not commit the simplistic fallacy of reducing the causes of terrorism to metapolitical creeds. No matter how much emphasis there is on ideology and cosmology, and on the human need for overarching meaningful ideology, it should be taken as read that a unique constellation of concrete, and often highly material social, economic, political, religious, cultural, or ethnic factors – or a blend of several of these – shape each historic context which engenders any one of its specific manifestations. There is thus no intention to suggest that such factors are secondary, forming mere ‘epiphenomena’ or background to some basic psycho-cosmological syndrome or state of mind which is the *real* cause of terrorism. By starting with a consideration of the terrorism of antiquity, this book deliberately avoids the trap of treating Al Qaeda as if it were the template for all terrorism (indeed it will become obvious that it is a hybrid of two distinct, far older species of the genus). There is a hint of both these fallacies in Michael Ignatieff’s impassioned reaction to George Bush’s declaration of a ‘war on terror’ made even before the air had cleared over Ground Zero:

What we are up against is apocalyptic nihilism. The nihilism of their means – the indifference to human costs – takes their actions not only out of the realm of politics, but even out of the realm of war itself. The apocalyptic nature of their goals makes it absurd to believe they are making political demands at all. They are seeking the violent transformation of an irredeemably sinful and unjust world. Terror does not express a politics, but a metaphysics, a desire to give ultimate meaning to time and history through ever-escalating acts of violence which culminate in a final battle between good and evil.⁴⁴

Instead, consistent with Cozzens’ approach, the position adopted in this volume is that ‘terror’ expresses *both* a politics and a metapolitics. It articulates political demands, provoked by what for the terrorists themselves are far from apocalyptic or nihilistic, but concrete empirical threats, injustices, or aspirations. Yet *simultaneously* terrorism also seeks to ‘give ultimate meaning to time and history’. It certainly can take the form of an ‘apocalyptic nihilism’ which invokes Manichaeian fantasies of cosmic good pitted against cosmic evil, but can also assume much more down-to-earth, realizable, restrained goals shaped by the terrorist’s hunger for freedom, as is the case of many ‘liberation struggles’ for an independent homeland against occupation by what is perceived as an enemy culture. Where my analysis agrees with both Ignatieff and Cozzens, is that the immediate demands and actions not just of Al Qaeda but of all the terrorist movements in history cannot be understood simply in military, functionalist, or ‘counter-insurgency’ terms. They need to be related to their ‘cause’, the ‘grand strategy’, that drives them. This in turn can only be understood fully in the context of beliefs, whether religious or secular, that have assumed in the mind of the ‘operatives’ themselves a ‘fanatical’ quality. This term has long been used by social scientists as a heuristic device in the exploration of the subjective world of the

extremist.⁴⁵ However, in the present context it retains echoes of the original Latin word *fanaticus*, derived from *fanum* meaning temple, to connote ‘inspired by a God’,⁴⁶ and by extension the suprapersonal – and even suprahuman – sacrality with which terrorists tend to endow their mission.

The militant fanatic can be imagined as self-enclosed in a sacred cognitive and moral space, his or her own inner temple, from which the ‘profane’, and hence threatening or decadent, world is observed. Taken to extremes this absolutist outlook, purged of ambivalence, doubt, and tolerance, has the effect of dehumanizing the inhabitants of the profane world to the point where their murder becomes abstracted as ‘collateral damage’ or even as a necessary ‘sacrifice’ in the fight to realize a higher cause. As Cozzens’ essay in *Mapping Terrorism Research* argues so forcefully, the neglect of this inner space, and hence of the ‘non-instrumental’ dimension of terrorism, leaves unexplored the subjective, phenomenological aspect of engagement in violence, with especially serious consequences for understanding the dynamics of suicidal (or rather, from the terrorist perspective, ‘martyr’) violence. Such an ultimate act of self-immolation for the sake of a creed demands an exceptional, transcendental, almost mystic, state of self-sacrificial idealism, commitment, and *belief*, qualities intimately bound up with the way the terrorist cause and the murder it so often demands is *sacralized* in the mind of its agents,⁴⁷ something that holds true for much ultranationalist, guerrilla and partisan warfare as well. (When pronouncements by terrorists are approached simply as ‘propaganda’, it is worth reminding ourselves that it originated as the Vatican’s term for the dissemination of the Catholic *faith*.) Closely linked to the recurrent tunnel vision in academic research concerning terrorism’s ‘non-instrumental’ causes, is the failure of many mainstream ‘terrorologists’ to appreciate the potential contribution that approaches drawing on social psychology⁴⁸ can make to understanding the appeal of a terrorist cause to particularly vulnerable or idealistic individuals.⁴⁹ A similar blind spot prevails concerning the need for more incisive transdisciplinary research involving elements of sociology, cultural anthropology, and social anthropology^{50,51} to encourage what Cozzens calls ‘out of the box thinking’.

The book’s structure

The structure of this book grows out of its aim to illuminate terrorism’s extensive but frequently neglected non-instrumental dimension. This chapter has been devoted to establishing the peculiar vantage point from which it is written, and the interpretive strategy it has adopted, which may certainly seem to some readers ‘out of the box’, and even ‘off the wall’, but at least the title should by now have lost the cryptic aura of pseudo-profundity or pretentiousness it may have had for some. The ‘terrorist’s creed’ of the title, apart from its obvious allusion to the highly popular computer game *Assassin’s Creed*, refers to recurrent metapolitical patterns and subliminal psychological constants within the extraordinarily variegated belief-systems and conscious motivations of individual terrorists down the

centuries. 'Metapolitics' has acquired some highly technical meanings within the political sciences remote from our own concerns, for example in the eponymous work of Alain Badiou,⁵² but here it is being used in a way which corresponds closely to what Cozzens refers to as the 'culture' of terrorism. The Greek prefix 'meta-' means simply 'beyond', and in the context of this investigation refers to the non-political, non-strategic, non-instrumental goals being fulfilled by a terrorist campaign from the perspective of the terrorists themselves, such as the defence or purification of a culture, religion, or ethnicity, the creation of a new type of society, or the precipitation of a cataclysmic event in fulfilment of some abstruse apocalyptic scheme of history, religious or secular, according to which a new era is about to dawn.

On one level both 'creed' and 'the metapolitics' of terrorism thus refer to the 'ideological framework' and 'grand strategy' which Cozzens highlighted as an under-researched area of motivation and rationale for terrorist actions. While creed is saturated with the connotations of religious faith, 'metapolitics' is a term extensively used by the European New Right's (ENR) use of the term in its attack on the hegemony of the pluralistic, democratic values of secular humanism, with the important difference that, with the exception of Anders Breivik's killing rampage in Norway in July 2011, most proponents of the ENR's celebration of cultural difference disdain violence to achieve their ends. Instead they see metapolitics as the *precondition* for a new totalizing form of cultural politics needed to secure the threatened patchwork of unique ethnic identities being eroded by modernity. It is a usage, paradoxically influenced by the notion of 'cultural hegemony' promoted by the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, and its right-wing use is illustrated by this declaration of a major ideologue of the German 'New Right' (*Neue Rechte*), Pierre Krebs:

It is impossible to overthrow a political apparatus without previously having gained control of cultural power. The assent of the people must be won first: their ideas, ethos, ways of thinking, the value-system, art, education have to be worked on and modified. Only when people feel the need for change as a self-evident necessity will the existing political power, now detached from the general consensus, start crumbling and be overthrown. Metapolitics can be seen as the revolutionary war fought out on the level of world-views, ways of thinking and culture. It is precisely the metapolitical level which is our starting point. We want to take over the laboratories of thinking.⁵³

From such observations it should already be self-evident that the 'culturalism' that results from our focus on terrorism's metapolitical creeds has nothing to do with the reduction of the multiple historical realities subsumed under the term terrorism to mere 'culture', and hence to an ultimately diaphanous and chimerical 'discourse' which drains material historical realities and events of all substance. This error arises when theoretical insights drawn from the 'cultural turn' which occurred within the human sciences in the last decades of the twentieth century are applied in the most crudely reductive, fundamentalist spirit