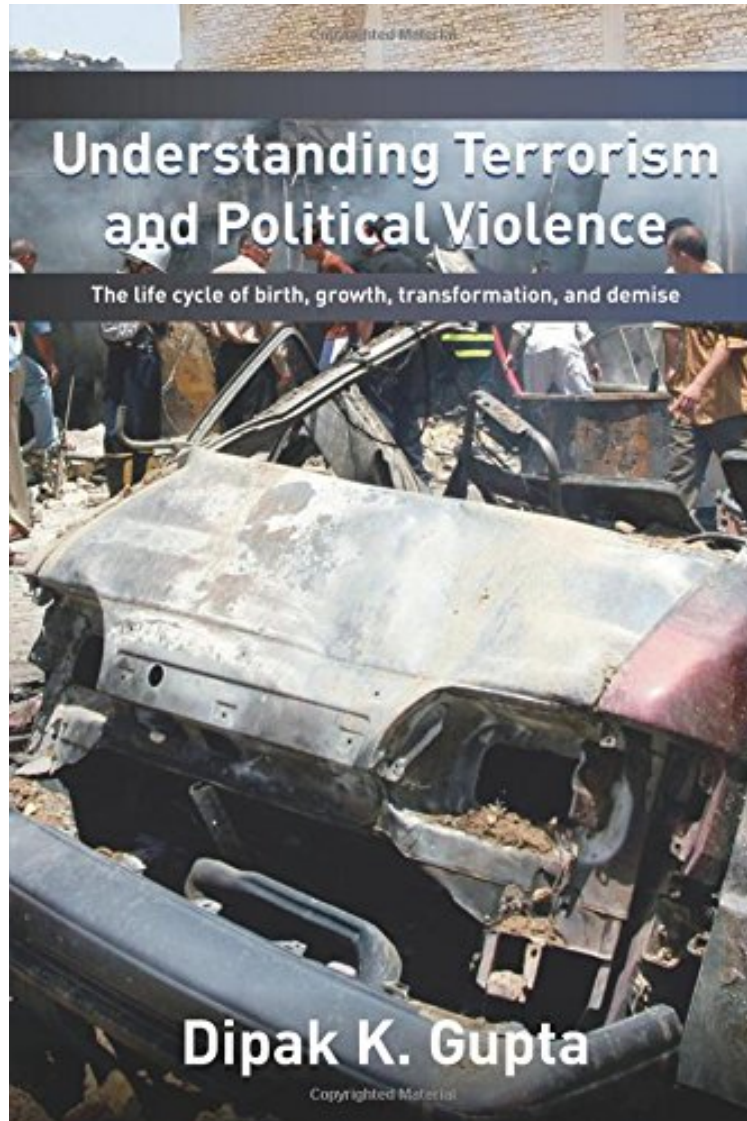


# Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence

*Dipak K. Gupta*

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#1394320 in Books Dipak Gupta 2008-05-11 2008-03-31 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.21 x .69 x 6.141, 1.03 #File Name: 041577165X304 pages Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence The Life Cycle of Birth Growth Transformation and Demise | File size: 70.Mb

**Dipak K. Gupta : Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent mixture of statistics and story for an overarching view on the origins and motivations of terrorism. By David J. Zugman The breadth of scholarship is what sets this book apart. The analysis of the motivations of individuals to commit altruistic atrocities is of interest to many disciplines and Dr.

Gupta masterfully interweaves evolutionary psychology, game theory, and strong statistical analysis to better the understanding of this anomaly. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. FittingBy Ron RousseauGreat book. Easy to understand7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. The Best Book to Date on Modern TerrorismBy Herbert GintisTerrorism, defined as attacks on civilian populations with the aim of imposing harm on non-military personnel and property, has been understood for many years as generally a thoroughly rational and calculated attempt at gaining psychological advantage by groups that cannot gain by increasing their direct military confrontation with the enemy. However extensive the damage done, and in the case of nuclear or biological terrorism this damage can be extreme, the point of attacking defenseless civilians is always mainly psychological: break the will of the enemy or establish a reputation that improves the capacity to recruit new combatants (Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005; Scott Atran, *The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism*, *The Washington Quarterly* 29:2 (2006) pp. 127-147). What is truly and stunningly new is suicide terrorism, where individuals willingly embrace certain death to further the terroristic aims of the groups to which they belong. There were, for instance only 81 recorded suicide attacks in the decade of the 1980's, while there were 460 such attacks in 2005 alone. It is not difficult to see why a terrorist organization would want to carry out suicide missions, both for psychological and logistical reasons. Al Qaeda deputy Ayman Al-Zawahiri, for instance, argues in "Knights Under the Prophet's Banner" that "the method of martyrdom operations is the most successful way of inflicting damage against the opponent and the least costly to the mujahideen in casualties" (cite in Atran, 2006). But, what are the motivations of the suicidal attackers? Why are there so many more of these attackers than ever before? It would be easy to answer this if we could attribute suicide terrorism to one or two particular groups (e.g., Al Qaeda), but such groups are generally loose associations of locally-rooted and small networks that do not in any sense take orders from a central authority. Students of terrorism have generally offered explanations that further their own political agendas or theoretical predispositions at the expense of explanatory power. In this volume, Gupta goes through these pseudo-explanations quite carefully and exposes their shortcomings (see also Atran, 2006). Gupta's alternative explanation is very persuasive, although I believe there is an element from Atran's explanation that should be added to Gupta's. Let me note first that Gupta's book is an excellent introduction to the topic for the uninitiated, as well as a must read for the expert who may be unacquainted with his interpretation of the phenomenon. Gupta uses contemporary behavioral game theory and other experimental evidence to validate his claim that we all harbor both self-regarding and other-regarding preferences. The self-regarding preferences are those commonly studied in biology and economics, but the other-regarding preferences are what make humans truly human and capable of identifying with groups and cooperating effectively in large numbers. In particular, many people identify with large groups and include the welfare of the members of these groups in their personal objective function, so their behavior becomes a balance between self-interest and the goals of the groups to which they belong. When the latter goals become paramount, individuals will be willing even to sacrifice their lives to further the welfare of their groups. This is a simple, direct, and I believe ultimately correct analysis of the situation. Scott Atran, in various papers including the 2006 article cited above, adds an important point. Humans have a strong predisposition to identify with supernatural religious and quasi-religious world views, and these views immeasurably strengthen perceived group-interests. Suicide terrorists, he argues, are motivated by the vision of a whole new world order based on a religious (Al Qaeda) or secular (communist or fascist) vision. I do not think it is an accident that Islamic fundamentalism had to wait until the collapse of communist millenarianism before it could begin to act on an international scale: there appears to be room for only one global millenarian movement at a time. There is a temptation to treat such millenarian movements as themselves pathological, but Gupta does not succumb. And rightly so. All the freedoms we enjoy today were fought for and won by groups with a millenarian vision of a better society, and doubtless the advance of freedom in the future will depend on the brave actions of such visionaries. In the present era, lovers of freedom must condemn both terrorism in democratic countries, and quite independently, Islamic fundamentalism with its goal of imposing a religious orthodoxy upon national political systems, as intrinsically opposed to an emancipated society. Personally, I do not abhor the moral absolutism of a Taliban terrorist; rather I abhor terrorism and the goals of the Taliban. I appreciate, by contrast, the moral absolutism of freedom fighters everywhere. "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice," Barry Goldwater once said. Here, here! Gupta is a fine humanist with a touching and empathetic writing style that matches his erudition and veracity. He also speaks in part from personal experience, as he recounts in his discussion of Maoist terrorism in Bengal.

This book explains the lifecycle of terrorist organizations from an innovative theoretical perspective, combining economics with social psychology. It provides a new approach to understanding human behaviour in organized society, and then uses this to analyze the forces shaping the lifecycle of violent political movements. Economic and rational-choice theorists assume that human beings are motivated only by self-utility, yet terrorism is ultimately an altruistic act in the eyes of its participants. This book highlights the importance of the desire to belong to a group as a motivating factor, and argues that all of us face an eternal trade-off between selfishness and community concern. This hypothesis is explored through four key groups; the IRA in Northern Ireland, Al Qaeda, Hamas, and the Naxalites in India. Through this, the book analyzes the birth, growth, transformation and demise of violent political movements,

and ends with an analysis of the conditions which determine the outcome of the war against terrorism. *Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence* will be essential reading for advanced students of terrorism studies and political science, and of great interest to students of social psychology and sociology.

'Highly recommended'R. G. Mainuddin, *Choice* 'Reading this book, it is clear that it is a labor of love. A combination of personal detail (a terrific opening section that will surprise many familiar with his previous work), literary observations, cross-disciplinary references that never feel clumsily juxtaposed, and examples drawn from across conceptual boundaries provide the reader with a richly potent stew of material to contemplate. What Gupta ultimately provides in his dynamic conceptual framework is a research agenda, rich for potential hypothesis testing. Gupta rises to the challenge laid down by Walter Reich and others in terrorism studies by moving beyond the confines of individual disciplinary perspectives, and for that alone should be praised. That he does so by providing a thoughtful, learned volume is even more reason to read this important and essential book.'John Horgan, *The Pennsylvania State University, USA*'This is probably one of the most comprehensive books that have been written on political violence and terrorism in recent years in the sense that the author is able to combine rich theory, empirical data about insurgent groups, and even first-hand experience of the phenomenon of terrorism.'Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca, *Juan March Institute, Madrid, Spain, Perspectives on Terrorism*About the AuthorDipak K. Gupta is the Fred J. Hansen Professor of Peace Studies and the Distinguished Professor in Political Science at San Diego State University, California. He is author of seven books.