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Chair: Sociology of Terrorism

Terrorism as a Rational Choice: Models and Perspectives.

Prof. Alessandro Orsini

Alessia Roxane Zorzan

Matricola 088602

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SUPERVISOR

CANDIDATE

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Introduction

This undergraduate dissertation aims at analyzing the prominent paradigm of rational choice theory in the context of terrorism and terrorists' behavior. Scholars generally share a common position in considering terrorists rational actors, who make their decisions with rational calculations, based on the consideration of the costs and benefits of the various alternatives they are presented. The methodology used to carry out this research consists of the analysis, comparison, and systematic thinking of some of the most influential scholarly work on rational choice theory in the fields of economics and sociology, and then applied to the phenomenon of terrorism in general, and suicide terrorism in particular.

The first chapter offers a systematic analysis of the empirical research and sociological theory of rational choice, starting from a definition and exploring the early rational choice model, the *homo oeconomicus,* proceeding then to the study of the prominent social exchange theory of Homans, followed by Blau's account on the concept. Additionally, an exemplary model of the prisoner's dilemma game is presented, in order to clarify the process of rational choice in economics and sociology. In the analysis of individual behavior and its consequences, a significant effect on the rational choice model is given by game theory, which has reached a wide audience. Game theory deals with a specific set of choices and alternatives in order to explain and understand the rational choices people make. Moreover, a fundamental concept of this first chapter, is that of utility. The utility function is usually applied in microeconomics, to calculate the satisfaction index of an individual's choices. According to rational choice theory, all individuals are expected to maximize their utility over time, using every means at their disposal to ensure that the anticipated benefits outweigh the costs incurred.

The second chapter is devoted to the study of terrorists and terrorists' activity on the basis of the rationality premise. Starting from the analysis of the possible causes for terrorism, in particular politically rational terrorism, this chapter examines and challenges the conventional Western wisdom of terrorism irrationality and devises Sageman's standard profile of a terrorist. For the purposes of this dissertation, the political rationality of terrorist groups is measured on the effectiveness of their political actions; given that rational actors are expected to choose the alternative that is most rewarding for them –which may grant them political benefits– then it can be considered politically rational for terrorist groups to use terrorism and violence to advance their political ambitions. Furthermore, the study of terrorists' rational behavior is made both at the individual and the group level, as identified by McCauley, Moskalenko and Moghaddam.

Finally, the third chapter goes deeper in the study of terrorism and gives the account for a specific type of terrorism, suicide terrorism and examines with a rational lens, how suicide terrorists are indeed rational actors. Starting by defining what suicide terrorism is, both for westerners and for scholars, the chapter defends the rational choice theory and expands on the motivations that lead a suicide attacker to commit the perpetration and kill. This section is constructed on a particular type of suicide terrorism –devised by Robert Pape– strategic terrorism, which follows a systematic and calculated course of action, and it is targeted towards a specific type of government. A fundamental argument is given by Pape's: a purely strategic level of analysis of suicide terrorism, based on the method of coercion. His study is one of the most comprehensive and accepted on suicide terrorism. The most important concept to grasp from Pape's contribution is that the strategic logic of suicide terrorism is aimed at political coercion. The chapter ends with a challenge for the governments' counterterrorism policies.

Chapter 1. Models of Rational Choice.

1. Introduction

The first chapter of this dissertation analyzes the different studies of the dominant paradigm in both sociology and economics, rational choice theory. Starting with a definition that could be accepted by all, this chapter explores the early rational choice theory model, the *homo oeconomicus*, whose classical and strict view brought to the formulation of new systems. In particular, the social exchange theory of George Homans and later the model of Peter Blau will be examined, considering in the analysis other sociologists and theories; finally, a breakdown of the economics theory underlying rational choice theory.

The assumption of rationality is one of the central paradigms in the field of sociology. Therefore, plenty of researchers have based their studies on such assumption of rational choice. But how did the rational choice theory model develop? Who are the prominent scholars in the subject? And why has this theory become dominant among economists and sociologists?

1.1 Early Rational Choice Models

To start, it is crucial to stress that rational choice theory is far from being a unified model as no consensus has been yet achieved in the academic literature. For many scholars, rational choice refers to "a range of models that posit that individuals will be motivated by self-interest and desire to maximize their sense of well-being or, in the language of economists, their utility"[1]. This last concept will be analyzed later in the chapter (Section 1.4). The underlying assumption of rational choice theory is therefore that people are rational and build their actions and choices on what they recognize as being the most effective means to achieve their goals. It essentially means that actors are "constantly weighing alternative means against alternative ends and choosing between them"[2], from which derives the term rational choice.

Early rational models are based on the neoclassical model of *homo oeconomicus*, which has, however, a very strict view on how actors are expected to act. It was a model that required individuals to have all information and moreover, it implied that looking for new information did not enforce any additional cost. Furthermore, the model assumed that all participants necessarily had complete information, with a full certainty of the outcome of a certain decision-

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[1] Lewis James R., *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, p. 110;

[2] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociologcal Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.279;

making process. This was later found to be not true. The *homo oeconomicus* was born from the need to incorporate more sociological aspects into economics. And it actually did, but although it was assumed to be progressive, to be advancing towards social sciences and sociology, the newly *homo sociologicus* still rolled back into the classic *homo oeconomicus.* This does not mean that the *homo oeconomicus* did not start its social advance, but the opposite–as seen above: it did incorporate other social sciences, including sociology.

Today this model is considered outdated by numerous scholars[3]. Yet it still represents the dominant theory used for introducing the new research of rational behavior. In fact, many microeconomics textbooks are using it for introduction, although it has stark limitations[4]. In the same way, the whole new research is founded on the basic model of behavior of the *homo oeconomicus* even though some assumptions are not appropriate and have even been rejected. Some of the limits people face are inherently cognitive.

To justify for this, researchers began to imply that individuals are "boundedly rational"[5], meaning that people do actually participate in "cognitive processes"[6] and have the capacity to make decisions based on the quantity information they have acquired and even though it may not be value-maximizing, they are still "good enough" decisions[7]. The analytical theory of bounded rationality has been formulated by Herbert Simon; it is based on the grounds of rational choice theory even though it differs from it on some issues and also combines within the model some ideals from the field of psychology.

The main idea of bounded rationality is that individuals lack some capability to maximize completely their behavior. In fact, actors do not take into account, in the bounded rationality model, of all the options and information available. Rather, they are likely to stop whenever one among the few options assessed by him/her is perceived to be acceptable in order to satisfy his/her level of utility. Individuals may have, and usually do have, erroneous or incomplete information about the situation and the action may fail to achieve its ultimate goal because of that. One might ask why, and the answer is relatively straightforward: cost-benefit

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[3] Among the most prominent scholars who believe the rational choice theory to be an approximation of the actual human behavior: Ross, D., Dumouchel, P., *Emotions as Strategic Signal*s: *Rationality and Society*, "Rationality and Society", Volume 16, Issue 3 2004, p. 251–286; Zey Mark, *Rational Choice Theory and Organizational Theory: A Critique,* SAGE Publications, 1998;

[4] Kirchgässner Gebhard, *Homo Oeconomicus. The Economic Model of Behaviour and Its Applications in Economics and Other Social Sciences,* Springer Science + Business Media, Berlin, 2008;

[6] Lewis James R., *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, p. 111;

[6] *Ibidem;*

[7] *Ibidem;*

analysis. This implicates that individuals' cost-benefit calculations remain incomplete, as they do not aim at maximizing their expected utility, but only an acceptable level of utility, which does not mean it is the best for the actor in question.

Undoubtedly, this interpretation diverges from the original rational choice theory, where actors are thought to be always looking for ways to completely maximize their utility. Furthermore, Simon discovered that people, as a consequence of not being able to maximize entirely their utility, are also barely able to predict the potential effects of their chosen option. Indeed, they make decisions without taking into consideration the uncertainty of the result of their decision, as they do not consider all the options available to them. Sometimes, or better, most of the times, consequences "might be misjudged or even ignored"[8] and judgments are taken without the means to exclude or at least reduce all the probable side effects. Correspondingly, information people have may happen to be "incomplete, erroneous or contradictory, which may even lead to systematic mistakes in decision-making (…) and decisions will often yield non-optimal results"[9].

The different accounts on the rationality model have led to debates concerning distinctions in human behavior decision-making process and the degree to which the guidelines of the rationality choice theory are truly observed. Therefore, scholars have made use of the distinction between *thick* and *thin* models of rational choice theory. Thick and thin definitions have been a crucial contraposition in the fields of both political sciences and international relations. In the rational choice model individuals' approach to preferences and beliefs can be distinguished on the basis of thick and thin rationality, the most-widely recognized variation within the model, which has stimulated many debates.

The main difference to highlight, in order to distinguish a thick model from a thin one, is that an application of rational choice theory is thick if it is based on empirical assumptions and related to the psychological choice; in this context, Simon's bounded rationality model is considered to be thick by some critics, as it is based on psychological assumptions (there are inconsistencies between the expected utility and the final choices of individuals). On the other hand, a rational choice theory is thin "if and only if it does not rest on any empirical assumption about (..) psychological substrates"[10] i.e. if the psychological assumption of an actor's choice

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[8] Van Um Eric, *Evaluating the Political Rationality of Terrorist Groups*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2016, p.30;

[9] *Ibidem;*

[10] Fumagalli Roberto, *How thin rational choice theory explains choices,* "Studies in History and Philosophy of Science", Volume 83, 2020, p. 64;

is eventually false or inaccurate, it "does not per se undermine the plausibility of such application"[11].

1.2 Homans' Exchange Theory and Principles of Human Behavior

The central assumption of rational choice theory is its methodological individualism, which will eventually explain collective behavior and outcomes. The individual choice principle is based on a conception of the individual as the principal actor in the society; this does not imply that individuals are ignored, but on the contrary, groups are studied as aggregates of individuals. Following this line of reasoning, a large body of research has proposed that the "behavior of a group can and should be explained with recourse to individual behavior"[12].

In the field of sociology, exchange theory has been one of the most recognized approaches to rational choice behavior. Exchange theorists conceptualize social interaction as "an exchange of tangible or intangible goods and services, ranging from food and shelter to social approval or sympathy"[13]. Following this definition, people choose to participate in some kind of social behavior or exchange after having taken into account both the costs and the benefits of the various pieces of information they have, but also after having evaluated which among of them is the most attractive. George Homans is the most known exponent of the social exchange theory; his most important book, known as the exchange theory, is Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms[14]. By elementary social behavior, Homans means that people's behavior can be explained through psychology, which is the basic explanation of all social sciences; his report focuses on studying mostly individuals and small groups.

Homans' work is, on the whole, a deductive system where he highlights five different principles of human behavior. The first three can be grouped into the rationality proposition and are respectively: the success proposition; the stimulus proposition; and the value proposition. The last two are the deprivation-satiation proposition and the aggression-approval proposition.

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[11] *Ibidem;*

[12] Van Um Eric, *Evaluating the Political Rationality of Terrorist Group*s, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2016, p.23;

[13] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.280;

[14] Homans George, *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms,* Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1961;

1. "The *successor proposition*. For all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action.

2. The *stimulus proposition*. If in the past the occurrence of a particular stimulus, or set of stimuli, has been the occasion on which a person's action has been rewarded, then the more similar the presents seemingly are to the past ones, the more likely the person is to perform the action, or some similar action now.

3. The *value proposition*. the more valuable to a person is the result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action.

    The *rationality proposition*. In choosing between alternative actions a person will choose that one for which, as perceived by him at the time, the value, V, of the result, multiplied by probability, p, of getting the result, is the greater

4. The *deprivation-satiation proposition*. The more often in the recent past the person has received a particular reward, the less valuable any further unit of that reward becomes for him.

5. The *aggression-approval proposition.*
    a. Whenever a person's action does not receive the reward he expected, or receives the punishment he did not accept, he will be angry; he becomes more likely to perform aggressive behavior, and result so of such behavior become more valuable to him

    b. When operation section receives the reward he expected (…) or does not receive punishment he expected, he will be pleased; he becomes more likely to perform approving behavior, and the results of such behavior become more valuable to him."[15]

In these propositions the term exchange does not appear: this is because Homans here is not talking about a particular kind of exchanging behavior, but the emphasis is on the general principles of human behavior of human actions. This lies at the core of all rational choice theories.

As already stated, the first the three principles are fundamentally a "statement of human rationality"[16]. The claim here is essentially that people's behavior is stimulated by rewarding

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[15] *Ivi*, p.291;

[16] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.292;

their actions; these stimuli of encouragement are on the basis of the value that people themselves attach to things. This implies the fact that they are indeed rational, which does not mean that they are always right about what is the most rewarding choice or the most rational choice, but individuals do act in their own account of what a rational choice might be. Following this line of reasoning, the idea that people choose a course of action based on its potential value, becomes another study itself.

Homans has advanced the theory of the value proposition as an empirically demonstrable proposition and Coleman subsequently tried to develop a theory of value in social exchange shadowing Homan's account. However, by doing so, he needed to create an independent measure of a subjective value, which he did not succeed in. The meanings but also the values that people attribute to effects varies enormously within societies but also between societies and, therefore, need to be studied on a case-by-case basis. But as a general theory it can be stated that sociologists are faced with values and preferences which as aforementioned, cannot be measured precisely. Within the rational choice theory, it can be assumed that people value survival, approval and power and accordingly rational choice theory can envisage human behavior and choices. Consequently, it can be said that the value proposition on its own is often an insufficient explanation of choice and behavior. Homans' rationality proposition, finally, can be seen in parallel with economics, where the rationality proposition is considered in terms of maximizing someone's expected utility, and the fact that people's preferences are transitive; then, on that basis, the basic assumption of the rational utility model is justified.

The fourth proposition, the deprivation-satiation proposition, can be studied by presenting Blau's account. His position is accepted by economists: the basic assumption is that rational individuals will only act on something if the value or the reward they get is greater than what they have to give up in order to get the return in terms of "either direct cost or foregone opportunities"[17]. Therefore, only if the individual makes a net profit does he make certain choices and enters in some kind of exchange relationship. The fifth and last proposition of Homans is conveyed in behavioral psychology terms. The main assumption is that if individuals' expectations are dissatisfied, then their anger and aggressive behavior takes over and, on the contrary, if their expectations are satisfied or even outdone, they are gratified. This last concept is crucial also in sociology, as individuals' expectations are rooted in social norms, which usually define either what is true and what is moral and also what is erroneous and unfair. This is crucial as it is the distinctive characteristic of those modifications of rational

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[17] *Ivi*, p.297;

choice theory associated with the term of exchange theory, as it departs from the main concerns of economics.

Within the analysis of individual behavior and its consequences, one significant influence on the rational choice model is given by the theory of games which has reached a wide audience, as its approach is used by many influential scholars. The theory of games is concerned with a specific set of choices and alternatives in order to distinguish persistent dilemmas and strategies. The best-known example is the prisoner's dilemma, and its underlying structure helps to analyze both past events and the likely developments of individual behavior.

1.2.1 Prisoner's Dilemma

Figure 1. Prisoner's Dilemma[18]

The prisoner's dilemma is a crucial game in sociology but also in economics because of its parallels with many social situations. In the original version of the game two prisoners – let's call them prisoner A and prisoner B– have committed a crime and have both been arrested without any possibility of communication with each other. The police authorities, in order to have a confession from at least one of the two, offer each prisoner separately the following

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[18] *Ivi*, p.307;

deal: if A confesses and his companion B does not, then B will get nine years in prison and A will be able to walk freely. As a second option they have both been presented the following: if both prisoner A and B confess, they will each get five years in prison. Finally, if none of them confesses, they will both face a two-years prison time.

The figure above summarizes the choices each prisoner has to face, and each quadrant shows the consequences for each action for each prisoner separately and then also the combined number of prisoners, which follows the outcome of such decision. By strictly analyzing each quadrant, it can be seen that the third worst choice for each individual –which is also the worst in terms of the total numbers of years in prison– is the one in the upper left corner, which represents the outcome of the situation in which both prisoner A and prisoner B confessed. This choice however is not likely to happen as each prisoner will make the following judgement– from the point of view of prisoner A (taken into consideration the fact that each player makes his/her decision in complete ignorance of the other's decision): if I do not confess and B does not either, we will both get two years. However, it is possible that I, A will stay silent, and B confesses. In this case, I will serve nine years in prison. Therefore, this last choice will be hazardous. Lastly, on the other hand, if I confess, he might be staying silent. Thus, at worst, I, prisoner A, will get five years in prison, which is always better than nine. Consequently, I will confess. Both prisoners choose, in isolation, the strategy which is for them the one that will maximize their chances of a higher payoff or benefit.

The paradox which makes the prisoner's dilemma so captivating is that both prisoners end up defecting even though they both know that they will be better off by collaborating– there is a contradiction both within the micro and macro level rationality. Boudon, a major sociologist, considers the consequence of any social action to be a variation of the prisoner's dilemma. He defines the perverse effects as "individual and collective effects that result from the juxtaposition of individual behaviors and yet were not included in the actions' explicit objectives"[19]. In his model of rational choice theory and its perverse effects, Boudon claims that it "serve(s) as an analytical instrument for assessing the likely success of certain institutional changes"[20], which emphasis is crucial in the rational choice model.

Many critics have questioned the use of a rational choice perspective to analyze groups or institution which work and cooperate over time. James Coleman, one of the best-known American sociologists, has been studying the way in which "individual decisions, aggregated,

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[19] Boudon Raymond, *The Unintended Consequences of Social Action*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p.5;
[20] *Ivi*, p.103;

produce what are often unanticipated social effects"[21]. As a classic rational choice theorist, Coleman claims that collective behavior can be better understood if it is seen in terms of individual maximizing utility. This however is different from the prisoner's dilemma example, as the players involved in Coleman's study are not involved in "once and for all decisions but rather in relationships that extend over a long period"[22] of time; the longer the game continues, all the players become more trustworthy as they are rationally self-interested.

Most critics contrast rational choice perspective with explanations that use group norms to explain behavior. Following this line of reasoning, their argument is that "rational choice models are suitable for explaining individual behavior within a framework of given norms and values, but they cannot provide an explanation of how groups and societies develop norms in the first place"[23]. Coleman tries to counterbalance these critiques by emphasizing the difference between one-time and continuing relationships. The latter are notorious for producing coalitions and trust, whereas one-time relationships usually produce cheating or attempted cheating. This is however only a matter of their relationship status; in fact, whether people choose to follow or not to follow norms depends on the rational choices facing them, meaning that individuals will select the best choice in order to maximize their utility in that moment. These theories of cooperation are fully consistent with Homan's model in which norms can easily emerge within individuals in small groups.

1.3 Blau's Account of Exchange Theory

Contrasting this approach, many scholars have studied groups as unitary actors. In this vision, a collective is expected to have one stable configuration of preferences and consistent goals. Modern approaches have applied the unitary actor assumption to other aggregates, including international organizations, political parties, states, lobby groups, and also terrorist groups[24]. The perspective discussed up to this point concentrates on theory of rational behavior from the individuals' perspective and while most of the work has been associated with the exchange theory, focusing on individuals or small groups behavior, other scholars are focused

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[21] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.311-312;
[22] *Ibidem;*
[23] *Ivi*, p.313;
[24] Van Um Eric, *Evaluating the Political Rationality of Terrorist Groups*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2016, p.23;

on the institutional and structural analysis of the model. His major contribution to exchange theory is found in Exchange and Power in Social Life (1964)[25].

Blau's main impact focuses on the function of social exchange as opposed to economic exchange and he distinguishes two functions of the former: the creation of bonds of friendship and the establishment of subordination or domination. Accordingly, social exchanges increase integration by "creating trust, encouraging differentiation, enforcing conformity with group norms, and developing collective values"[26]. Blau discusses, therefore, economic exchange and social exchange to the extent that the latter benefits of the creation of trust between people and incorporates the level of trust between individuals into social groups. Social exchanges, however, tend to evolve gradually, as it is not straightforward to measure the value of exchanges. A core and underlying characteristic of this process is the social norm of reciprocity; to this extent, Blau argues that "the need to reciprocate for benefits received in order to continue receiving them serves as a 'starting mechanism' of social interactions"[27]. Group norms, comprising reciprocity, regulate exchange relations. Contrary to the economic exchange, moreover, social exchange differs as the nature of the return cannot be "bargained over"[28]; in addition to this, social exchange assumes some kind of future return, although its nature is not agreed in beforehand.

Using the exchange theory to explain consistency and in the wider society, Blau argues one characteristics of large institutions, which is that exchange is increasingly indirect: rewards often come from individuals who indirectly participated in the exchange. On this point he believes that these exchanges depend on the "strength and internalization of social norms, which in turn depend on the fact that people receive approval in exchange for their conformity"[29].

How do large institutions enforce conformity? The method Blau designates goes above the original assumption of exchange theory. He argues that the origin of shared values and norms does not lie in individual utility maximization but in different aspects of groups psychology. Blau advises a mechanism in which shared experiences produce norms and values trough cognitive dissonance. This term was coined by Leon Festinger (*A Theory of Cognitive*

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[25] Blau Peter, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, Routledge 1964;

[26] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.319;

[27] Blau Peter, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, Routledge, 1964, p.92;

[28] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.323;

[29] *Ibidem*;

Dissonance, 1957) and it suggests that when an individual faces some kind of conflict with others, his or her "responses and rationalization can be strengthened and transformed into common values and norms"[30]. Some people, therefore, might find themselves in the same situation of cognitive dissonance and, by sharing their accounts, they create social consensus and thus, social norms. Cognitive dissonance, therefore, helps creating social consensus and group norms, via the discussion and support of opinions and values.

After having described both Homans' and Blau's accounts, it can be stated that rational choice theory is concerned on the macro perspective of society and on how difficult it is to relate rational individuals and explain social order and groups, or the so-called collective action. In the section 1.2 it has been explained how rational choice models appear to function better for small group or individual situations. Even some advocated of rational choice models recognize that the collective action or group norms inquiry still has not been completely developed yet. Indeed, it is common sense to find differences between what seems rational in a small group compared to what seems to be rational in a large group.

Rational choice theories can actually work well in explaining cooperative behavior, but also trust, in small groups: who is not trustworthy is quickly found among few individuals. In a large group, on the other hand, it is quite frequent, but also rational, to free ride: everybody is involved in some kind of social exchange while one individual is giving up/breaking the trust created with the group. Here the norm of reciprocity does work, but only up to a certain point. One can argue, what makes an individual accept group values and norms? Within the theory of collective behavior, scholars of rational choice stress the concepts of public goods and selected benefits. In a large society with public goods, the process of benefiting is for everyone, even for the noncontributors in the society. With selected benefits, by contrast, only group members shall receive their benefit. In order to prevent or at least control the free rider problem of those who take benefits and do not make any contribution, Hechter (in *Principles of Group Solidarity*) illustrates the concept of solidarity and argues that it characterizes many groups, although in different degrees, and defines it as "compliance in the absence of compensation"[31]. Coleman, on his side, extends the analysis to modern societies, which are characterized by formal organization and geographical mobility; all of this contributes to inevitable problems in enforcing social norms, which can only grow in stable social systems. Where stability is not present, what makes the norms effective disappears and the free rider problem will unescapably

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[30] *Ivi*, p. 325;

[31] Hechter Michael, *Principles of Group Solidarity,* "University of California Press, Berkley"*,* 1988, p.10;

keep rising. What is crucial is the creation of internal sanctions through socialization, which makes it possible to acquire all the benefits and maintain cohesion. Coleman's contribution, finally, also provides a formulation close to Homan's exchange theory, maintaining that if an individual's "actions benefit others, then those other have an incentive to provide rewards– in the form, say, of social approval"[32].

1.4 Economics, Utility and Rational Choice Theory

From its early models, rational choice theory has been a long-standing concept in economics. In economics, explanations are seen as economic to the extent that they describe the related phenomena in relation to the rational choices of "individual economic agents"[33]. Rational choice scholars adopt four basic propositions of economics:

1. "Individuals are rational profit-maximizers, making decisions on the basis of their tastes and preferences

2. The more of something an individual has, the less interested he or she will be in yet more of it

3. The prices at which goods and services will be sold in a free market are determined directly by the tastes or prospective buyers and sellers. The greater the demand for goods, the more "valuable" it will be and the higher will be its price. The greater the supply, the less valuable it will be and the lower will be its price.

4. Goods will generally be more expensive if they are supplied by a monopolist than if they are supplied by a number of firms in competition with each other."[34]

The first two points are more related to an individual's basic psychological disposition and can be used to make expectations about their behavior and their choices. It is crucial to note that economists tend to predict that alterations in rewards, benefits and payoffs will change people's behavior and choices. Rational choice theorists have also followed this idea: it can be compared quite frequently the behavior of people to different payoffs, thus being able to predict individuals' choice without putting value on each option. The second proposition of human behavior is the so-called law of diminishing marginal utility; a principle which declares that

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[32] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition,* Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.337;

[33] Sugden Robert, *A Survey of Contributions from Economics and Philosophy*, "The Economic Journal", Vol. 101, 1991, p.751;

[34] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.284;

"as more of a good is consumed, the consumption of additional amounts will yield smaller additions to utility"[35]. A definition of marginal utility is also necessary: "additional satisfaction obtained from consuming one additional unit of a good". Diminishing marginal utility means, therefore, that if the consumption of a good rises, then its marginal utility– the extra utility an individual profits by consuming another unit of it– decreases.

The last two propositions of economics concern the price at which people are willing to exchange. Sociologists in this case try to extend this proposition outside the marketplace and claim that social exchange implicates prices, which are in turn determined by demand, supply of goods, as economic exchanges are. Those studies focus on what individuals could get from a monopolistic supplier and following this analysis, "an individual who monopolizes valued quantities and power is in an even better position"[36].

As specified multiple times in the chapter, individuals are assumed to be utility maximizers. The meaning of utility has been questioned, as multiple standards have been developed. Early research in economics advised that utility may be understood in financial gains or, as the economists call it, maximization of wealth. Recently, scholars have argued for more flexible conceptions of utility. In microeconomics, it is defined as a "numerical score "representing the satisfaction that a consumer gets from a given market basket"[37]. However, in everyday language and use, utility has become known as benefit, or payoff or even wellbeing. The question, therefore, is: can utility be derived from self-interested behavior, in order to achieve and economic payoff? One version of the term implies that individuals pursue action to enhance their personal utility and they are, therefore, acting in a selfish behavior. Another, broader version, suggests that individuals are self-interested, but not necessarily selfish. And resulting from that, the behavior that follows benefits not only the individual actor but also a group, be it smaller or bigger, to which the actor is faithful; this behavior can be considered rational.

As a consequence, "any action that sacrifices self-interest for a collective good would contradict rational behavior"[38]. This is an extension of self-interested behavior to altruistic

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[35] Pindyck Robert S., Rubinfeld Daniel L., *Microeconomics,* Pearson Education, New York, 8th Edition, 2013, p.95;

[36] Wallace Ruth A, Wolf Alison, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p.286;

[37] Pindyck Robert S., Rubinfeld Daniel L., *Microeconomics,* Pearson Education, New York, 8th Edition, 2013, p.78;

[38] Van Um Eric, *Evaluating the Political Rationality of Terrorist Groups*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2016, p.21;

behavior, that might still be useful for the maximization of someone's personal utility. An illustration can be made with terrorists and terrorist groups: individuals join groups, spending money to be part of the group and even risk their life every day to benefit the terrorist group– but not limited to it, as it can also benefit some part of the population, as they are usually seeking for a political change. Terrorist behavior in this case is not considered necessarily altruistic, because the group he belongs to actually benefits materially from the individuals' participation –as most organizations ask for a compensation for each member– but, so as to study the behavior of groups, and in particular terrorist groups, it is required an understanding that departs from purely self-interested behavior.

1.4.1 Cost and Benefits of Options

Rational choice theory, as seen in this chapter, is not a unified theory; but the underlying assumption is that actors weigh the costs and benefits of their options and then, considering their preferences, pick the alternative that guarantees the highest net profit. Therefore, individuals, who are utility maximizers, will almost always value more money, pursue benefits and try to follow what, in their opinion, is the best course of action that will yield that result. Going back to the example of terrorists and terrorist groups and the underlying assumption of preferences that individuals have, it can be identified that with these preferences, actors also satisfy the two basic conditions of transitivity and connectivity, in order for these preferences to be stable. Connectivity means that options can always be comparable, whereas transitivity –strictly connected to the notion of consistency– indicates individuals to compare options and to "rank them consistently according to the underlying configuration of preferences"[39]. If an actor prefers A to B and B to C, this should imply that he/she would also prefer A over C in order to have consistent, therefore transitive, behavior and preferences. This would make individuals completely rational and their behavior would be determined and predictable.

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[39] Parsons Stephen D., *Rational Choice and Politics. A Critical Introduction*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2005, in Van Um Eric, *Discussing Concepts of Terrorist Rationality: Implication for Counter-Terrorism Policy*, Economics of Security Working Paper 22, Berlin, 2009;
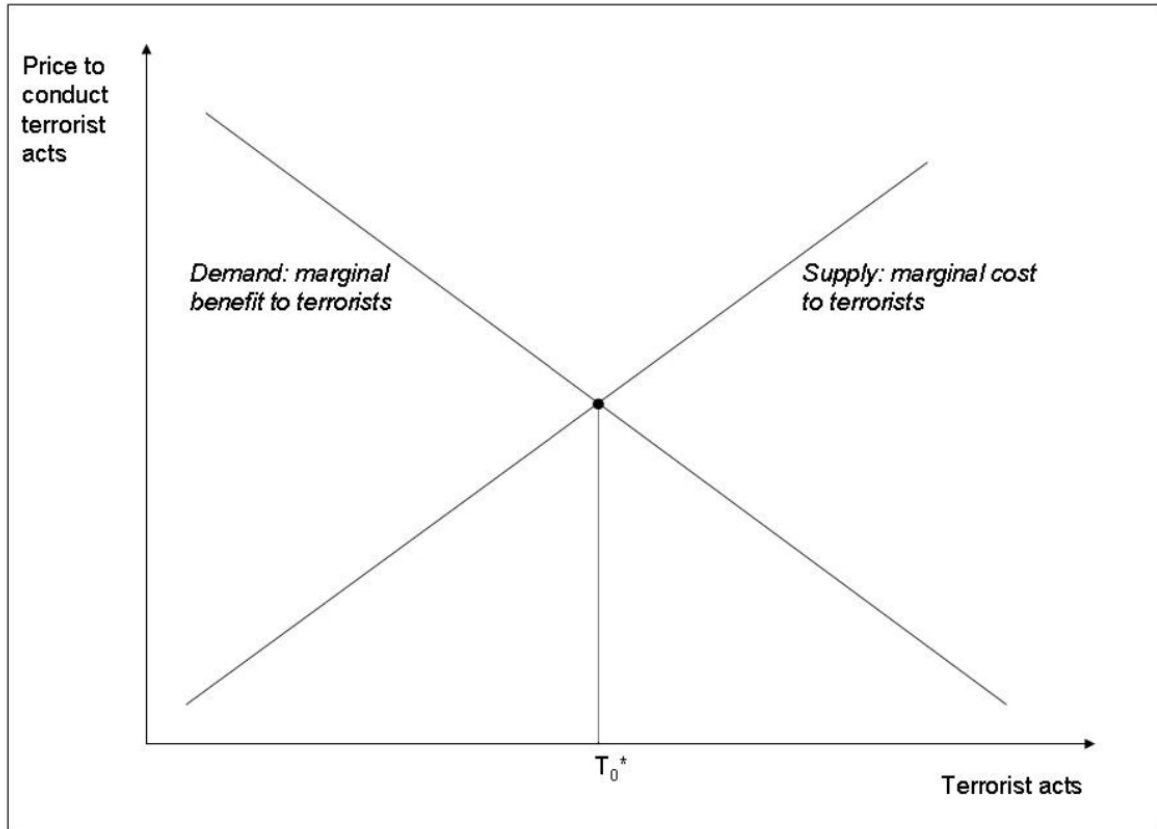
Figure 2: Supply and demand for terrorism[40]

Translating these decisions into economic terms, and applying these behaviors to terrorists, one can identify the cost-benefit situation (Figure 2). Terrorists, as all individuals, are expected to maximize their utility over time, using every means at their disposal to make expected benefits outweigh the expected costs. The supply curve (upward sloping) and the demand curve (downward sloping) intersect at T_0, where price equates quantity supplied and quantity demanded. Since terrorist attacks are assumed to provide terrorists with decreasing benefits, the demand curve is downward sloping. How do terrorists and, in general, individual actors choose for the best option available? If they are instrumentally rational individuals, then they must be completely and thoroughly informed of both costs and benefits resulting from all possible options.

After having analyzed the main theories and studies underlying the models of rational choice, the next chapter will be devoted to the study of terrorists and terrorists' activity on the basis of the rationality premise.

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[40] Van Um Eric, *Discussing Concepts of Terrorist Rationality: Implication for Counter-Terrorism Policy*, Economics of Security Working Paper 22, Berlin, 2009, p.10;

Chapter 2. Rational choice theory applied to terrorist activity.

2. Introduction

Rational Choice Theory provides a standard model for the ongoing research on terrorism, terrorists decision-making and terrorist activity, both at the individual and the group or collective level. This second chapter is devoted to the study of such terrorists' behavior on the basis of the previously described rational choice theory. A rational approach to terrorism offers scholars the guidelines to analyze with a more systematic methodology modern, but also older terrorism. Starting with the basis of rational choice theory, here applied to terrorism, this chapter explores many sides of terrorist activity through a rational lens, going from the misconception that people usually have on terrorists, to the profile of a terrorist, and the different types of a terrorist attack, analyzing also the distinction found between the individual and the group level.

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, rational choice theory is based on the assumption that people are usually utility maximizers, who evaluate thoroughly the pros and cons of an action before committing to it. This theory views terrorism as a political behavior, which is rational in its scope. Terrorism's objectives are to acquire political influence or gain recognition for a specific cause and this is the critical point in the radicalization process.

2.1 The Causes of Terrorism

Crenshaw[41] tries to make a comprehensive explanation of the causes of terrorism; in order to "distinguish a common pattern of causation from the historically unique"[42]; she proposes a theoretical framework for the analysis of the likely settings for allowing terrorist activity. Firstly, there is the need to distinguish between two factors, the "preconditions, factors that set the stage for terrorism over the long run, and the precipitants, specific event that immediately precedes the occurrence of terrorism"[43]. Essentially, the former are those factors that allow the groundwork for terrorist activity and the latter are the ones that spell out the subsequent eruption of violence. Following this difference, Crenshaw further divides the preconditions into "enabling" factors or "permissive factors"[44], which create the opportunity and the

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[41] Crenshaw Martha, *The Causes of Terrorism,* "Comparative Politics", Volume 12, July 1981;

[42] *Ivi,* p. 379;

[43] *Ivi*, p.381;

[44] *Ibidem;*

environment for terrorist operations to happen and those circumstances and conditions which directly happen to be the cause for terrorism.

Pursuing with the analysis, she identifies several permissive factors to terrorism– urbanization, modernization, social facilitation and government's failure or reluctance to avoid terrorism among others. This last one is of extremely sensitivity, as most of the times terrorists are committing attacks and terrorist organizations exists as such in order to bring about a political change[45]. Direct causes for terrorism have been explained with the focus on the situational factors. The first condition is the "existence of concrete grievances among any identifiable subgroup of a larger population"[46]. Nevertheless, this is neither a sufficient nor a necessary cause of terrorism, since not every dissatisfied minority eventually turns to political violence. What is crucial here is the perception of deprivation of the group in question towards the real deprivation: particularly critical is the degree to which they perceive their deprivation or discrimination to be just or unjust and from that stems their attitude towards violence and terrorism. A second condition, connected to this first, is the absence of political involvement, which allows for grievances and dissatisfactions to be generated and, as a consequence, terrorism is expected to happen, both as a permissive factor and as a direct cause.

However, this investigation is centered on background conditions, and it is mostly based on the organizations' conception and interpretation of it. It is the circumstances, the situations that allow terrorist organizations to view that condition as permissive and provide them with the persuasive intention of pursuing change. The last condition analyzed is the precipitating event, which immediately precedes the outburst of terrorist activity.

2.1.1 Politically rational terrorism

Often, the terrorist organization feels completely dissatisfied with the government and terrorism becomes a means to an end, therefore, justifiable. This represents a rational political choice, based on the decision-making process of a terrorist organization, "assumed to be well aware of (its) available options"[47]. It implies that terrorists evaluate their possibilities and then choose the one which has the greater value or reward compared to what they would have to give up. The assumption of political rationality of terrorist groups has been carried out by many scholars and, among those, Van Um builds his study on the political effectiveness of terrorist

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[45] Van Um Eric, *Evaluating the Political Rationality of Terrorist Groups*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2016;

[46] Crenshaw Martha, *The Causes of Terrorism,* "Comparative Politics", Volume 12, July 1981*, p. 383;*

[47] Van Um Eric, *Evaluating the Political Rationality of Terrorist Groups*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2016, p. 130;

groups. On a tactical level, he implies, terrorist groups have in fact been rather successful in achieving their objectives, not necessarily on a political level, but at least some groups satisfied their claim on political recognition or influence on a governmental election[48]. Political goals have been, on the other hand, very successful on a strategic level, via for instance, terrorist campaigns, as the one in 1940, of the Jewish Terrorist campaign against the British in Palestine.

Sometimes, however, for the sake of the group's survival, terrorists must sacrifice (or at least postpone) their political gains for the group. So, is it socially rational violence or politically rational violence? Van Um concludes that group do have to "face severe constraints"[49], but in order to keep their end goal of political change, they must delay their objectives. This holds true for group that have goals and intentions for the long-run, which may prove effective, as it gives the organization time and space for evaluating better the options available and therefore, a group's strategy may even improve, contrary to a group with "a short time horizon"[50]. Rather, most of the times, terrorists are conscious that their objectives are best attained in the long-run and their action would only be part of a bigger political change– "the longer the groups' violent struggles last, the more likely they may succeed"[51].

As a consequence, what are the conditions under which terrorists are politically rational actors even when they face constraint? It may be the case that terrorism in this instance, is the best relative choice: it has been underlined many times that terrorists are rational actors who evaluate options and chose the one that better maximizes their utility and following this line of reasoning, it may be said that in the case of constraint, terrorism may still be the best option available for actors, "after alternatives have been rejected as viable options"[52]. For the sake of this dissertation, the political rationality of terrorist groups can be measured on the basis of the effectiveness of their political actions; given the fact that rational actors are expected to choose the most rewarding alternative, "which is likely to grant them political benefits"[53], then it can be considered politically rational the fact that terrorist groups resort to terrorism and violence in order to advance their political ambitions.

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[48] *Ivi,* p.131;

[49] *Ivi,* p.138;

[50] McCormick Gordon H., *Terrorist decision making*, "Annual Review of Political Science", Volume 6, 2003, p.498;

[51] Van Um Eric*, Evaluating the Political Rationality of Terrorist Groups*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2016, p. 141;

[52] *Ivi*, p. 139;

[53] *Ivi, p.196;*

2.2 Terrorists are not irrational actors

Going further, it is necessary to stress two peculiarities that are often misconceived. The first one is that terrorists are considered as irrational or "crazy people"[54]: this is not considered true by most scholars. For instance, Nalbandov[55] believes that terrorists' decision-making is indeed rational, as actors take time and think through and through their actions. Moreover, it is essential to stress that most studies have proved that terrorists are normal people, with no mental illness or psychopathological problem whatsoever– "more than 30 years of research has found little evidence that terrorists generally suffer from psychopathology"[56]; in fact, the basis of a terrorist behavior is inconsistent with that of psychopaths. Hoffman has described them as "disturbingly normal"[57] and this highlights the fact that terrorist are indeed ordinary people, who simply choose terrorism rationally for utility-maximization purposes.

The second misconception is the assumption that terrorists are rational, but the rationale considered is the Western. This is a mistake, because the cost-benefits calculations and the decisions taken by the terrorist (taking into consideration fundamentalist Islamist terrorists and terrorists organizations) are not made in the same way as those we are accustomed to in the Western part of the world. Certainly, coming from different backgrounds, terrorists also have a different rationale behind their decision-making. Western mistakes are usually more visible when analyzing counter-terrorist measures: analysts assume terrorists to behave in the same way they do and therefore they try to predict their movements based on a Western rationale in the same condition as the terrorist in analysis. Costs-benefits analysis made by such terrorist are without doubt different from ours and researchers must take this crucial factor into consideration when working for counter measures. Of course, every terrorist organization and group possess a different subjective rationale, but the motive behind their attack(s) can always be studied with a rational choice theory, as terrorists are considered to be rational actors.

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[54] *Ivi,* p.97;

[55] Nalbandov Robert; *Irrational rationality of terrorism.* "Journal of Strategic Security*"*, Volume 6, *Issue* 4, 2013;

[56] Keys-Turner Karen D., *The violent Islamic radicalization process: A framework for understanding*. Naval Postgraduate School Monterey CA Dept of National Security Affairs, 2011;

[57] Hoffman Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009 in McCormick Gordon H., *Terrorist decision making*, "Annual Review of Political Science", Volume 6, 2003;

2.2.1 Standard Profile of a Terrorist, Sageman

A thorough analysis of a terrorist profile has been completed by Sageman[58]. First of all, it needs to be underlined the fact that he proposes a model of terrorists based on a bottom-up process, rather than a top-down method. Moreover, it also is crucial the fact that he downplays the role of extremist ideology, thus implying the fact that radicalization is "deeply rooted in group dynamics common to every human group"[59], and not ideology. The method employed is a scientific methodology, by first of all using databases (thus collecting information) and then testing various claims about terrorism. The goal of his research is disproving some "conventional wisdom"[60] on why some people chose to become terrorists. He started by studying specific threats to the United States, in particular with 19 people of 9/11 and them as a starting point. Since most information on terrorism is erroneous, he went to the field to test the hypothesis himself. He accumulated about almost 500 biographies, but since most of it is erroneous, he tried to base himself with trial transcripts and even went to the field to test the hypothesis himself.

What is the relationship between poverty and terrorism?[61] Poverty is one of the most used justifications for terrorism: economic deprivation leads to grievances and as, a consequence, to terrorism. The empirical evidence on the subject challenges this assumption. In fact, it is proved that most terrorists are from middle-class backgrounds. Al-Qaeda composition, for example, is mostly made of middle-class people. The difference here regards the different socioeconomic composition of people in the different waves of global Islamist terrorists[62]. The first wave of terrorism involves the "companions-in-arms"[63] of Bin Laden went to fight the soviets. These people, the so-called old-Guards formed the basis of the Al-Qaeda since 1998. Today there are still 2000 people following in the group. In terms of socioeconomical conditions, these terrorists were often from the upper class and middle class, therefore, from a higher status. The second wave of terrorism includes people who joined social movements from the 1990s and

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[58] Sageman Marc, *Leaderless jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century,* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2011;

[59] Orsini Alessandro, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Mode*l, "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism", 2020, p. 6;

[60] Sageman Marc, *Leaderless jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century,* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2011, p. 13-56 and 69;

[61] Cfr. Orsini Alessandro*, Poverty, Ideology and Terrorism: The STAM Bond, "*Studies in Conflict & Terrorism"*,* 2012. The major literature for the topic poverty and terrorism is cited in this article*;*

[62] *Sageman Marc, Leaderless jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2011,* p.48;

[63] *Ibidem;*

mainly come from middle-class. The third wave comprises the "post-Iraqi invasion generation"[64], essentially young terrorist wannabees. This can be considered the degradation of jihadi. They are mostly poorly educated and young, who want to be heroes and want to link up to Al-Qaeda, but they do not know how. They usually are second generation Muslims, with parents that are part of the unskilled labor in Europe or in the United States; only this third wave of terrorism includes people from middle to lower social classes.

Another conventional claim about terrorist is that they were brainwashed, but looking at the background of the terrorists, they mostly come from middle-class, as aforementioned. Moreover, the argument that people usually make is linked to the charismatic leader and its ability to brainwash vulnerable individuals, but this is not the case. Another theory is the Madrassa[65] theory of terrorism: it was not their culture that brainwashed the terrorists, but their Muslim schooling did. Data, however, disproves this theory: most children who became terrorists later in life "grew up secular, in secular environments"[66]. People usually have the "visions of young children swaying to the rhythmic recitations of the Quran in madrassas (which convey) the idea that rote memorization of a text in a language that they do not understand invariably leads the young to fanaticism"[67]. Yet, 87% of terrorists from the study did not go to Madrassas. This theory is also proved wrong by the fact that Madrassas are usually schools based on the study of secular subjects and therefore, apprentices are more inclined to stay home.

A further idea is the one of immaturity, about children and teenagers joining organizations because they are naïve, but the average age of subjects who join a terrorist organization is 26, much higher that what is commonly assumed. Strictly linked to this is the notion of ignorance: most of them graduated high school and, even more surprisingly, 62% went to university. This is much higher than the United States average, which is about 52%. It is also higher than the majority of the community of origin, where less than 10% of people go to university. Even here, there is a slight difference in the three waves. The first wave saw a percentage of people who completed their college education of 60%; the second wave saw a slight increase of the people who dropped college in order to connect with the terrorist organization; and the third

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[64] *Ivi,* p.49;

[65] Madrassa is a religious Islamic school;

[66] Sageman Marc, *Leaderless jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century,* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2011, p. 51;

[67] *Ibidem;*

wave, in connection with the socioeconomical background, is first of all too young for college, but an even more striking result is that most dropped out of high school.

Moreover, most people who did go to college, did not study religion (as commonly thought), but they studied in the technical field, specifically engineering or medicine, "as did the al Qaeda Central leadership. Osama bin Laden was a civil engineer; Zawahiri, a physician; Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, an engineer; Ramzi Yousef, an electrical engineer; Mohammed Atta, an architect; and Ziad Jarrah, an engineer"[68]. This shows that most of terrorists do not have a background in religion and its commentary, and therefore join the religious thoughts later in life, with only the knowledge of the original text of the Quran.

An additional typical misconception for terrorism is for sexual frustration: as they are Muslims, there is no premarital sex, so the assumption here is that they become so sexually frustrated that they would commit suicide for the cause. This is one of the simplest statements to contradict, as the facts speak rather clear. Still, there is a good amount of people who believe sexual frustration to be the cause of terrorism. This, however, is a great example of the belief that it is commonly perceived, that of " 'they' are so different from 'us' ". As stated above, terrorists have been found to be "disturbingly normal"[69]. 73% were married and continuing with his empirical research, Sageman found that 2 out of 3 have kids. Therefore, people do not become terrorist because of the sexual frustration.

Last but not least, there is the assumption on criminal records: another theory is that they are just criminals and sociopaths –with antisocial personality disorder, for which you need to have a long criminal activity, going back to childhood. But the vast majority does not have any criminal record before joining a terrorist organization. No real personality disorder, no real trauma –usually they come from pretty good families– no narcissism; usually, they come from pretty normal and common families.

Finally, it can be said that the profile of a terrorists is that of a standard, normal, person, coming from a middle-class family, who went to college and has a family on his/her own. How do they end up in terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda? Contrary to popular belief, radicalization is a bottom-up process: a person doesn't become radicalized because, for instance, Al Qaeda sent a militant to recruit a person –this would be a top-down activity, which does not work in the west– but an individual, which is usually an expatriate with a very good level of education commits himself to the organization. Moreover, there is no central

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[68] *Ivi,* p.59;
[69] See Reference 17

committee in Al-Qaeda, which is sending militants to recruit people; there is no official recruitment program in which militants travel in order to recruit followers in the Western cities exists. On the contrary, Al-Qaeda organization is very selective; individuals have to pass ability and motivational tests, because so many young people want to join in. On the contrary, the main problem for Al Qaeda is not recruitment but selection: interestingly, acceptance rate at Al-Qaeda is 15%, which is similar to Harvard's 13%. [70]

2.3 What influences an attack?

A crucial factor to take into consideration is what triggers an attack. Ganor[71] identifies both internal and external influences that drive an organization to pursue a terrorist attack; those would be exerted either from the bottom up or from the top down. Analyzing each one, we can pinpoint first of all top-down internal triggers, which lay within the terrorist organization, while bottom-up internal triggers are usually based on demands on leadership of the organization that have their origin in the field. Instead, top-down external triggers, which are those that have their foundation outside an organization. They may include political developments in the international sphere (situation of crises and/or wars, but even the singing or the implementation of an agreement), memorial days (or days that have a particular meaning for the organization, for example the anniversary of its foundation), but also events that interest considerable crowds of people. Bottom-up external triggers, on the other end, are the ones that have their origin in the organization's ground. They may involve grievances from their population of origin or competition with another terrorist organization.

The decision taken for perpetrating the attack represents just one of the many choices a terrorist organization –or its leaders– have to make. First of all, as already underlined multiple times in this dissertation, terrorists make decisions and choices in a rational way, by calculating the costs and benefits, or the advantages and the disadvantages of the various alternatives. The first decision a terrorist organization has to make– which is probably the most banal– is to create the organization itself. It may be obvious, but it is actually crucial, especially for state forces and counter-terrorist measures that have to identify this new entity to try to counter it. Then, the organization will decide its political goals and whether to achieve them in a violent or non-violent way. If the former is chosen, then it becomes a terrorist organization. The

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[70] Gerwehr Scott, Daly Sara, *Al-Qaida: Terrorist Selection and Recruitment, in* Kamien David, McGraw-Hill *Homeland Security Handbook,* McGraw-Hill Companies, New York, 2006, Chapter 5;

[71] Ganor Boaz, *Global Alert: The Rationality of Modern Islamist Terrorism and the Challenge to the Liberal Democratic World,* Columbia University Press, New York, 2015;

organizational structure and the *modus operandi* are other important decisions the leaders of the organization have to make: will it be a hierarchical organization? With a strong command and control structure or a "network of loose social connections"[72]? From the side of the members there are other decisions to be taken: they may decide to take part of the organization; therefore, they have to choose whether to just support it, either passively or actively, or to effectively join it. Passive support may entail publicity, promotion of the organization aims and objectives, whereas active support could include participating in riots and contributing to the financial gains of the organization.

2.3.1 Organized and Individual Attacks

It is crucial to distinguish between a personal initiative, or lone wolf terrorism from organized terrorism. This is because most of the times, lone wolf terrorists organize and plot the whole attack by themselves, without being associated with any organization. Moreover, the motivations behind an individual attack are different from those of organized terrorism: individuals might be looking for personal vengeance for having suffered from injustice themselves or even for perceiving to be attacked by someone. They might even feel grievance towards a specific community without having any connection to it. The internet too is an enabler and serves as incitement for lone wolves, as terrorist organizations started to use online platforms to encourage supporters to perpetrate attacks. Furthermore, what differs lone wolves from organized attackers, is the type of weapons and the scale of their attack. Usually, individual initiatives attacks are smaller, mainly performed by not-so trained people and the weapons used are the so-called cold weapons: "knives, axes, bricks, and stones; arson; vandalism; vehicular killing; or a shooting rampage with whatever hot weapons a lone wolf can acquire (grenades or guns)"[73].

Organized attacks, on the other hand, are usually bigger in scale and tend to have the upper-hand against counter-terrorism measures and state police. Therefore, it is easier to stop a lone wolf than an organized attack by a group, with a long time of planning, of gathering intelligence and training the perpetrators. How do organizations plan an attack? First of all, an attack has to be initiated: almost every terrorist organization has a hierarchical level, with a relatively easy and straightforward chain of command, which includes the leadership, the mid-level

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[72] *Ivi,* p.128;
[73] *Ivi*, p.138.

commanders and the terrorists in the field[74]. The subsequent step is crucial for determining if the attack is actually going to be perpetrated: an organization has to gather operational intelligence, both for learning the enemy's weaknesses (the "enemy" is the state) and to "obtain concrete, up-to-date operational information about a chosen target"[75]. Then, the organization has to select the perpetrators of the attack, in order to be able to effectively plan the attack in every detail, from getting every piece of information possible, to the modus operandi and the escape route (used after committing the attack on the basis of what the organizations has gathered for an efficient, and hopefully successful escape). Then, weapons and equipment are needed: here it is clear how state support or financial support from sympathizers serves and it is central for an organizations. Afterwards, the attackers are trained, with multiple defense techniques, military training, survival training and other vital exercises. The next step consists of successfully perpetrating the attack. The attack will be officially considered completed by the organization when the perpetrators have accomplished their goal and also have effectively escaped following the plan.

2.4 Violence between terrorist groups

Van Um builds a line or reasoning based on the rationality of inter group violence. Superficially analyzed, politically rational terrorism would not include also inter-group grievances and as a consequence, inter-group violence; but if a further look is taken deeper into the matter, it comes natural for groups to feel grievances towards each other. There have been several instances where inter-group violence was more prominent than the political ultimate cause, as the "violent clashes (…) in the Gaza Strip between Palestinian groups fighting for a common cause during the first intifada"[76]. However, studies have clarified the deeper motive behind inter-terrorist group violence, that are found to be rational and primarily motivated in achieving political objectives even when fighting each other. Yet, are those terrorist irrational for not pursuing political change via cooperating with the other group, or at least trying to find an agreement with non-violent means? Can it be understood as a politically rational behavior?

Abrahms[77] posits that interorganizational violence does not entail an irrational behavior. Nevertheless, he finds that it is more the social rationality rather than the political rationality

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[74] *Ivi,* p.139;

[75] *Ivi,* p.140;

[76] Abrahms Max, *What terrorists really want: Terrorist motives and counterterrorism strategy,* "International Security", Volume 32, Issue 4, 2008, p. 91;

[77] *Ibidem;*

of those groups that supports this idea. As previously mentioned, terrorist organization may have a long run political objective, that sometimes might require an extended time in taking effect. To this end, terrorists may strive for preserving the integrity of the group and as a consequence, inter-terrorist group violence is justified rationally. The group may be in a fight for "tangible resources"[78], that could be used for the group for larger political objectives.

It follows that most of inter-group violence happens for pursuing "intermediate objectives, related to the larger political cause"[79]; in this instance, political objectives are still the main driver for terrorists, but they are just delayed in exchange for some other intermediate and more easy reachable goals. As indicated before, politically rational terrorists have as their ultimate goal (and therefore prime motive) a political change. Accordingly, they also want to prevent other terrorist groups from gaining concessions, even if they aspire at the same political goal. It may seem irrational at a first glance, but by taking a deeper look inside groups behavior, it is found that it is indeed rational for the group itself, because if another organization wins what the other is trying to achieve, then the first group would not gain anything in terms of the reward for itself and in terms of benefits.

Furthermore, it is almost impossible for two separate entities –in this case, of course, terrorist groups– to have exactly the same goals and the same political platform. Even more rationally speaking, it may be said that they also want to prevent "undesired changes"[80], and even opposite objectives to what the real political end is, to happen. Violence, as a consequence, erupts for "preventing shifts in the power relationship (… in order to) preserve the internal balance of power between groups"[81]. A further motivation for inter-group violence may be the instance of loss of support from the population, which is another vital characteristic for a terrorist group. Therefore, rational and politically motivated violence may be the evidence of maintaining or establishing political dominance. Groups can be seen as markets which compete for having the dominance and achieve more "market share"[82]. This market share can comprise of both political support from the population but also of financial needs, recruits and funding from them. The result is that by competing with similar organizations, a terrorist group

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[78] Van Um Eric, *Evaluating the Political Rationality of Terrorist Groups*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2016, p. 41;

[79] *Ibidem;*

[80] *Ivi,* p.42;

[81] *Ibidem;*

[82] *Ibidem;*

may achieve the upper-hand and therefore it would be easier in the future to attain the political goal.

2.4.1 The strategic approach of terrorism

McCormick provides with a very insightful analysis on the strategic frame as a decision-making process of terrorism. Strategic agents "enter into a fight in the same way they would approach a "contest" or "game" "[83]. Here, the decision-making of terrorists is compared to game theory, which, as seen in Chapter 1, is critical for explaining and understanding the rational choices they make. As any game, the purpose of it is to win. "Terrorism, in this view, is an instrumental activity designed to achieve or help achieve a specified set of long-run and short-run objectives"[84]. This implies that terrorists choices are established on predicted results of certain actions. Alternative choices are evaluated beforehand and the decision of choosing the violent, terrorist route depends on the solution to several issues, among others: what are the accessible paths and what are the predictable results of them? How are these expected to have an effect on the aims of the group?

An important factor to be underlined once again is that terrorists seek to maximize their utility in order to get the expected rewards or benefits, by minimizing the costs needed to realize these political objectives. In the case of a game (or a competition) against another organization, the strategy of games would be to play the other group, instead of playing the chances. In other words, a terrorist group decision to commit or not to commit is based on the decision taken by the other group, in terms of targets, method/approach and timing. Therefore, every decision would be influenced in some ways by the strategy of the opponent. Another characteristic of this strategic approach is the assumption that terrorists groups act with a common rationality, as a unitary actor. Therefore, the decision-making would be made by a unitary body/identity, with a single mind, a common set of preferences and the group would be able to make the best choice available to it to achieve the highest profit.

Furthermore, it is crucial to take into consideration the connection between a certain action made by terrorists and its consequences, which can both be intended and unintended. "The relationship between an action and its behavioral impact is clearly indirect"[85]. This relationship can be broken down into four steps:

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[83] McCormick Gordon H., *Terrorist decision making*, "Annual Review of Political Science", Volume 6, 2003, p.481;

[84] *Ibidem;*

[85] *Ivi,* p.483;

1. "An action is carried out against a specific target

2. The action is interpreted, packaged, and retransmitted by the media

3. The 'mediated' message is received and interpreted by the group's target audience (s)

4. It is hoped, the target(s) of influence respond in a way that advances group interests"[86]

Analyzing those steps one by one, it is found that the first one is the most rational; in fact, it is the decision-making process of a terrorist organization, where the attack is chosen and the terrorists have complete control over it: what it is aiming to attack, when the attack will be perpetrated, how and by whom. However, the terrorist group does not have much control on the second and third steps, namely how the media and the population or targeted audience interprets the attack. A growing number of organizations, to counter a possible negative effect, have started to deliver themselves the message of the attack online. An approach of this kind is followed by Al-Qaeda, which has developed a strategy for targeting the media and a specific audience. This involves the Internet, which allows the terrorist organization to have control over what is published and also on the comments, on the reviews under the available content.

2.5 Group and Individual level rationality

Nalbandov analyzed individual and group level terrorist rationality. Before proceeding with the study, it is necessary to underline the difference he finds between the "old" and the "new" terrorists[87]. Old terrorists are those that perpetrated their attacks before the end of the Cold War, whereas the new terrorists are those who were in action after the Cold War. Moreover, it is much easier to analyze old terrorists with the rational choice model, as new terrorists depart from the standard frame and add to their radicalization process also psychological factors[88]. Within the individual level rationality, it may be found that old terrorists were more selfish in their scope and did not contemplate the suicide action that is common nowadays with new terrorists. They wanted to be present when the change and the benefit caused by the perpetration of the attack would take place. On the other hand, new terrorist value suicide as a means to an end, as a means to achieve the political objectives he/she was aiming at. It represents the "sacrifice for the greater common good"[89]. The similarities

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[86] *Ibidem;*

[87] Nalbandov Robert, *Irrational rationality of terrorism*. "Journal of Strategic Security*"*, Volume 6.4, 2013, p.24;

[88] See also Moghaddam, Section 2.5.2

[89] *Ivi,* p.27;

among these terrorists, however, is found in the rational thinking and decision-making process, with cost-benefits calculations and maximization of utility.

For what concerns group level rationality, terrorism has been found to be predominantly a collective struggle, with the exception of some attacks. Still, lone wolf terrorists tend to affiliate with an organization (even though most of the times, the organization itself has never had any contact with the terrorist). This brings to stress that, from a rational choice point of view, that group rationality stems from a desire of political change, from a goal agenda that will benefit the entire group, not just the political agenda of one or few members. Nevertheless, Nalbandov believes that radicalization can happen both at the individual and at the group level. Moreover, he also identifies the trend of new terrorism: it has become "a truly global enterprise (…), it has turned into "franchised" tactics readily available to organized and individual actors"[90]

2.5.1 Friction (McCauley and Moskalenko)

McCauley and Moskalenko[91], in order to explain the use of rational choice theory when dealing with radicalization, use mainly the concept of the free rider. Essentially, a person participates and takes part of a group rationally when there is an incentive, or he/she believes that the benefits and end result will be higher than the costs of the participation, which either way will be borne by other activists of the group. After having analyzed the behavior of different groups, they found that "social rewards for participation (…) can make behavioral commitment rational after all"[92]. Moreover, they have established that small groups are vital for a perpetration –therefore to commit a terrorist act– and bigger organizations represent merely the larger cell from which other smaller groups are working completely disconnected and acting on their own. Therefore, the attackers choose autonomously the targets and how to carry out the massacre. The main illustration is Al-Qaeda, a large organization, with many groups that connect with them, with the specific case of the Madrid bombings in 2004[93].

Following Nalbandov line of reasoning, McCauley and Moskalenko have analyzed the radicalization process following three different levels of radicalization: the individual level, the group level and, in addition to these two, they also identified mass level radicalization.

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[90] *Ivi,* p.33;
[91] McCauley Clark, Moskalenko Sophia, *Mechanisms of political radicalization: Pathways toward terrorism*, "Terrorism and political violence" 2008, p. 415-433;
[92] *Ivi,* p. 417;
[93] *Ibidem;*

According to McCauley and Moskalenko, "there are 6 mechanisms for individual radicalization, which is a particular type of lone wolf: Personal Grievance, Group Grievance, Slippery Slope, Love, Status and Risk Seeking, Unfreezing"[94]. The first mechanism is personal grievance, which stems from injustice and the feeling of wrongful treatment and therefore revenge is sought. That is what happens with many lone wolf terrorist– they want to get revenge to just one person, but they start to blame an entire social category to which they think that person belongs to. In the case of group grievance, a person is not badly treated, usually has a good life, and great prospect careers, so he/she has no reason to feel hatred for a social category. But this person identifies with a group of people who is badly treated and emphasizes with this category of people, with this social group suffering from injustice.

The third mechanism for individual radicalization is Slippery Slope, which stands for "unintentional and progressive"[95] radicalization. After a series of situations, this individual becomes more and more violent. It is not always ideology that pushes individuals towards violent radicalization. The fourth mechanism is love for risk taking; in this case, what is decisive is not ideology, but that a person wants to obtain social prestige by running risks. The pursue for social prestige underpins the will for taking chances and become radicalized. Particularly young people are strongly attracted by strong emotions and, moreover, this mechanism occurs especially among people coming from lower classes, because those individuals aim at becoming famous terrorists. The fifth mechanism is always love, but in a different meaning. It is love for friends, for one of your brothers (for instance the Boston 2013 marathon bombing). In this case one can decide to join a radical organization because his/her brother or friend is a member and even if this person is not so ideologically committed to the cause, he/she decides to become a member anyway.

The last mechanism is unfreezing: many individuals, because of the civil war, move abroad and start a new life, with no restraint towards the previous daily life duties. Those individuals become expatriates and people exposed to this kind of situation are more prone to becoming members of a terrorist organizations. Here the concept of disconnection is crucial: unfreezing happens to people that are disconnected to their previous social life and have no restraint. They need to start a new life in a new society. It is important to underline the fact that for radicalization to happen, to be successful –in the majority of the cases– one mechanism is not enough. Sometimes different mechanisms need to overlap. There can be different types of

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[94] Orsini Alessandro, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism", 2020, Volume 43, Issue p.14;
[95] *Ibidem;*

individual radicalization happening; "only in rare cases –perhaps group grievance or lone-wolf terrorists– is one mechanism sufficient for radicalization"[96].

Going further, McCauley and Moskalenko underline the three mechanisms for group radicalization, which are respectively group polarization, group competition and group isolation. This analysis is a crucial point, which is so essential because sociological thought has been employed. The narrative is not focused anymore on individual dynamic, but on small groups. Group polarization is a mechanism that proves how the group has power over individual radicalization; in fact, being part of a group helps an individual to talk about his or her radicalization process and from a discussion can begin a great inclination towards terrorism. Group cohesion is another important concept: "a group cannot be considered united if not placed in a position of comparison with other groups and, in the political arena, that leads to rivalry. A particularly powerful form of competition and contrast is provided by intergroup competition"[97]. Group isolation, the last mechanism of group radicalization, is what provides the group with the most space and time to organize its members.

Finally, they also analyzed mass radicalization, which comprises three mechanisms: Jujitsu Politics, Hatred against the enemy, and Martyrdom. Jujitsu politics is a mechanism that has the goal of radicalizing the masses, even people that before were against terrorism. Hatred against the enemy is another path towards mass radicalization: the terrorist group makes the society accept hate and violence towards those that do not "deserve compassion"[98], by using dehumanizing adjectives. Last there is martyrdom culture, connected to suicide terrorism.

2.5.2 Staircase to terrorism, Fathali Moghaddam

Usually, micro-level theories have been used to explain the path towards terrorism. Common theories employ the use of only few variables and often do not imply psychological factors. New research and literature has moved beyond strategic thinking and tries to inspect also the psychological variables that may condition terrorists decision-making. It has already been understood the non-implication of mental illnesses in terrorists which may affect their behavior. Moreover, it also needs to be stated that "terrorists manifest a range of often quite different personality traits and come from a wide range of backgrounds"[99].

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[96] *Ibidem;*

[97] *Ivi,* p.15; also, see Van Um's analysis in Section 2.4

[98] *Ibidem;*

[99] McCormick Gordon H., *Terrorist decision making*, "Annual Review of Political Science", Volume 6, 2003, p.491;

Moghaddam proposes a model of radicalization based on psychological processes, aimed "at reconstructing the chronological and existential phases that transform an individual into a terrorist"[100]. This theory of radicalization is based on the idea that radicalization can be conceived as of a six floor building. This six floor building is like a pyramid and the basic idea is that the more steps climbed by the individual, the fewer the chances that they can abandon the path towards terrorism and revert back from it.

The ground floor is the largest and the five others become progressively smaller. Relative deprivation is the starting point of Moghaddam, it represents the situation in which we find ourselves and what we think of it depends on other people. Comparison here is the key word: without comparison relative deprivation is not possible. A situation is bad in someone's eyes because other people have a better situation. People always take into account what other people have and do, so it happens for this person to see his/her situation as bad, compared to others even if objectively it is not bad. Relative deprivation is a cognitive process. Therefore, the feeling of being deprived of a reward arises from the comparison with what other people have and this creates general feeling of deprivation and insatisfaction. In many cases, individuals become terrorists not only because they want to advance in this process, but also, and mainly, because they cannot turn back.

Those who move to the first floor are individuals who are looking for a solution to what they perceived as unfair treatment[101]. Two psychological factors are critical in determining if the radicalization process will pursue: the first one is the "individual's perception of being able to improve their social status by using their own talent. (…) The second (one) is perception of procedural fairness."[102] One person cannot improve his/her social status, not because he/she does not have talent, but because society is unjust, the social system doesn't function correctly and that is why this person is in that situation. In this floor becoming a terrorist is just a possibility, not a certainty. Some individuals become frustrated because they do not find those roots to making progress, they find their paths blocked. In some parts of the world this is because of the corruption. There is not a freedom of open competition that people seek. The individual starts to look for a solution in his problem and the turning point happens on the second floor with the displacement of aggression.

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[100] Orsini Alessandro, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism", Volume 43, 2020, p.2;
[101] *Ivi,* p.3;
[102] *Ibidem;*

The psychological process most relevant in the second floor is the displacement of aggression. This line of reasoning is related to the assumption of frustration-aggression made by McCormick: his hypothesis is based on the fact that violence may result from feelings of frustration.[103] Some individuals move up to the third floor, where the psychological process is disengagement of morality of the rest of us, the majority, the kind of morality that says that killing and terrorism is wrong. They become engaged with the morality that says that terrorism is justified if a person can't fight in any other way, because it represents a means to an end. It is a shifting in attitudes. Back to the early 20th century there has been a study of attitudes (cognitive radicalization) connected to behaviors, actions (violent radicalization). Just because a person expresses an attitude it does not mean that they will perform the action, that they inevitably will become terrorists. Just because there is an endorsement of terrorism on a moral level, it doesn't mean that he will not carry out the action. However, it does mean that the person has shifted in a moral way, seeing terrorism as a justified means to an end. A very important theme is threatened identity: not only at the individual but also at the collective level. This is a very important motivation for action: this threat should be unjustified; however history shows that there are very good reasons for groups to feel threatened (for example traditional and fundamentalist religious groups feel threatened by globalization and urbanization– see Section 2.1 on permissive factors). It is not true that terrorists are morally disengaged. They are very much engaged, but in a reality of a terrorist group. They disengage from the morality of the surrounding world. McCormick asserted, in the same way as Moghaddam, that "the "internalized control" mechanisms that regulate individual behavior can be selectively "disengaged" and reconstructed. (…) once this process is completed, the individual's regulatory framework is effectively reversed. Actions that were once morally reprehensible take on the character of moral imperative"[104].

The main psychological process that shifts on the fourth floor is categorical thinking, the "us-versus-them"[105] thinking. This allows the others to be labeled as non-human, as sinful, everything that justifies exterminating them. This will not inevitably lead you to terrorism, but it is very likely to happen, as in this case the possibilities of turning back are almost none. The fifth, and last floor, is where the radicalization process is completed. At this point, "terrorists

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[103] McCormick Gordon H., *Terrorist decision making*, "Annual Review of Political Science", Volume 6, 2003, p.491;

[104] *Ivi,* p.492-493;

[105] Orsini Alessandro, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism", Volume 43, 2020, p.2;

do not feel any form of regret, nor guilt, for their victims"[106]. Terrorists have developed various strategies for side-stepping inhibitory mechanisms; the action of the terrorist to kill others does not only involve the strategy of labeling them as non-human, but also perceiving the others as sinful and as deserving to being the target of aggression. It is extremely crucial here to underline the threatened identity of these people, threatened from the standards of western, and more in particular, of American society, which is a hard target to achieve for those populations who do not have the means. Therefore, they resort to terrorism, they find terrorism to be their best alternative in order to satisfy their goal.

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[106] *Ivi,* p.4.

Chapter 3. Rational choice applied to suicide terrorism

3. Introduction

After having described a broad sociological framework for rational choice theory in chapter 1 and for terrorism seen though the lenses of rational choice for chapter 2, chapter 3 of this dissertation will be devoted to analyzing specifically suicide terrorism, always in the context of rationality. There is major scholarly consensus on the view that suicide terrorists are rational actors. This chapter will examine this dominant interpretation and will challenge the public impression that overlooks suicide terrorists as irrational. Starting from a definition of suicide terrorism, some common misconception will be examined; furthermore, it will be analyzed through a rational position why suicide terrorism is easier, what is the public response to it and how much the feedback influences further attacks. Moreover, there will be an analysis of terrorist organizations' rational motivations to choose suicide terrorism over other conventional forms of terror, to conclude with some implications of suicide attacks for counter-terrorism policies.

3.1 Suicide terrorism

3.1.1 History of suicide terrorism

Terrorist organizations are increasingly adopting suicide attacks to achieve their objectives. Suicide terrorism is quite a new phenomenon: before 1980 there have been just a few instances of suicide terrorism, which were better understood as suicide missions (where the person who committed the attack does not expect to survive). The best-known example are the Jewish Zealots and the Sicarii in the first century A.D., who used violence to attack Roman occupiers and liberate Judea; the mission was carried out in such a way that it was almost unthinkable for the attackers to not be killed themselves. A second famous example are the attacks carried out by the Japanese Kamikaze in World War II; they were aimed not at civilians, but at military personnel, but still this represents an instance of suicide attacks, as the individuals executing the attack were not suicidal, but they were sacrificing themselves against an enemy (in this case U.S. naval vessels). After 1945, there was a period of halt in suicide attacks, even though there have been some instances of suicide terrorism, not considered as such, because the terrorists did not kill other people while attempting to kill themselves (or while killing themselves). [107]

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[107] Pape Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House Inc, New York, NY,2005 and Madsen Julian, *Suicide Terrorism: Rationalizing the Irrational*, "Strategic Insights", Volume III, Issue 8, 2004;

The first modern instance of suicide terrorism did not come until the 1980s, more particularly in April 1983, with the attack at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. The main difference from previous attacks is that this is the first occurrence in which more than one suicide campaign was active. In fact, from the early 1980s, these types of attacks have seen a rapid increase, both in speed –the number of raw attacks has been growing since then– and geographical location. From the 1990s it spread to other countries, namely Sri Lanka (both civilians, political and military targets), but also to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in 1994, the Persian Gulf in 1995 with Al-Qaeda-led attacks against the American military and Turkey in 1996, with attacks against Turkish military and governments from the Kurdistan Workers Party. At the beginning of the new century, other countries started to see occurrences of suicide terrorism: the years 2000 and 2001 have been marked with attacks in Chechnya against Russian but also in Kashmir against Indian target, up to the most outstanding attack conducted by Al-Qaeda against the United Stated on September 11, 2001[108]. Pape[109] carried out a study of every suicide attack worldwide from 1980 to 2003 and found 315 instances of suicide bombings, of which 301 conducted from "eighteen organized coercive campaigns – each a series of attacks that the terrorist leaders explained as aimed at gaining specific political concessions from a named target government"[110].

3.1.2 Definitions of suicide terrorism

It is crucial to understand what scholars identify with the concept of suicide terrorism. Pape differentiates suicide terrorism from other two types of more conventional terrorism, which he calls "demonstrative" and "destructive" terrorism[111]. The former is aimed at publicity, usually to gain more recruiters or sympathizers, while the latter is a more aggressive form of terrorism, intended to coerce opponents even if this means to lose support for the cause. Suicide terrorism, on the other hand, "is the most aggressive form of terrorism, pursuing coercion even at the expense of angering not only the target community but neutral audiences as well"[112]. It is essential to underline, moreover, that a "suicide attack is, by definition, an attack that is

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[108] Pape Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House Inc, New York, NY,2005;
[109] *Ibidem;*
[110] *Ivi,* p.18;
[111] *Ivi,* p.11;
[112] *Ibidem*;

dependent on the death of the attacker"[113]. This means that, in order for a suicide attack to be successfully carried out, the perpetrator must kill him/herself. This is a crucial point when defining suicide attacks, as they are sometimes confused with suicide missions. The latter are instances of attacks where the perpetrator is not sure that he will survive, but he is not supposed to kill himself. An instance of this would be bombs detonated from a distance or pre-set to explode, where the attacker is killed either in the detonation or by the military forces.

However, it is crucial to underline the fact that the term suicide attack or suicide terrorism is misleading; martyrdom is probably the best term to describe a person who commits suicide, especially when referring to Islamic fundamentalism. This is because in the Islamic-jihadist culture, there is a difference between *Intihar* and *Istihad*. *"*Islamic fundamentalists do not perceive the holy act of martyrdom (*Istihad)* as suicide (*Intihar)* to be forbidden by Islam"[114]. In particular, the executor of a suicide attack, in the Islamic culture, is not perceived to have committed suicide, because suicide *per se* is forbidden by Islam[115]. Therefore, they consider martyrdom as a rational choice, from a person who calculates the costs and benefits of the action, which inevitably end up with the benefits outweighing the costs of the attack. These rational calculations and rewards are based on religious, personal, and social returns, which are not the same for every suicide bomber. These, in turn, serve to "create a rational platform"[116], with additional benefits, both for the family and peers of the suicide attacker and to the personal image of the martyr.

3.1.3 Explanations of suicide terrorism

"Suicide terrorists often are labeled crazed cowards bent on senseless destruction who thrive in the midst of poverty and ignorance"[117].

The first explanations to suicide attacks are consistent with the period (1980s) but they are not adequate to justify the recent growth in the use of this method. The number of studies from the first wave of suicide terrorism identifies the terrorists' suicidal act as irrational, focusing solely on individual motives instead of looking at the bigger picture, the terrorist organizations. It has

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[113] Ganor Boaz, *Global Alert: The Rationality of Modern Islamist Terrorism and the Challenge to the Liberal Democratic World*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2015, p.143;

[114] Perry Simon, Hasisi Badi, *Rational Choice Rewards and the Jihadist Suicide Bomber*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", Volume 27, 2015;

[115] Ganor Boaz, *Global Alert: The Rationality of Modern Islamist Terrorism and the Challenge to the Liberal Democratic World,* Columbia University Press, New York, 2015, p. 145;

[116] *Ibidem;*

[117] Atran Scott, *The Genesis of Suicide Terrorism,* "Science", Volume 229, Issue 5612, 2003, p.1535;

been proven that psychological explanations are not reliable for explaining the reasons why terrorism happens in a certain society at a certain time or times[118]. Why do certain countries or societies experience terrorism multiple times and some others do not? Psychological explanations are not sufficient to explain this kind of violence. Instead, it is required a rational or strategic explanation on the matter. Indeed, psychological descriptions cannot account on the reasons why there are some countries experiencing terrorism and other countries that do not. Furthermore, psychological explanations cannot account for the characteristics and attitudes usually given to an attacker, which, as explained in Chapter 2[119], "come from a broad array of lifestyles"[120], as opposed to the conventional understanding of suicidal individuals, with psychopathological problems and a long-lasting criminal record.

Other common explanations of terrorism stem from the perception of poverty, which is nowadays considered a "rather poor explanation for suicide terrorism"[121] and therefore has been challenged by leading scholars. Atran has recognized that terrorists' choices for suicide terrorism rely on the fact that they are indeed rational: they evaluate the costs and benefits of their possibilities, and if the latter outweigh the former, then suicide terrorism is the best choice[122]. An in-depth study on the quality of suicide terrorism and the economic conditions has been carried out by Benmelech, Berrebi and Klor[123]. They study the rational motivations for suicide terrorism, while challenging the approach that poor economic condition underlies terrorism. Related literature has only put their focus on the quantity of terrorism instead of looking at the connection between quality and economic conditions– this is a crucial difference. It is also important to note that although economic conditions may be relevant when an organization chooses to carry out and perpetrate an attack, they are not root causes of suicide terrorism. Benmelech et al. analysis focuses, moreover, on terrorist organizations' ability to recruit more volunteers when a country's economy is not well-off, and consequently the level of unemployment is high. This is because in a condition of economic crisis there is a high number of high-skilled people, who usually are more educated and experienced who are

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[118] Pape Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House Inc, New York, NY,2005;

[119] See Section 2.2: Terrorists are not irrational actors, Chapter 2;

[120] Pape Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House Inc, New York, NY,2005, p.20;

[121] *Ibidem;*

[122] Atran Scott, *The Genesis of Suicide Terrorism,* "Science", Volume 229, Issue 5612, 2003, p.1536;

[123] Benmelech Efraim, Claude Berrebi, Esteban F. Klor, *Economic conditions and the quality of suicide terrorism*, "The Journal of Politics", Volume 74, Issue 1, 2012;

recruited by terrorists. The suicide attack that follows this recruitment process, therefore, will have more probability of be directed towards more important targets. Here is it crucial to mention that Rosendorff and Sandler[124] have added an important argument to this analysis: suicide terrorism must be differentiated from other types of terrorist attacks.

3.2 Why is suicide terrorism chosen?

At this point it is rational to ask, why do rational individuals resort to suicide terrorism? By summarizing the last few paragraph's findings, it can be stated that when the economy is good and therefore, the level of unemployment is low, there is a lower chance to recruit high-skilled individuals, as they prefer the market economy. On the contrary, when the unemployment level is high, more high skilled people are rationally joining an organization. Why? Bueno de Mesquita's[125] findings on the argument are straightforward: if the supply for terrorists is higher than the demand, then the cost of participation (for the organization) will be lower, and the rewards will be higher, as more skilled individuals are part of the organizations' activity.[126]

Most organizations, however, choose to employ suicide as their method of attack, because it is the easiest among the options available to them. First and foremost, this is because a suicide attack is more destructive than other types of terrorist attacks, and it is easier to target and kill more people if the perpetrator is willing to die for the cause. In fact, suicide terrorists have the upper hand in choosing where to perpetrate the attack and when, depending on the favorable or unfavorable conditions of the environment they are. Moreover, with suicide bombings, there is no need to put some time-delay or remotely activated explosive devices; suicide bombers usually wear suicide vests and can "conceal weapons on their own bodies and make last-minute adjustments more easily than ordinary terrorists"[127]. An illustration of the level of destruction that suicide attacks can achieve is given by Pape, who identifies that from 1980 to 2003, 48%

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[124] Rosendorff B. Peter, Todd Sandler, *Suicide Terrorism and the Backlash Effect*, "Defence and Peace Economics", Volume 21, Issue 5, 2010 in Benmelech Efraim, Claude Berrebi, Esteban F. Klor, *Economic conditions and the quality of suicide terrorism*, "The Journal of Politics", Volume 74, Issue 1, 2012, p. 114;

[125] Bueno de Mesquita Ethan, *The Quality of Terror*, "American Journal of Political Science", Volume 49, Issue 3, 2005 in Benmelech Efraim, Claude Berrebi, Esteban F. Klor, *Economic conditions and the quality of suicide terrorism*, "The Journal of Politics", Volume 74, Issue 1, 2012, p. 118

[126] For an empirical study on the link between economic conditions and quality of suicide terrorism using the evidence of Palestinian suicide terrorists against Israeli targets between 2000 and 2006, see Benmelech Efraim, Claude Berrebi, Esteban F. Klor, *Economic conditions and the quality of suicide terrorism*, "The Journal of Politics", Volume 74, Issue 1, 2012

[127] Pape Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House Inc, New York, NY,2005, p.28;

of total deaths caused by terrorist attacks were victims of suicide bombings, while only 3% of all terrorist attacks have been classified as suicide attacks.[128] This is an impactful number for terrorist organizations; if they want to cause many deaths, it is proven that a suicide attack will yield more destruction.

Another crucial reason why terrorist organizations choose suicide terrorism is the cost it implicates, which is lower than another conventional type of attack, which usually requires more members, more materials, more risks to be arrested or killed by the police and more control by the organization and therefore more risk to be found or intercepted during the perpetration of after, during the escape. Moreover, "human bombs conduct their mission with greater versatility and accuracy and are less likely to be captured and forced into informing on their recruiters"[129]. On this last point, it can be added that even if a suicide perpetrator is apprehended before the attack, it is still possible to detonate the explosive device, so that the bombing could still go through according to the plan.

Notwithstanding the fact that suicide terrorism is easier and cost-effective, both for target selection and the organization, suicide attacks are almost never the first choice; as a matter of fact, is almost always a last-resort method. Suicide terrorism is considered to be a coercive strategy, in which the coercer is the weak actor trying to target a stronger actor. In these circumstances, there is the situation or relative weakness by the terrorists, who logically choose to employ the suicide strategy when all the other types of terrorism and attacks are deemed less effective and too costly for the position of weakness of the organization. In light of this, more and more scholars are implementing suicide bombings into a broader spectrum in international relations and conflict studies, which synthetizes the empirical finding with the theory by using rational choice models and game theory[130].

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[128] *Ibidem;*

[129] Hafez Mohammed M., *Rationality, Culture, and Structure in the Making of Suicide Bombers: A Preliminary Theoretical Synthesis and Illustrative Case Study*, "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism", Volume 29, Issue 2, 2006, p.168;

[130] For more on the empirical use of rational choice theory in the current study of suicide attacks see Martha Crenshaw, *The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice*, in Reich Walter, *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind,* Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990; Gurr Ted R., *Terrorism in Democracies: Its Social and Political Bases* in *ibidem*; and Pape Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House Inc, New York, NY, 2005;

3.2.1 How is suicide terrorism chosen? Groups and individual motivations.

Terrorist organizations, as already mentioned, do not use suicide terrorism as the first method of choice of attack, but they make rational cost-benefit calculations between alternative methods. Most terrorist organizations have used both demonstrative and destructive forms of terrorism before resorting to suicide bombing. As any other logical method, terrorism is also one of trial and error: over time, terrorist groups see the trajectory of the various methods, their effect both on the target and on the rewards they get and evaluate the options they have available to choose the one with the most effective outcome. The most important "analytical difficulty"[131] is the assessment of a coercive method: was the operation successful, partially successful or did it fail? Depending on the point of view (the population, the government, or the organization), the answer to this question will change accordingly.

The analysis of terrorist's rationality when it comes to suicide bombings can be divided into two different macro areas of analysis: the one from the organization which organized the attack and the individual level, of the suicide bomber who commits the attack. Both parties are acting rationally in the sense that they are picking and executing the option they believe is the one that will yield the best outcome. The organization's aims are first and foremost directed towards a target audience. They are able to adapt to a rapid changing environment and organize themselves as such, in order to mobile the public opinion in their favor. "Flexibility to changing circumstances is fare from a handicap since a sustained consistency in the organization's ideology that use suicide terror is not required"[132]. Organizations, in fact, are very much rational in their decision to employ suicide terrorism: if their decision will bring a higher outcome and reward, then it will be the best option available. These benefits are evaluated both in the short and in the long run. Short-run rewards may be the costs to bear the attack, while long run effects may be for example a policy change by the government. The final goal of an organization is to ultimately minimize the cost allocated for the attack and maximize their expected return.

The decision of a terrorist organization and of an individual terrorist to employ suicide terrorism is based on a cost-benefit calculation of religious, personal, and social benefits. It is important to underline the fact that each decision is personal to every suicide bomber and organization. There is no set decision-making process or evaluation of possibilities and not

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[131] Pape Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House Inc, New York, NY, 2005, p.61;

[132] Bloom Mia, *Dying to Kill: The Allure to Suicide Terror*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, p.88;

every terrorist is expected to be wanting to achieve the same goals and rewards[133]. The martyr's involvement in the attack will give him/her direct access to eternity in paradise. The promise of such rewards is what inspires suicide attackers to perpetrate, along with some other personal rewards; among others there is honor for the family of the martyr, fame, glory, being seen as a hero, but also superior to others who do not commit the same sacrifice. Social rewards are strictly connected to personal rewards and may include honor and, courage and the martyr's family social upgrade.

Even though the study of suicide terrorist has some limitations (as it is impossible to interview a suicide terrorist after the attack, if the latter has gone according to plan), it is safe to say that individuals go through a process of decision-making before deciding to commit to the cause: they do seemingly kill themselves in an irrational or crazy way but, in reality, their decision is well-thought and based on a careful consideration of future benefits. "It is not mostly altruistic motivation that drives individuals to make ultimate sacrifice; rather, the suicide bombers' self-lethal behavior is rooted in its anticipated costs and benefits"[134].

3.2.3 Public response to suicide terrorism

The civilian population can either reject or accept the violence of suicide terrorism. This depends on a wide variety of factors, going from personal to economic and organizational concerns. The response depends usually on the method used and for which purpose it is used. "If martyrdom is considered a proper response, the larger audience will support suicide terror and it will flourish".[135] On the contrary, if the perpetration and coercion method is considered hostile, then the gap between the terrorists and the public will deepen even more. There may be instances where martyrdom episodes are not considered illegitimate, but the public response still isn't fully supportive for the cause because the targets are mainly civilians. In these cases, the terrorist organization's peculiarity of being extremely adaptable is useful: it will reorient and target more military targets (or hard targets) instead of the general population. This will make their cause more supportable from the general public.

Another instance would be when the organization has the full support from the public; this may happen where the general discontent and hatred for the opposing faction is high. In

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[133] Perry Simon, Hasisi Badi, *Rational Choice Rewards and the Jihadist Suicide Bomber*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", Volume 27, Issue 1, 2015, p. 58;

[134] *Ivi,* p.72;

[135] Bloom Mia, *Dying to Kill: The Allure to Suicide Terror*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, p.81;

such instances, civilians might be the target of suicide attacks, but the population would still be in support for the cause. The level of acceptance, of course, varies for all groups, depending on their perception of violence and coercion. Therefore, it can be stated that public response and support depends on who the target of choice is. Public support, however, can serve as a means of building trust between the coercer and its political constituents[136]. The celebration, the honor of being seen as a hero will be of psychological importance for the public, who is giving the support for the cause. It will look like the organization and the individual did something for them, giving a sense of unity to the cause.

3.3 The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism, Pape

Pape in his book proposes a purely strategic level of analysis of suicide terrorism, based on the method of coercion. His study is one of the most complete and much accepted (and criticized as well) among terrorism scholars. He takes into consideration 315 suicide terrorist attack perpetrated between 1980 and 2003, including a wide variety of information and documents in his findings, to have the most reliable database of suicide attacks. In order to understand what suicide terrorism is, he identifies three main steps: strategic, social, and individual. For the sake of this dissertation, only the strategic part will be taken into the analysis, as it is relevant for analyzing the rationality of suicide attackers.

The first and most important concept to grasp from Pape's contribution is that "the strategic logic of suicide terrorism is aimed at political coercion"[137]. Moreover, the author bases his study on the fundamental concept that the goals of a terrorist suicidal campaign are primarily nationalistic and not religious. This is why suicide terrorism's support has recently grown exponentially. Another reason is because terrorists have understood that this particular coercive strategy pays. This support is used to recruit personnel for the organization, which is, therefore, not made of criminals but the population, the national communities themselves are part of it. At the foundation of Pape analysis there is the concept that "suicide terrorism is a strategy of coercion, a means to compel a target government to change policy. The central logic of this strategy is simple: suicide terrorism attempts to inflict enough pain on the opposing society to overwhelm its interest in resisting the terrorists' demands, and so to induce the government to

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[136] Hoffman Bruce, Mccormick Gordon G., *Terrorism, signaling, and suicide attack*, "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism", Volume 27, Issue 4, 2004

[137] Pape Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House Inc, New York, NY, 2005, p.23;

concede, or the population to revolt against the government"[138]. Furthermore, terrorism usually occurs in a series of attacks that aim to achieve a political objective.

Established the concept of coercion as the goal for suicide terrorism, Pape applies it to two different strategies: punishment and denial. The former is based on increasing costs or the risks for the target society in a way that the value of interest of the disputed is overpowered. The latter is centered on the idea that the coercer needs to prove to the target its limitations. Therefore, the strategy would be to let the target know that whatever they do to contrast them, it will be just a loss for them, as the coercers are bound to lose either way. In suicide terrorism, the coercer represents the weak actor in the dispute; then the optimal strategy would be the one of punishment. This embodies the same line of reasoning used by states when they use economic sanctions towards their opponent: a growing number of civilian casualties impacts the cost and the interests of the target state and ultimately, it is forced to concede something to the coercer. Usually, these concessions are based on their political demands. The leverage, however, is not the damage inflicted in that moment or before, but "the expectation of future damage"[139] is what alarms states the most.

Pape's analysis challenges the studies of terrorism and suicide terrorism as irrational behavior or religious fanaticism and employs a strategic logic. To support this, he uses three general patterns: timing, nationalistic goals, and target selection. For the timing, he analyzed that out of 315 cases of suicide terrorism, 301 were part of organized campaigns and not random incidents. This represents 95% of all suicide attacks, a strikingly high number for what are common thought to be isolated events. To distinguish between the two, it suffices to say that a suicide campaign "consists of an intended series of attacks that terrorist leaders explain and justify as aimed at gaining political concessions from a target government"[140]. Moreover, a campaign continues until the organizations' leaders suspend it or abandon it, which can be for different reasons –either they have made enough political gains, or they believe it has failed. The suspension of a campaign, therefore, is made with the understanding and realization that other perpetrations would be counterproductive for the purposes of the campaign, at least until the organization finds another strategic decision to pursue these goals. This is a further example of why suicide terrorists are indeed rational actors: their choice of target is not random; their suicide attacks are meticulously planned; and their political goals are articulated and consistent throughout the campaign.

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[138] *Ivi,* p. 28;

[139] *Ivi,* p.31;

[140] *Ivi,* p. 39;

Nationalist goals represent the second general pattern to support Pape's conclusion that suicide terrorism is strategic. Suicide terrorism can be a long-term strategy only when the degree of commitment of the national community is high and in order to achieve this support, the organizations need to raise awareness to the communities. The most important goal is the independence of their homeland from foreign occupation or influence. Indeed, from 1980, suicide terrorism has been used to coerce a foreign government out of a community's homeland by forcing out the military forces. Following this, most suicide attacks have been perpetrated against military targets and not towards civilians, even though Westerners seem to notice only the attacks perpetrated against civilian population. Actually, the goals of suicide campaign are not irrational: they are very much realistic, in the sense that their aims are "often more mainstream than the observers realize"[141], reflecting common claims from the community. Moreover, their goals are often fully supported by the community as they are realistic policy objectives and not radical.

The third pattern to support the strategic logic of suicide terrorism is democracies as the target of coercion. The main goal of suicide terrorism is to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from a territory. Modern democracies are usually the target because they are usually more vulnerable to coercive punishment than authoritarian governments. Moreover, since suicide terrorists are always the weaker side of the conflict, modern democracies are safer to counter, because if they retaliate, they are less likely to kill or harm civilians than authoritarian states. This is a further instance of how terrorism is a rational strategy: rebels resort to this only when the type of target they face is known to not retaliate or if they do, at least the damage they inflict wouldn't be so high that the costs are higher than the benefits.

Finally, the strength of Pape's book lies in the methodological use of data to analyze thoroughly his initial assumptions that suicide terrorism is a national liberation strategy to coerce foreign occupiers –which usually have a democratic political system– out of a community's homeland.

3.4 Implications for counter-terrorism policies

There are different effects of suicide terrorism on counterterrorism policies. Going back to the argument of poverty and economic conditions, which affect the quality terrorism and the targets, it can be stated that counterterrorism policies must take into account this connection.

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[141] *Ivi,* p. 42;

In fact, the most common policies aimed at countering suicide attacks try to "incapacitate terror organization by cracking down on their members and enacting security measures that diminish the probability of success of a planes attack"[142]. Instead, they should try to "outbid the outbidders"[143]; counterterrorism policies should aim at giving domestic policies which benefit the general population and the national communities, which the terrorists claim to be their goal, so that the community is rewarded but the terrorist organization is not. Moreover, they should also tackle the economic conditions: as previously stated, terrorist organizations benefit from a state's poor economic condition, as it allows them to have more high-skilled recruits and support for their goals and objectives. This, in turn, should lead counterterrorism policies to aim at improving economic development and growth, which in turn might reduce the possibility of a planned suicide attack.

Finally, a remarkable study has been carried out by Rosendorff and Sandler[144] on this issue. They analyze the backlash effect that the levels of deterrence and preemption from suicide terrorism can have on the population and on the terrorist organization. Their paper has the purpose of formulating a game of suicide terrorism, which involves a leader, a target government, and supporters to observe the effects of preemption on an "objective-minded rational terrorist organization"[145]. First of all, government preemptive action can have the backlash from the population: if too much force is used to prevent a potential suicide attack, then the population can be hostile towards the government and support the terrorist organization's aims and objectives. Secondly, suicide attack themselves can generate support of the population, with videos and propaganda. The backlash effect here is a loss for the government. Additionally, preemptive measures have a high marginal cost, and this generates a diminishing rate of normal terrorist attacks and consequently an increasing rate of suicide attacks. In conclusion, it can be stated that if government tighten their preemption level, then terrorist organization can see this low level of engagement as an encouragement to increase their attacks, while, on the other hand, too much preemption will generate backlash, therefore a higher number of suicide attacks and recruits. In this light, terrorist organizations are

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[142] Benmelech Efraim, Claude Berrebi, Esteban F. Klor, *Economic conditions and the quality of suicide terrorism*, "The Journal of Politics", Volume 74, Issue 1, 2012, p. 114;

[143] Bloom Mia, *Dying to Kill: The Allure to Suicide Terror*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, p.97;

[144] Rosendorff B. Peter, Sandler Todd, *Suicide Terrorism and the Backlash Effect*, "Defence and Peace Economics", Volume 21, Issues 5-6, 2010;

[145] *Ivi,* p. 444;

extremely rational, in the sense that they are particularly astute in pushing the government to respond to their attacks and at the same time, to increase support for their cause and objectives.

Conclusion

This dissertation has been written with the aim of putting theory and practice together: the theory of rational choice applied to terrorism in general and suicide terrorism in particular. As a student of Politics, Philosophy and Economics, I have always been rather curious and interested about the motivations of terrorism and the political systems in which often terrorist groups and organizations operate in. As a consequence, the course of sociology of terrorism at my university has given me the basis for developing this thesis and broadening my studies on the subject.

The thesis offers a general framework on the scholarly work related to the rational choice theory in sociology and economics, followed by an analysis of the most prominent accounts of terrorists' rationality. The main question that drove me to write about terrorists' rationality was: are terrorists rational? If the answer is yes, then how are they driven to terrorism? What are the main motivations for a terrorist group to employ violence as a method? What brings terrorist to kill themselves and to kill others in a rational way? I tried to give some comprehensive answers in this thesis, by relying on the prominent model of rational choice, which has a particular high level of consensus among scholars.

Although the rationality premise is the prominent theory among scholars, there are some theorists who counter this main model. According to some scholars, ideology has a causal power in steering individuals towards extremist behavior. Among others, Alessandro Orsini, Arie W. Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Bélanger and Rohan Gunaratna give extreme importance and coverage to the analysis of the ideological element and its causal power. For them, ideology represents the *primum movens* in the radicalization process: for some people it is the support of a terrorist ideology which often results in acts of terrorist violence.[146]

The first chapter has been devoted to the analysis rational choice theory, from its roots until the notion that scholars give to it nowadays, which assumes actors to be utility maximizers, with a complete perception of all implications and consequences of the options and also a well-defined set of preferences. Individuals then, order these preferences transitively and choose which one yield the highest reward or expected utility. This assumption asserts that individuals are rational in their choices. Moreover, rational choice is best defined in a situation

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[146] For a comprehensive analysis and literature on the main role of ideology in the processes of radicalization, see Orsini Alessandro, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Mode*l, "*Studies in Conflict & Terrorism",* Volume 43, *2020;*

of exchange, where individuals have the possibility of pursuing their objectives through preferences and resources available to them in a rational manner.

After having analyzed the main theories and studies underlying the models of rational choice, the second chapter has been devoted to the study of terrorists and terrorists' activity based on the rationality premise. A number of different considerations and studies have been done in this area. The chapter devises a profile of a terrorist in addition to the motivations that drive an organization, but also individuals to engage in terrorist activities. To answer the above-mentioned questions, it has been found that terrorists are indeed rational actors, who evaluate their options, taking into consideration the costs and the benefits of all the possibilities available to them and ultimately choose the one which yields the most rewarding outcome, which in their case is engagement in terrorist actions.

The third chapter goes even further into the analysis of terrorists' rationality and evaluates the rationality of suicide terrorists. Pape devises a strategic model for the rationality of suicide terrorists, who are seen as rational actors trying to achieve a political goal through coercion. It is found, moreover, that suicide terrorism has the highest rate of destruction, while being cost-effective. This is another instance of how suicide bombings and attacks are rationally planned in order to attain the organization's political aims and objectives.

Finally, this dissertation has been written with the purpose of putting together different studies on the subject of rationality and rational choice theory and linking them to the study of terrorism and suicide terrorists, with the aim of giving a general understanding and some insightful commentaries on the matter. Having a broad knowledge of terrorism and terrorists' behavior is essential and it represents the basis for the current counter-terrorism policies and counter-terrorism studies. There cannot be strategies, procedures and laws against terrorism without a complete familiarity and expertise on the subject and this thesis has tried to give some inputs and contribution for the further study of terrorists' rational behaviors.

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Sintesi

Questa tesi si propone di analizzare la teoria della scelta razionale nel contesto degli studi sul terrorismo e sul comportamento dei terroristi. La metodologia utilizzata per elaborare questa ricerca prevede un'analisi e un confronto sistematico di alcune delle più influenti fonti accademiche sulla teoria della scelta razionale, sia nel campo dell'economia, sia in quello della sociologia, successivamente applicate al fenomeno del terrorismo in generale e del terrorismo suicida in particolare. A tale proposito, è possibile anticipare che gli studiosi generalmente concordano sul fatto che i terroristi siano attori razionali, che prendono le loro decisioni con calcoli logici e sistematici, basati sulla considerazione dei costi e dei benefici delle varie alternative che vengono presentate.

Il primo capitolo di questa tesi è, essenzialmente, una ricerca e uno studio sulla base sociologica ed economica della teoria della scelta razionale (*rational choice theory*, abbreviata come RCT). Iniziando con una definizione, accettata dalla maggior parte degli studiosi, il capitolo esplora il modello iniziale della teoria della scelta razionale, l'*homo oeconomicus*, che venne da subito criticato, portando alla formulazione di nuove teorie. Più in particolare, la teoria dello scambio di George Homans e il modello di Peter Blau sono stati esaminati nel corso di questa ricerca, considerando anche le analisi di altri importanti sociologi. Quindi il capitolo si conclude con un'analisi economica della teoria della scelta razionale.

L'*homo oeconomicus* è un concetto fondamentale della teoria economica classica, che prevede un modello dove un individuo che abbia una conoscenza completa di tutte le possibilità a sua disposizione, sia portato ad una totale massimizzazione del proprio benessere. I limiti di questa teoria sono stati evidenziati fin da subito e così nacque l'*homo sociologicus*; nonostante quest'ultima fosse una teoria che si proponeva come nuova, come una soddisfazione del bisogno di incorporare elementi sociologici nell'economia, in realtà affondava ancora troppo le radici nella precedente definizione. Nonostante questi limiti, la ricerca attuale si fonda ancora sullo studio dell'*homo oeconomicus*, anche se alcuni presupposti sono stati scartati.

Per giustificare ciò, i ricercatori hanno iniziato a introdurre il concetto di razionalità limitata (*bounded rationality)*, nel senso che le persone partecipano attivamente a processi cognitivi e hanno la capacità di prendere decisioni basate sulla quantità di informazioni che hanno acquisito. Queste informazioni, come già sottolineato, sono limitate, quindi le decisioni prese sono sufficientemente buone, anche se potrebbero non massimizzare interamente l'utilità. La teoria analitica della razionalità limitata è stata formulata da Herbert Simon e si basa sui fondamenti della teoria della scelta razionale, anche se differisce da essa su alcune definizioni.

Nel campo della sociologia, la teoria dello scambio è stato uno degli approcci più affermati sul comportamento di scelta razionale. George Homans è l'esponente più noto della teoria dello scambio sociale: il suo libro più famoso, in cui viene elaborata la cosiddetta "la teoria dello scambio", è *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms*. Secondo il sociologo, gli individui scelgono di partecipare in qualsiasi tipo di comportamento sociale o di scambio non solo dopo aver preso in considerazione sia i costi che i benefici delle varie informazioni che hanno, ma anche dopo aver valutato quale di queste massimizzi maggiormente la loro utilità e il loro benessere.

Il lavoro di Homans è, nel complesso, un sistema deduttivo, in cui mette in evidenza cinque diverse proposizioni del comportamento umano. Le prime tre possono essere raggruppate nella proposizione di razionalità e sono rispettivamente la proposizione di successo, la proposta di stimolo e la proposta di valore. Le ultime due sono la proposta di privazione-sazietà e la proposta di aggressione-approvazione. La proposizione di razionalità ha un'evidente influenza della teoria della scelta razionale in questo approccio del sociologo statunitense. Homans, infatti, fa riferimento a comportamenti umani in termini economici: un individuo, a cui sono state presentate diverse alternative, sceglierà quella che per lui, in quel preciso momento, massimizza e valorizza maggiormente la sua utilità.

Successivamente è necessario sottolineare che, nell'analisi del comportamento individuale e delle sue conseguenze, un'influenza significativa sul modello della scelta razionale è data dalla teoria dei giochi, che si occupa di un insieme specifico di scelte e alternative al fine di distinguere dilemmi e strategie stabili per analizzare futuri scambi. L'esempio più noto è il dilemma del prigioniero e la sua struttura aiuta ad analizzare sia gli eventi passati, che il probabile sviluppo del comportamento individuale. Questo gioco presenta due persone (A e B) che, dopo aver (presumibilmente) commesso un crimine, vengono arrestate. Condensando le alternative possibili, può essere affermato che, se entrambi confessano, è svantaggioso, ma non fidandosi l'uno dell'altro e non avendo possibilità di confrontarsi, sia A che B optano per questa soluzione. È svantaggioso, poiché la soluzione più conveniente per entrambi sarebbe quella cooperativa, cioè non confessare. Il rischio di quest'ultima è che se uno dei due tradisce questo patto tacito di cooperazione, chi viene tradito prenderebbe nove anni di galera, mentre l'altro uscirebbe immediatamente di prigione. Il paradosso che rende il dilemma del prigioniero così accattivante è che entrambi finiscono per disertare, anche se sono consapevoli del fatto che la loro situazione migliorerebbe collaborando: è questa la contraddizione all'interno della loro razionalità.

Le teorie analizzate fino a questo punto della ricerca studiano gli individui e non i gruppi. Nella sezione successiva, quindi, l'analisi si focalizza su Peter Blau, che invece ha studiato i comportamenti dei piccoli gruppi e le interazioni sociali al loro interno. Questo scambio sociale permette la creazione di rapporti di fiducia tra le persone e lo incorpora tra gli individui nei gruppi sociali. Inoltre, contrariamente allo scambio economico, lo scambio sociale differisce, in quanto la natura del profitto non può essere contrattata; in aggiunta a ciò, lo scambio sociale presuppone una sorta di retribuzione futura, sebbene la sua natura non sia stata concordata in anticipo.

Il capitolo continua con un concetto base per comprendere al meglio la teoria della scelta razionale, quello dell'utilità. La funzione di utilità è solitamente applicata nella microeconomia, per calcolare l'indice di soddisfazione delle scelte di un individuo. Secondo la teoria della scelta razionale, ci si aspetta che tutti gli individui massimizzino la loro utilità nel tempo, utilizzando ogni mezzo a loro disposizione per far sì che i benefici previsti superino i costi sostenuti.

Il secondo capitolo è dedicato allo studio dei terroristi, dei loro comportamenti e delle loro attività, sulla base della premessa della razionalità. Partendo dall'analisi delle possibili cause del terrorismo, in particolare del terrorismo politicamente motivato, questo capitolo esamina e sfida il criterio di giudizio occidentale convenzionale, che vede il terrorismo come irrazionale; si elabora allora il profilo standard di un terrorista, delineato dallo studio di Sageman. Inoltre, l'applicazione del comportamento razionale dei terroristi viene effettuato sia a livello individuale che di gruppo, come identificato sia da McCauley, Moskalenko che da Moghaddam.

La *Rational Choice Theory* fornisce un modello standard per l'attuale ricerca sul terrorismo, sul processo decisionale dei terroristi e sull'attività terroristica, sia a livello individuale che di gruppo o collettivo. Un approccio razionale al terrorismo offre quindi agli studiosi le linee guida per analizzare, con una metodologia sistematica, non solo il terrorismo moderno, ma anche quello più antico. Spesso un'organizzazione terroristica si sente insoddisfatta del governo e il terrorismo, come conseguenza, diventa un mezzo per un fine specifico, quindi, giustificabile. Si tratta di una scelta politicamente razionale, basata sul processo decisionale di un'organizzazione terroristica, che si presume sia ben consapevole delle opzioni disponibili. Questo implica che i terroristi valutino le loro possibilità e poi scelgano quella che ha il maggior valore o ricompensa comparato a ciò a cui dovrebbero rinunciare. Il presupposto della razionalità politica dei gruppi terroristici è stato portato avanti da molti

studiosi e, tra questi, Van Um costruisce il suo studio sull'efficacia politica dei gruppi terroristici.

Quali sono, dunque, le situazioni in cui i terroristi sono attori politicamente razionali? Può essere che il terrorismo, in questo caso, sia la migliore scelta relativa: è stato sottolineato più volte che i terroristi sono attori razionali che valutano le opzioni e scelgono quella che meglio massimizza la loro utilità; seguendo questo ragionamento, il terrorismo potrebbe essere la migliore opzione disponibile per gli attori, dopo che le diverse alternative sono state respinte come opzioni attuabili. Per i fini di questa tesi, la razionalità politica dei gruppi terroristici può essere misurata sulla base dell'efficacia delle loro azioni politiche; dato che ci si aspetta che gli attori razionali scelgano l'alternativa per loro più gratificante, che possa concedere loro benefici politici, allora può essere considerato politicamente razionale il fatto che i gruppi terroristici ricorrano al terrorismo e alla violenza per portare avanti le loro ambizioni politiche.

Un altro punto fondamentale trattato in questo secondo capitolo è la sfida contro il giudizio occidentale sui terroristi: la prima valutazione, di solito errata, è che si pensa generalmente che i terroristi siano irrazionali. In questo contesto è essenziale sottolineare che la maggior parte degli studi ha dimostrato l'assenza di malattie mentali o problemi psicopatologici: la base del comportamento terroristico è, infatti, incoerente con quella degli psicopatici. Hoffman li ha descritti come "normali", evidenziando il fatto che i terroristi sono davvero persone comuni, che semplicemente scelgono il terrorismo razionalmente per scopi di massimizzazione dell'utilità.

Il secondo giudizio diffuso in Occidente si basa sull'asserzione che i terroristi siano razionali, ma solo secondo parametri occidentali. Questo è un errore, poiché i calcoli dei costi-benefici e le decisioni prese dal terrorista (prendendo in considerazione i terroristi fondamentalisti islamisti e le organizzazioni terroristiche) possono differire a seconda delle diverse culture e dei differenti set valoriali. Ne segue che, indubbiamente, venendo da contesti diversi, i terroristi hanno anche una logica diversa alla base del loro processo decisionale. Gli errori sono solitamente più visibili quando si analizzano le misure antiterrorismo: gli analisti occidentali presumono che i terroristi si comportino allo stesso modo e quindi cercano di prevedere i movimenti sulla base di una logica dell'occidente. L'analisi costi-benefici effettuata da un terrorista è senza dubbio diversa a seconda di una serie di fattori di base e i ricercatori devono tenere in considerazione queste differenze quando attuano politiche di antiterrorismo.

Il capitolo continua con un'analisi approfondita del profilo di un terrorista eseguita da Sageman. Innanzitutto, va sottolineato il fatto che egli propone un modello ~~di terroristi~~ basato su un processo dal basso, piuttosto che dall'alto verso il basso. Sageman inizia poi a chiedersi

quale sia il rapporto tra povertà e terrorismo. La povertà è una delle giustificazioni più utilizzate per il terrorismo: la privazione economica porta a volte a proteste e, di conseguenza, al terrorismo. L'evidenza empirica sull'argomento sfida questa ipotesi, poiché dagli studi sulle vite dei terroristi si evince che la maggior parte di questi proviene da ambienti della classe media. Un'altra teoria diffusa è quella della Madrassa (dal nome arabo delle scuole islamiche), secondo la quale l'istruzione secondo precetti dell'Islam possa favorire un cosiddetto "lavaggio del cervello", che favorisce il terrorismo. Anche in questo caso, i dati smentiscono la teoria, poiché la maggior pare dei bambini che sono diventati terroristi in età adulta, sono cresciuti in ambienti laici. Questa teoria è screditata anche dal fatto che le Madrasse sono solitamente scuole basate sullo studio di materie comuni e quindi gli studenti sono più inclini a restare a casa. Un'ulteriore idea è quella dell'immaturità, dell'adesione di bambini e adolescenti alle organizzazioni poiché ingenui. Tuttavia, l'età media dei soggetti che aderiscono a un'organizzazione terroristica è di ventisei anni, molto più alta di quanto comunemente si presume. Strettamente connesso è il concetto di ignoranza: la maggior parte di essi è diplomata e, cosa ancora più sorprendente, il 62% ha frequentato l'università, studiando nel campo tecnico, in particolare ingegneria o medicina, non religione o studi culturali, al contrario di quanto abitualmente assunto.

È fondamentale distinguere tra un'iniziativa personale, o terrorismo del lupo solitario, dal terrorismo organizzato. Questo perché, la maggior parte delle volte, i lupi solitari organizzano e pianificano l'intero attacco da soli, senza essere associati ad alcuna organizzazione. McCauley e Moskalenko, per spiegare l'uso della teoria della scelta razionale quando si tratta di radicalizzazione, usano principalmente il concetto del *free rider*. In sostanza, una persona partecipa e fa parte razionalmente di un gruppo quando c'è un incentivo o crede che i benefici e il risultato finale saranno superiori ai costi della partecipazione. Gli autori hanno analizzato il processo di radicalizzazione seguendo tre diversi livelli: il livello individuale, il livello di gruppo e, oltre a questi due, hanno anche individuato la radicalizzazione di massa.

Moghaddam, analogamente all'analisi di McCauley e Moskalenko, propone un modello di radicalizzazione basato su processi psicologici, finalizzato a ricostruire le fasi cronologiche ed esistenziali che trasformano un individuo in terrorista. Questa teoria si basa sull'idea che la radicalizzazione possa essere concepita come una piramide a sei livelli. L'idea di base è che salendo i vari gradini, diminuiscano le possibilità che l'individuo possa abbandonare il percorso di radicalizzazione verso il terrorismo e tornare indietro.

Dopo aver descritto un ampio quadro sociologico per la teoria della scelta razionale nel capitolo uno e il terrorismo visto attraverso le lenti della scelta razionale nel capitolo due, il terzo capitolo di questa tesi è dedicato all'analisi specifica del terrorismo suicida, sempre nel contesto della razionalità. C'è un grande consenso accademico sul fatto che i terroristi suicidi siano attori razionali. Questo capitolo esamina questa interpretazione dominante e sfida l'impressione pubblica che considera irrazionali i terroristi suicidi. Partendo da una definizione di terrorismo suicida, vengono analizzati alcuni comuni fraintendimenti. Vengono poi osservate, attraverso una posizione razionale, le ragioni per le quali il terrorismo suicida è più realizzabile, qual è la risposta pubblica ad esso e quanto il feedback influenza ulteriori attacchi. Inoltre, viene effettuata un'analisi delle motivazioni razionali delle organizzazioni terroristiche a scegliere il terrorismo suicida rispetto ad altre forme convenzionali di terrore, per concludere con alcune implicazioni degli attacchi suicidi per l'implementazione di politiche antiterrorismo.

A questo punto è logico chiedersi, perché gli individui razionali ricorrono al terrorismo suicida? Riassumendo i risultati analizzati, si può affermare che quando l'economia è sana e quindi il livello di disoccupazione è basso, c'è una minore possibilità di reclutare individui qualificati, poiché preferiscono l'economia di mercato. Al contrario, quando il livello di disoccupazione è alto, le persone più qualificate entrano razionalmente in un'organizzazione. Perché? Le conclusioni di Bueno de Mesquita sull'argomento sono semplici: se l'offerta per i terroristi è superiore alla domanda, allora il costo della partecipazione (per l'organizzazione) sarà inferiore e le ricompense saranno maggiori, poiché gli individui più abili sono parte delle attività.

La maggior parte delle organizzazioni, tuttavia, sceglie di utilizzare il suicidio come metodo di attacco, perché è la più semplice tra le opzioni a loro disposizione. Innanzitutto, questo è dovuto al fatto che un attacco suicida è più distruttivo rispetto ad altri tipi di attacchi terroristici ed è più facile prendere di mira e uccidere più persone se l'artefice è disposto a morire per la causa. I terroristi suicidi, infatti, possono scegliere dove perpetrare l'attentato e quando, a seconda delle condizioni favorevoli o sfavorevoli dell'ambiente in cui si trovano. Un altro motivo cruciale per cui le organizzazioni terroristiche scelgono il terrorismo suicida è il costo che implica, il quale è inferiore a un altro tipo di attacco convenzionale, che di solito richiede più membri, più materiale, più rischio di arresto o di venire uccisi dalla polizia, più controllo da parte dell'organizzazione e quindi anche maggiore rischio di intercettazione durante la perpetrazione e la fuga.

Anche se lo studio del terrorismo suicida ha alcune limitazioni (date dal fatto che è impossibile intervistare un terrorista suicida dopo l'attacco, se quest'ultimo è andato secondo i piani), si può affermare che gli individui passano attraverso un processo decisionale specifico prima decidere di impegnarsi per la causa. Apparentemente si suicidano in modo irrazionale ma, in realtà, la loro decisione è ben ponderata e basata su un'attenta analisi dei benefici futuri. Se si prende in considerazione il feedback della popolazione civile, si può avere una situazione di rifiuto o accettazione della violenza portata dal terrorismo suicida. Ciò dipende da un'ampia varietà di fattori, che vanno dalle preoccupazioni personali a quelle economiche e organizzative. Conseguentemente, la risposta della popolazione dipende dal metodo terroristico usufruito e per quale scopo il terrorismo viene utilizzato.

Esistono casi in cui le motivazioni alla base di un attentato suicida possono essere condivise dalla popolazione, ma l'atto in sé viene comunque condannato poiché causa vittime tra i civili. In questi casi, la particolarità dell'organizzazione terroristica di essere estremamente adattabile è utile: avendo la capacità di reindirizzare i propri obiettivi, possono prendere di mira obiettivi militari invece della popolazione generale. Ciò renderà la loro causa più condivisibile da parte del pubblico. Un altro esempio potrebbe essere quando l'organizzazione ha il pieno sostegno della popolazione; questo può accadere dove il malcontento generale e l'odio per la fazione avversaria sono alti. In tali casi, i civili potrebbero essere comunque il bersaglio degli attacchi, ma la popolazione sarebbe comunque a sostegno della causa. Il livello di accettazione, ovviamente, varia per tutti i gruppi, a seconda della loro percezione della violenza e della coercizione.

Un tema fondamentale di questo ultimo capitolo è basato sulle considerazioni di un altro autore di riferimento negli studi sul terrorismo, Robert Pape, che propone un livello puramente strategico di analisi del terrorismo suicida, basato sul metodo della coercizione. La sua ricerca è uno delle più complete e rinomate (ma anche una delle più criticate) sul terrorismo suicida. Nel suo studio egli prende in considerazione 315 attacchi terroristici suicidi perpetrati tra il 1980 e il 2003, con un'ampia varietà di informazioni e documenti, per creare un database largamente affidabile sugli attacchi suicidi. Il più importante concetto da cogliere dal contributo di Pape è che la logica strategica del terrorismo suicida è finalizzata alla coercizione politica. Inoltre, l'autore basa il suo studio sul concetto fondamentale che gli obiettivi di una campagna terroristica suicida sono principalmente nazionalistici e non religiosi. Tramite questa teoria, si può spiegare il recente aumento del fenomeno.

Alla base dell'analisi di Pape, quindi, c'è il concetto che il terrorismo suicida è una strategia di coercizione, un mezzo per costringere un governo bersaglio a cambiare politica. La

logica primaria di questa strategia è semplice: il terrorismo suicida tenta di infliggere dolore alla società avversaria, al fine di indurre il governo a concedere delle policy o la popolazione a ribellarsi contro il governo. Perciò, il terrorismo si manifesta solitamente in una serie di attacchi che mirano a raggiungere un obiettivo politico. Infine, la forza dell'analisi di Pape risiede nell'uso metodologico di dati per analizzare a fondo i suoi presupposti iniziali, cioè che il terrorismo suicida sia una strategia di liberazione nazionale per costringere gli occupanti stranieri fuori dalla patria di una comunità.

Infine, le conclusioni tentano di fornire un quadro sistematico delle informazioni raccolte, rispondendo alle principali domande che mi hanno spinta ad effettuare questa ricerca: i terroristi sono attori razionali? Se la risposta è sì, allora come vengono spinti al terrorismo? Quali sono le principali motivazioni per cui un gruppo terroristico impiega la violenza come metodo? Cosa porta il terrorista ad uccidersi e ad uccidere gli altri in modo razionale? Ho cercato, quindi, di dare alcune risposte esaudienti, facendo affidamento al modello di rilievo della scelta razionale. Questa tesi è stata scritta con lo scopo di mettere insieme diversi studi sul tema della razionalità e della teoria della scelta razionale e collegarli allo studio del terrorismo e dei terroristi suicidi. Avere un'ampia conoscenza del terrorismo e del comportamento dei terroristi è essenziale e rappresenta la base per le attuali politiche e studi nel campo dell'antiterrorismo. Non possono esistere strategie, procedure e leggi contro questo fenomeno senza una completa familiarità e competenza in materia e questa tesi ha cercato di dare alcuni spunti e contributi per l'approfondimento dei comportamenti razionali dei terroristi.