

# **HUNTING TERRORISTS**



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Second Edition

# HUNTING TERRORISTS

A Look at the Psychopathology of Terror

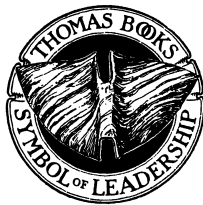
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*This book is dedicated to Mariana  
and Albert, my parents. This book and  
my success are the residue of their  
labors.*



## FOREWORD

The literature analyzing terrorism is replete with several types of genre. Some works offer detailed studies of political and social factors. Other books attempt to focus on applied information. The best of these efforts seek either to introduce readers to complicated topics or take sophisticated readers to deeper levels of understanding. The worst studies sensationalize violence or present terrorism in narrowly framed polemic, simplifying arguments to fit an author's personal bias. While the best works avoid sensationalized polemics, few examinations attempt to explore both the theoretical nature of terrorism while dealing with issues that can be applied to practical counterterrorist activities. Joe Navarro's *Hunting Terrorists* is an exception to the rule.

This book accomplishes two valuable objectives. First, Navarro explores the field of political terrorism with a theoretical model. A reader unschooled in the theories of terrorism can work through the first chapters and develop a basic understanding of terror. While this does not substitute for tackling Martha Crenshaw, Alex Schmid, Bruce Hoffman, Walter Laqueur, and many of the other recognized scholars in the field, it provides a basis for understanding the problem and reading further. Joe Navarro lays a foundation for law enforcement officers and criminal justice students. Second, Navarro has also given law enforcement officers a chance to enhance skills through his focus on the issues necessary to counter terrorism. Without giving away "trade secrets," Navarro's work addresses pragmatic steps needed to investigate and to prosecute terrorists. For the first time in the nation's history, U.S. law enforcement officers are being asked to counter a group of people who have been militarily trained to attack civilian targets, and in some cases, terrorists are even better trained than the

police. Navarro addresses this problem by giving readers a framework for understanding terrorism and practical, experience-based methods for facing it.

Terrorists differ from street criminals, the target of most law enforcement activity. Street criminals are rarely loyal to the “cause” of crime, they care little for fellow criminals, they seldom plan activities, and they are not motivated to live a life of crime. Terrorists, by contrast, are loyal to a cause. In fact, many of them are ready to die for it. They care for comrades in the common struggle, they meticulously plan operations, and they are motivated by the cause. The techniques used against street criminals are helpful in terrorist investigations, but counterterrorism requires further skills. *Hunting Terrorists* introduces those skills.

Although terrorism is as old as conflict, it remains a misunderstood novelty to many law enforcement officers in the United States. Joe Navarro is one of the few American investigators equipped to provide an in-depth analysis of the topic. His experience is based on several years of service in counterterrorism as a supervisory special agent in the FBI, and he translates this experience into an important guide. When working through *Hunting Terrorists* readers are taken on a journey through the investigative process. They will come away with both a better understanding of terrorism and material to enhance investigative skills.

Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowsky (retired) once stated that modern conflict has transformed the nature of war. Nothing verifies this assertion more than the changing nature of terrorism. In state-to-state war law enforcement has a limited role; however, as the nebulous cloud of terrorism redefines the methods for attacking our country, police officers assume a greater role in national defense. Cebrowsky has argued that the American military needs to learn how to “operate deeply in society.” Law enforcement officers already do this, and their contacts, information, and skills have become a valuable asset in homeland security.

Joe Navarro was hunting terrorists long before the tragedies of September 11, 2001. His story, his skills, and his understanding of terrorism are translated into information in this new book. Over the past few years I have had the privilege of working with Navarro in counterterrorist training sessions. He is one of the most gifted instructors I have ever encountered in thirty years of criminal justice teaching, and



## Chapter I

### TERROR THE OMNIPRESENT

To hunt terrorists, it is essential to first understand what terrorism is and is not, and how terror has manifest itself throughout history. The word terrorism did not enter into the lexicon of speech until the French Revolution and the Jacobin Reign of Terror (1792-1794) where it served to describe government sanctioned political violence intended to make the population “quake” or “tremble” (Latin, *terrere*). Approximately 20,000 persons were killed during this short time period, Marie Antoinette perhaps its most famous victim (Combs, 1997, 21-22; Hibbert, 1980). Like so many other French words which stick because of their preciseness (e.g., *sabotage*, *espionage*), the word terror stuck and remains with us. Yet, terror itself precedes the French revolution, it has, in fact, been with us since humans found it practical to use “*violence or the threat of violence to exact compliance from a population*” (Navarro, 2003). Terrorism worldwide, be it against an abortion clinic, national minorities, multinational corporations, or a sitting government, has only one intention, to influence a society or a people by terrorizing them. It is, in the borrowed words of Carl von Clausewitz, “politics by other means.” For the totalitarian, the disenfranchised, the frustrated, or the radical extremist, it is an effective tool; for some the only tool in their arsenal. It is, as Clausewitz so well said, “an act of violence intended to compel our opponents to fulfill our will,” (von Clausewitz, 1986, 101).



## PREFACE

“If you look for bombs you will miss the terrorists, if you don’t look for terrorists, you will be sorry.” That stern admonition was given to me in 1986 by a representative of Israel’s Shin Bet. Having recently arrived in Puerto Rico, he was dismayed at how lax security had been through London’s Heathrow airport and JFK in New York. These words would echo in my head over and over in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, as images from New York filled me with anger and disgust. Anger that such an event took place and disgust that we had not done more, as an organization and as a nation, to prevent the tragedy of September 11th.

As the FBI’s investigation discovered evidence of box cutters used by the nineteen skyjackers, those words spoken to me sixteen years earlier resonated over and over. “If you look for bombs, you will miss the terrorists.” Regrettably, we were looking for bombs on September eleventh, thus we were blind to the box cutters used by the hijackers. My Israeli friends were right; to combat terrorism effectively we need to look for terrorists.

Arguably, the most important law enforcement task in this new millennium is the hunt for terrorists. Not for the instrumentalities of terror (what they will use), that’s where we failed, but rather the terrorists themselves. The Cold War is over, Huntington’s clash of civilization, as predicted, is upon us; for the first time in American history we have to respond to asymmetrical warfare (read, terror) on a global scale (Huntington, 1993, 56-73). This threat, according to the most cautious within the Intelligence Community, will be the greatest challenge of this 21st century, much as Marxism was during the greater part of the last century. We are already witnessing the spread of al-Qaeda and Muslim extremists from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Iraq and Central

and Northern Africa (e.g., Libya, Mali, Algeria, etc.). How we deal with this threat will depend principally on how well we do the job of identifying and neutralizing terrorists; for to be secure, we must find the terrorists, not just their devices.

I thoroughly believe that once you understand the makeup of a terrorist, what they universally share in common, what is part and parcel of their personalities, what is in their heads, and how they will behave in furtherance of their ideology, then and only then can we prevent terror. There is no other way. Even now, the system in place still allows for a terrorist to sit next to you on a plane, so long as they have no weapons and they are not known to the intelligence community. Why? Because we are still primarily looking for the instruments of terror.

Terrorists must be identified, penetrated, disrupted, and neutralized before they act out. If we don't, and this is a heavy charge, then we are forever doomed to mopping up after them. We cannot afford to continue to do so for terrorism itself has grown increasingly violent and catastrophic (White, 2003).

This book was written not from the perspective of an FBI manager in Washington, D.C. but rather from the trenches in the field where I purposely spent twenty-five years working and later instructing in the area of counterintelligence and counterterrorism. My intention is to help the reader clearly understand what is at the core of every terrorist, here or abroad, having had the opportunity to personally analyze, investigate, interview, and arrest terrorists. It is also my purpose to share with the reader the most effective ways to interview the terrorist once captured, because this remains a weak point with many agencies that have never previously worked terrorism cases.

This is an attempt to distill a vast amount of information about what terrorists have in common and how they can be identified. It is also an attempt to simplify a slippery and complex issue that obviously has current and long-term implications. It is presented herein, unabridged, exactly as it has been taught to FBI Special Agents at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia as well as members of the Intelligence Community to help with the investigations, identification, and interrogation of terrorists.

It should be also noted that I make no effort to write about what others have researched or written about. There are now hundreds of books on terrorism, many of which I list in the Bibliography. I write from my investigative perspective alone, seeking to share what I learned actually working these matters.

Part One of this book summarizes the prevalence of terrorism in history, including America's history, its practicality, how it is defined, and how it has morphed over the last forty years into what it is today, a form of "politics by other means." The history of terror is followed by a general examination of the major terrorist types and how these groups are composed. This review of the history of terror, and terrorist typology, serves as a foundation for the second part of this book that is dedicated solely to the psychopathology of terror.

Part Two builds on the history of terror and immediately delves into the psychopathology of the terrorist. The principal interest being the recognition of features common to terrorists that can be used to identify, disrupt, and neutralize them. In these chapters, the five principal co-morbid pathologies of terror are explored in detail highlighting how they combine to make a terrorist, both here and abroad. This is a unique view, not previously discussed outside of the Intelligence Community. It looks at terrorists from the point of view of what is in their heads, how they evolve, and how they will behave. This section also looks at the specific personality features that stand out among terrorists and how those translate into observable behaviors that investigators can use to identify and neutralize these individuals before they become metastable or act out. This is a unique melding together of psychology and practical investigative experience that the reader will find useful be they a student of terror or a law enforcement professional.

Then we will explore how the personality of these individuals impacts on the investigative process and how the terrorists will act. Which then will lead us in the last section: how to do a proper terrorism interview based on the key differences between a terrorist or enemy combatant and a mere criminal. This is the first time these key techniques will be revealed.

I am often asked why I write. My answer never changes. I write because I want others to know what I know. This book and my efforts are dedicated to those who toil and sacrifice daily in the realm of counterterrorism or counterinsurgency. I know and they know that to successfully stop terrorism we must know how to spot the terrorist and get information out of them. To these individuals and to that end this book is devoted.

J.N.



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# **HUNTING TERRORISTS**



## INTRODUCTION

*Nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer;  
Nothing is more difficult than to understand him.*

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881)

**T**welve years after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the start of what President Bush called the Global War on Terror, many feel that this has been an exhaustive foray. The 9/11 attacks, Afghanistan, Iraq, has been a real eye-opener for many and it has cost us dearly in life and capital. But the truth is that this war on terror has been going on for a very long time, going back to the 1920s and 1930s.

My involvement with counterterrorism however did not begin till 1981, as a very young group of FBI Special Agents, myself included, was sent to the San Juan FBI Field Office for one purpose: to identify, recruit, penetrate, disrupt, and neutralize terrorists operating in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean theater. This was a challenge for all of us. In many of our major cities we were literally under attack by domestic terrorists with roots in Puerto Rico. The *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional*, also known as the FALN and the *Ejército Popular Boricua*, better known as the *Macheteros* (a militant Cuban supported off-shoot of the Puerto Rican Independence movement), conducted an unrelenting series of terrorist attacks in furtherance of Puerto Rican independence (White, 2003, 211-213).

Over a ten-year period, the FALN had committed in excess of one hundred-thirty terrorist attacks in the United States, killing innocent civilians as well as police officers and wounding scores of others. In Puerto Rico, the *Macheteros* machine-gunned a U.S. Navy bus in Sabana Seca, killing two sailors and seriously wounding ten others. Two years later (1981), in a military precise operation, the *Macheteros*

destroyed nine U.S. military fighter jets at the Muñiz National Guard Air Base in San Juan. In that one eventful early morning the *Macheteros* destroyed more military aircraft on U. S. soil than at any other time in American history except for Pearl Harbor.

Between these two organizations, this was a considerable threat that in part was financed through crime such as the 1983 Wells Fargo depot robbery in Hartford, Connecticut. In that heist, \$7.2 million was taken and smuggled into Cuba by *Machetero* conspirators and later FBI Top Ten fugitive Victor Manuel Gerena. He, by the way, remains in Cuba protected by Fidel Castro and remains on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List. The money from that robbery was intended to finance more elaborate and lethal terrorist attacks.

Particularly irksome for the FBI was the nighttime attack launched by the *Macheteros* on the FBI building in Santurce, Puerto Rico when they fired a shoulder-launched LAW Rocket (antitank weapon) that struck only a few yards from where, incidentally, my office was located. Fortunately no one was hurt. Had it taken place during working hours dozens would have been injured or killed.

It was a remarkable time, a struggle of ideologies and politics, and there seemed to be no end in sight (O'Ballance, 1982, 21-60). In South and Central America Marxist regimes were gaining ground and becoming truculent (e.g., Nicaragua, El Salvador) (Nogee and Donaldson, 1992, 216-223). Closer to home, Cuba was leaving its imprint on the nearby Caribbean island of Grenada, all the while continuing to export terrorism throughout the hemisphere, including Puerto Rico (Smith, 1996, 163-187).

Of course, no one then could predict that the still-born ideas of Marx would, in a few short years, reach their logical conclusion: the Soviet system would collapse, Soviet Bloc countries would turn democratic, and revolutionary governments in South and Central America would turn their backs on Marxism. But that would be seven to eight years away. At that moment, the United States and in particular the FBI was in the thick of fighting terrorism, yet few people outside of law enforcement seemed to notice or care.

In fact, for nearly six decades the FBI had been dutifully pursuing terrorists in the United States, it was a war fought in the shadows. The violence and terrorism of the anarchists in the thirties and revolutionaries in the sixties and seventies (Weather Underground, Symbianese Liberation Army, the Black Panthers, and the American Indian Move-



ment) was being replaced by a new threat, more deadly and potent. These terrorists were better organized, better trained, better equipped, and definitely more lethal often times acting with the support of nation states such as Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and others.

The men and women of the FBI who were working counterterrorism in Puerto Rico at the time did so quietly, resigned to the task at hand that was to identify, penetrate, and neutralize, through legal means, any and all terrorist groups. This was no easy task as terrorism was spreading insidiously throughout the Western Hemisphere and it was a foreboding of what was to come on September 11th, 2001.

And, as if our hands weren't full enough, suddenly and unexpectedly, we were also presented with a new threat, one even more ominous. At a then secret meeting we learned that the Abu Nidal terrorist organization (a.k.a., ANO) was setting up terrorist cells in Puerto Rico. The FALN and the *Macheteros* were a serious threat, but this was a different league all together. At the time, and by every account, the Abu Nidal Organization was considered the most dangerous terrorist organization in the world and they were headed our way (Department of State, 1992; Crenshaw and Pimlott, 1997, volume ii, 235-278). Of obvious concern was the fact that this was the same organization that had been responsible for the simultaneous deadly attacks at the Vienna and Rome airports in December 1985 killing scores (Combs, 1997, 62-64). They were bringing with them a level of sophistication previously unknown to us in this hemisphere and frankly we were worried. There were many questions and honestly we had few answers.

In order to address these new threats and to learn from those who had vastly more experience in this area, we hosted a small delegation of counterintelligence officers from Shin Bet, Israel's equivalent of the FBI. Shin Bet, at that time, and now, is considered the premier counterterrorism service in the world. Addressing our concerns, my guests speculated as to why Abu Nidal terrorists were moving from the Middle East to Puerto Rico, what their intentions were, and what we could expect. Their message, and the future prospects for escalating violence in the region were not good news.

Over dinner at a local restaurant in the Condado section of San Juan, we discussed different strategies for dealing with this new threat, what had worked in Europe and especially in the Middle East. We discussed what we could anticipate once they got acclimated and became active in Puerto Rico or within the continental United States. Our

overriding fear of course was that once ANO terrorists reached Puerto Rico, the United States was an unencumbered two hour flight away – no passports required.

Over drinks, the senior Shin Bet officer present confided the words that would later resonate with me. He completed his previous admonition by saying, “you know Joe, you Americans spend too much time looking for bombs, in Israel we look for terrorists.” His admonition was correct, then and now. In Israel, located in what Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak described a few years ago as a “tough neighborhood,” experience has taught them to look for bombs secondarily, and terrorists first.

Understanding terrorism and the mind of the terrorist was a necessity in Puerto Rico. Without that knowledge, we would not be able to identify them or predict their behavior. By investigating, interviewing, analyzing, and researching terrorists, we were able to identify certain traits and attributes that all terrorists have in common. We found that by exploiting these unique characteristics we were able to better and more quickly identify terrorists, target informants against them, penetrate their groups, disrupt their activities, and in many cases neutralize them through arrests. We learned fast out of necessity and those lessons are just as valuable today.

As an investigator and later as an FBI Supervisor, I learned the hard way how difficult a task it is to investigate terrorism and yet how important it is for any free society to rid itself of terror. Terrorism and the violence of hatred can destabilize a country, ruin an economy, and wreak havoc on a people if it goes unchecked. History is replete with examples. Just look at the Middle East, Northern Ireland, or closer, look at Colombia, suffering under the ravages of forty-five plus years of organized terror. The importance of identification, infiltration and penetration of terrorist groups is essential; it is the *sine qua non* for preventing terrorist acts. The success the FBI had against the *Macheteros*, the FALN, Timothy McVeigh, Ramsay Yousef, as well as the Abu Nidal Organization and others was due to an unrelenting effort to identify those involved in these organizations. And that was achieved by understanding the psychopathology of terror.