POLI 142A: United States Foreign Policy
What is Terrorism?

- Def. Terrorism: Violence with the primary objective of inspiring fear for political purposes
  - Governments/scholars often talk about “non-state actors” in the definition (why?)
  - “Fear for political purposes” can be inspired by states as well as individuals or groups
What Makes Terror Different

- Political violence can be used in two ways:
  - Denial/conquest/counter-force: physically impose outcomes group/nation prefers
  - Punishment/counter-value: inflict harm until group/nation makes changes by itself
Terror is Different

• Terrorism is a kind of punishment strategy
• Terrorist group or nation seeks to get others to change behavior
• Non-state actors cannot use conquest/denial:
  • Usually too weak
  • Lack resources/organization/equipment
Terror is Different, cont 2

• So, while terror can be used by any actor
  • It is a weapon of the weak
  • Only action available to weak actors to try to force outcomes it prefers
• If terrorists had F-18s and smart bombs, they would probably use them.
  • Tactics are determined by the environment
The Sequence of Conflict

• Mao Zedong:
  • One of the great strategists/theoreticians of unconventional warfare
  • There is a progression or sequence of conflict:
    • Small, weak groups use terror to recruit members and to strike at the state
    • Insurgency evolves from terror
      • “Guerrilla warfare” Ernesto “Che” Guevara
      • Strike weakness with strength
Sequence of Conflict, cont.

- Eventually, insurgency evolves into conventional armed conflict
- Mao is clear that terror/insurgency NEVER work by themselves.
- Unconventional battle is preparatory to conventional battle
- Sequence can move back and forth (up and down the scale of conflict intensity)
The Impotence of Terror

- Basically, terror seldom (if ever) works
  - Terrorist acts usually result in reprisals
  - Cannot force opponents to accommodate terrorist demands
- High risk of alienating “friends”
- “Gnat biting an elephant”
Impotence of Terror, cont.

• Why do we see terrorism (if it does not work)?
  • Most of the time, we don’t
    • There are far, far more people unhappy with politics than there are terrorists
  • Preference outliers
    • “Terrorist Extremist” is redundant
  • Priming the sequence of conflict
    • Mao/Che - terror can turn into something
Conclusion

• Terrorism instills fear as method of punishment
• Proximate goal is to compell political change
• Often equally important as “marketing tool”
• Bottom rung sequence of unconventional war
• Terror is the weapon of the weak
• But the strong use it as well
• Seldom works, difficult to defeat