Correspondence

What Makes Terrorists Tick

*Erica Chenoweth,
Nicholas Miller, and
Elizabeth McClellan*

Hillel Frisch

Paul Staniland

Max Abrahms

To the Editors (Erica Chenoweth, Nicholas Miller, and Elizabeth McClellan write):

Max Abrahms's article "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy" is a welcome critique of the many points taken for granted by rational choice interpretations of terrorist group behavior.[1] His systematic review of the observable implications of rational choice perspectives on terrorism reveals some of the important shortfalls in the current literature. Abrahms overreaches, however, in rejecting strategic models of terrorism without providing ample empirical evidence or qualifications to his claims.

Abrahms presents seven "puzzling" tendencies of terrorist organizations as anomalies for the strategic model. We argue, however, that a strategic perspective can account for these anomalous behaviors when one examines the group's internal dynamics—particularly the relationship between the group's leadership and its constituents—which may require scholars to consider this level of analysis to explain terrorist group behavior. We consider each of Abrahms's puzzles in turn.

PUZZLE #1: COERCIVE INEFFECTIVENESS
Abrahms's argument that terrorism is ineffective, and therefore not rational, has two main flaws. First, by relying on the State Department's current list of foreign terrorist organizations, Abrahms misses the large number of terrorist groups that have ceased to

Erica Chenoweth is Assistant Professor of Government at Wesleyan University. Nicholas Miller is an undergraduate Government major at Wesleyan. Elizabeth McClellan is an undergraduate Comparative Government and Studio Art double major at Wesleyan. For a longer, more detailed version of this letter, see Erica Chenoweth's website, http://wesfiles.wesleyan.edu/home/echenoweth/web/home.htm.

Hillel Frisch is Associate Professor in the Departments of Political Studies and Middle East History at Bar-Ilan University. He thanks Stuart Cohen, Efraim Inbar, and Gordon McCormick for their helpful comments.

Paul Staniland is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science and member of the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a Research Fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs in the Harvard Kennedy School at Harvard University. The author would like to thank Brendan Green, Vipin Narang, Joshua Rovner, and Cyrus Samii for helpful comments.

Max Abrahms is a Social Science Predoctoral Fellow in the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, and a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Los Angeles. He would like to thank Mia Bloom, Martha Crenshaw, Matthew Gottfried, Peter Krause, Jessica Stern, Paul Stockton, and Robbie Totten for their helpful comments. He is especially grateful to Richard English for sharing his expertise over the years on the Irish Republican Army.

exist and inherently selects groups that are still operating precisely because they have not yet achieved their goals. Seth Jones and Martin Libicki have found that since 1968, 268 terrorist groups have disbanded and an additional 136 have splintered into other violent groups.[2] Indeed, Jones and Libicki found that 27 groups disbanded after achieving their goals, for a success rate of 10 percent.[3] Although not an overly impressive rate, there is a critical difference between never succeeding and succeeding one out of ten times when an organization surveys its strategic options.

Second, Abrahms does not explore alternative measures and perceptions of success upon which terrorist organizations may rely. There may not be a clear causal link between the terrorist campaign and the realization of the organization's goals, but if leaders perceive that terrorism can be successful relative to other alternatives, then choosing terrorism is rational. This is an issue that Robert Pape addresses in his discussion of suicide terrorism, noting that "in this search for an effective strategy, coercers' assessments are likely to be largely a function of estimates of the success of past efforts; for suicide terrorists, this means assessments of whether past suicide campaigns produced significant concessions."[4] Because it is often ambiguous whether a government's decisions are driven by terrorism or unrelated factors, it is rational to consider terrorism successful as long as this interpretation is "shared by a significant portion of other observers."[5] For instance, Abrahms was probably right that the 2004 Madrid bombings had a "questionable" effect on the results of the Spanish elections and Spain's subsequent withdrawal of its military forces from Iraq. But many observers have interpreted these outcomes as examples of terrorist success—an opinion likely shared by many terrorists and leaders who are contemplating adopting a terrorist strategy.[6] Many terrorist leaders cite prominent examples of perceived terrorist successes in explaining their tactics, whether they refer to Irgun, Hezbollah, the African National Congress (ANC), the Tamil Tigers, or al-Qaida.[7]

PUZZLE #2: TERRORISM AS THE FIRST RESORT
Abrahms argues that "terrorist groups do not embrace terrorism as a last resort and seldom elect to abandon the armed struggle to become nonviolent political parties," and that this undermines the strategic model (p. 84). But the strategic model does not re-

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2. Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida* (Washington, D.C.: RAND, 2008), p. 19.
3. Ibid.
4. Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 97, No. 3 (August 2003), pp. 343–361, at p. 350.
5. Ibid., p. 351.
6. Max Abrahms, William Rose, and Rysia Murphy, "Correspondence: Does Terrorism Ever Work? The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings," *International Security,* Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 185–192. p. 189.
7. For a collection of original terrorist documents, see Walter Laqueur, ed., *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings, and Manuals of al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Other Terrorists from around the World throughout the Ages* (New York: Sourcebooks, 2005). See, for instance, excerpts of Ayman al-Zawahiri's "Knights under the Prophet's Banner," pp. 426–433.

quire groups to adopt a number of other alternatives before adopting terrorism. They only consider other alternatives and decide that terrorism is the optimal strategy. This was the case with the ANC, which "considered four types of violent activities" before judging that "open revolution was inconceivable."[8] That terrorists' assessments are rarely correct or justifiable does not mean that they have made a priori irrational choices.

Furthermore, Abrahms's assertion that terrorist groups rarely transform into "nonviolent political parties" is empirically weak. Jones and Libicki found that the most common way for terrorist groups to end was by joining the political process—either through a peace settlement with the government and abandonment of violence or through "civic action" in the absence of an explicit agreement.[9] Of 268 groups that have ended since 1968 without splintering, 114 (or 43 percent) did so by entering nonviolent politics in one way or another.[10] Examples include the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador, and the Mozambican National Resistance.[11]

Even if such empirics were absent, Abrahms's claim that terrorist groups "toil alongside peaceful parties" and "sabotage open elections that would have yielded major political gains for the group" is not a disconfirmation of the strategic model (p. 85). Just because political parties with the same general ideology gain power does not suggest that extremist groups will be satisfied. Indeed, slight variations in political agendas may give the groups sufficient reason to remain dubious about the parties' intentions and capabilities to address group grievances. For instance, Abrahms uses the Italian left-wing terrorists of the 1970s as an example of this phenomenon. These terrorists, however, viewed the Italian Communist Party as having sold out to the Christian Democrats to form a governing coalition, especially when grievances about labor and wages were not immediately satisfied.[12] Once these grievances were addressed, members of the groups became introspective.[13] Effective counterterrorism policies subsequently brought the terrorist groups to their demise.

PUZZLE #3: REFLEXIVELY UNCOMPROMISING TERRORISTS

There are at least three problems with Abrahms's claim that terrorists' unwillingness to compromise with governments undermines the strategic model. First, some terrorist groups have attempted to compromise by declaring unilateral cease-fires, as the Basque terrorist group ETA did in 2006. As mentioned above, since 1968, 43 percent of terrorist groups have ended by entering the political process, often due to negotiations.[14]

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8. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), p. 240.
9. Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End*, pp. 20–22.
10. Ibid., p. 19.
11. Ibid., pp. 22–23.
12. Donatella della Porta, "Left-wing Terrorism in Italy," in Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park: Penn State University Press), pp. 105–159.
13. Erica Chenoweth, "The Inadvertent Effects of Democracy on Terrorist Group Proliferation," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder, 2007, pp. 175–245.
14. Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End*, p. 18.

Second, failing to compromise is not in itself evidence of irrationality. Terrorist groups may have extreme aims that preclude compromise. Jones and Libicki's findings support this claim, as groups with limited aims were far more likely to renounce violence and enter politics.[15] Furthermore, although Abrahms claims that "many terrorist organizations profess surprisingly moderate political positions" such as separatism and self-determination, he does not acknowledge that these "moderate political positions" often seem extreme to the governments that terrorists are targeting (p. 86). Historical instances of states willingly surrendering control over territory are rare indeed, especially in the absence of a protracted struggle.

Even among terrorists with limited goals, there are strategic reasons to be uncompromising and to attack at seemingly counterproductive times. These reasons include outbidding among groups,[16] suspicions about the government's credibility,[17] and the number of combatant groups—in nearly every case of the uncompromising terrorists mentioned in this section, other rival terrorist groups existed. Terrorist groups may attempt to hold peace processes hostage (e.g., Real IRA Omagh bombing in 1998) because they are dubious of their competitors' abilities to extract sufficient concessions rather than "selling out," or because holding out for the end of the peace talks may enable the group to extract more concessions.[18]

Third, Abrahms does not address the role of the government in negotiations with terrorist groups. In addition to all of the standard difficulties with negotiations (e.g., cheating, indivisibility, and domestic pressures), negotiating with terrorists can pose further challenges to the state. In fact, Peter Neumann notes that most governments are reflexively uncompromising toward terrorists.[19] As Abrahms argues previously, "Target countries view the negative consequences of terrorist attacks on their societies and political systems as evidence that the terrorists want them destroyed. Target countries are understandably skeptical that making concessions will placate terrorist groups believed to be motivated by these maximalist objectives."[20] If he is right, governments will hesitate to compromise with terrorists who target civilians because they infer from their tactics that their extreme goals preclude a settlement. This indeed seems plausible, but it demands qualification from Abrahms's later claim of "reflexively uncompromising terrorists" (pp. 85–87). If governments are generally unwilling to make concessions to terrorist groups, then it is inaccurate to blame terrorists solely for failing to reach compromises with the government.

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15. Ibid., p. 20.
16. Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
17. Dan Reiter, "Exploring the Bargaining Model of War," *Perspectives on Politics,* Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2003), pp. 27–43.
18. David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 50, No. 4 (September 2006), pp. 875–892.
19. Peter Neumann, "Negotiating with Terrorists," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 86, No. 1 (January/February 2007), pp. 128–138.
20. Max Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security,* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), p. 59.

PUZZLE #4: PROTEAN POLITICAL PLATFORMS

Abrahms argues that the tendency of terrorist groups to change their goals over time refutes strategic models of terrorism. Changing stated platforms, however, is not a disconfirmation of the strategic model, especially when one relaxes the assumption that terrorist groups are unitary actors.

Terrorist groups may "make up" political goals to survive because, at the group level of analysis, survival may be a stable preference over time. According to Daniel Byman, "Over 90 percent of terrorist groups do not survive their first year,"[21] while those that do survive have flexible organizational structures and are able to remain discrete. Terrorist organizations that do not place a high priority on group maintenance are likely to dissolve, so leaders may sacrifice some stated aims for the benefits of flexibility and continuity. For instance, because joining a terrorist group is often an irreversible decision, the group's leadership may invent new causes to appease their most devoted members, donors, and sponsors (pp. 86–89). Indeed, remaining united may be the only alternative for some terrorists given the high costs of exit.

PUZZLE #5: ANONYMOUS ATTACKS

Abrahms argues that terrorists often do not claim responsibility for their attacks, and that this strategy is illogical because it "pre[cludes] even the possibility of successful coercion" (p. 90). There are numerous strategic explanations, however, for this behavior.

First, one of the major goals of terrorist violence—to provoke a disproportionate government reaction to the violence—is often best served through anonymous attacks that provoke the government into cracking down on the population indiscriminately.[22] If this is part of the terrorist group's intentions, then claiming attacks is unnecessary and may even be counterproductive.

A strategy of spoiling may also be effectively carried out anonymously.[23] If a country seeks to bargain with moderates on terms that are unacceptable to terrorist organizations, the organizations may have strategic interests in disrupting the talks. Anonymous attacks may even be more effective at disrupting negotiations because they create suspicion that the moderates themselves may support terrorism.

Anonymity may also protect terrorist organizations from loss of popular support. An irate public may be more likely to back fierce government retaliation through visible counterterrorist responses.[24] Mia Bloom, for instance, has documented a number of unclaimed attacks that groups avoid claiming because of negative public reactions.[25] On the other hand, highly visible public actions can deliver recruits and resources. Correspondingly, sometimes multiple groups claim an attack after their constituents respond

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21. Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 63.
22. Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security,* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Summer 2006), pp. 49–79.
23. Ibid.
24. James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 88, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 577–592; and Max Abrahms, "Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists," *Security Studies,* Vol. 16, No. 2 (April–June 2007), pp. 223–253.
25. Bloom, *Dying to Kill.*

favorably to it.[26] Because of the uncertainty of the public response, anonymity can help terrorist groups survive unpopular miscalculations.

PUZZLE #6: TERRORIST FRATRICIDE

Abrahms claims that the strategic model cannot explain why "organizations purporting to fight for a common cause frequently attack each other more than their mutually declared enemy" (p. 90). On the contrary, "liquidating" groups with similar ideologies is rational given that the groups are competing for the same "market share" of recruits, sponsorship, sympathy, and attention.[27] The Tamil Tigers viciously pursued rivals in the early years and have evolved to be the hegemonic violent nationalist movement in Tamil Eelam. Consequently, the Tamil Tigers have become synonymous with the Tamil nationalist movement, so that governments are unable to address policy issues regarding Tamil Eelam without considering the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The National Liberation Front in Algeria also dominated its competition and eventually negotiated the terms of the French departure.[28] From a strategic standpoint, establishing dominance enables a group to control the terms of negotiation if it reaches negotiations with the government.

Regardless, terrorists spend less time attacking their rivals than they do their primary opponents. According to Christopher Hewitt, fratricidal attacks in the United States account for only 17 percent of terrorist activities, whereas terrorist targets are linked to stated aims more than 65 percent of the time.[29] In fact, terrorist fratricide would be more puzzling from the perspective of natural systems theory, where terrorist recruits seek camaraderie and companionship through social solidarity within a violent group. Attacking colleagues with similar political platforms inside or outside the group may not necessarily serve this goal either. Such behavior can be attributed to strategic calculations of relative gain and loss and, therefore, conforms more to strategic models than Abrahms suggests.

PUZZLE #7: NEVER-ENDING TERRORISM

Abrahms argues that the persistence of terrorist groups after their stated aims have become obsolete challenges the strategic model. Importantly, however, researchers at RAND found that 404 terrorist groups have ended since 1968; 136 of these splintered into other terrorist groups, and 268 have renounced violence.[30]

CONCLUSION

Although his article is an important, insightful, and creative critique, Abrahms goes too far in rejecting strategic models of terrorism. The puzzles that he presents are not puzzles for the strategic model. Instead, these anomalies are opportunities to delineate the

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26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Martha Crenshaw, "The Effectiveness of Terrorism in the Algerian War," in Crenshaw, *Terrorism in Context*, pp. 473–513, at pp. 511–513.
29. Christopher Hewitt, *Understanding Terrorism in America: From the Klan to al Qaeda* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 66–67.
30. Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End*, p. 19.

levels of analysis at which rational behavior is failing. What is rational for a terrorist recruit may not be rational for the group's leadership, and vice versa. Abrahms's alternative to the strategic model—natural systems theory—concerns only the individual's incentives for joining a group. Natural systems theory does not describe how terrorist leaders organize, apply ideology, and select strategy, but rather deals exclusively with foot soldiers. Abrahms may be right that the strategic model does not adequately address the interests of the rank-and-file (p. 95). But it may be necessary to apply the strategic model to the internal dynamics of the groups by disaggregating foot soldiers from strategists rather than rejecting the model outright.

Abrahms's main contribution may be to explain the types of individuals who are attracted to terrorist groups—in other words, how the preferences of terrorist recruits form. His article reinforces this need to reconsider the unitary actor assumption in rational choice models, which may provide many fruitful avenues for future research.[31] Indeed, strategic models and natural systems theory can be complementary, particularly if they unify the different levels of analysis discussed above. But at the level of the group's strategy, the natural systems perspective does not outperform the strategic model in generating a unique set of predictions that enhance scholars' theoretical understandings or policy choices.

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—Erica Chenoweth
Middletown, Connecticut

—Nicholas Miller
Middletown, Connecticut

—Elizabeth McClellan
Middletown, Connecticut

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To the Editors (Hillel Frisch writes):

Max Abrahms's article "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy" constitutes a well-written, thought-provoking critique of the assumption that terrorist groups are strategic in their pursuit of political goals and hence amenable to political concessions.[1] Nevertheless, the evidence Abrahms presents to support his argument, his alternative explanation for why terrorists pursue terrorism, and the policy implications he draws from his analysis are all open to question.

Abrahms claims that members of terrorist organizations are motivated primarily by the quest for social solidarity rather than by the desire to achieve clearly defined politi-

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31. For one such application, see Wendy Pearlman, "Fragmentation and Violence: Internal Influences on Tactics in the Case of the Palestinian National Movement, 1920–2006," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2007.

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1. Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy," *International Security,* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Spring 2008), pp. 78–105. Additional references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

cal goals. As Gordon McCormick notes, however, the truth is that there are movements that are either strategic or motivated by social solidarity, or both: "Terrorist groups, in this respect—as in many others—are not created equal. Nor is their behavior necessarily consistent over the course of their operational life. Some (otherwise distinctive) groups, such as the contemporary Irish Republican Army (IRA), al-Qaeda, Hamas, and the Tamil Tigers, have largely managed to subordinate their actions to their political objectives. . . . Others, such as the late November 17, the Popular Forces of 25 April, the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide, or any number of today's 'amateur' terrorists, have effectively subordinated their political objectives to their need to act."[2] Albert Camus, in his intriguing play on a Russian terrorist cell in 1905, *The Just Assassins*, effectively demonstrates this duality down to the level of the two main characters, Stephan and Yanek.[3]

A more serious problem is Abrahms's assumption that the behavior of terrorist organizations is irrational and therefore a puzzle for the strategic paradigm. Take, for example, his puzzle that "terrorist organizations with identical political platforms routinely attack each other more than their mutually professed enemy" (p. 82). Is this indeed irrational, nonstrategic behavior? Not when one considers that most terrorist movements have two basic objectives: to wring concessions from the government but, no less, to achieve hegemony in the rebel camp. Movements such as Fatah, for example, not only strive to gain independence; they also aim to constitute the government of the future state. This is why so many "wars of national liberation" are also civil wars. Therefore, "fratricide" is often motivated by strategic thinking, as the recent struggle for dominance between Hamas and Fatah over control of the Palestinian Authority (PA) suggests. Prior to their brief civil war, the Fatah Tanzim and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade undermined PA institutions to correct what activists from the "inside" (i.e., those who fought the Israelis while the PLO leadership was far away in Tunis) felt was an unfair share of positions of power allocated to them with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. Regarding al-Qaida, since 2003, at least, it has almost exclusively targeted states with a military presence in Iraq, demonstrating its strategic motivations.[4] The African National Congress employed terrorism only late in its struggle against the white government of South Africa, effectively refuting Abrahms's claim that terrorist organizations never use terrorism as a last resort.

Whether terrorist organizations can be assumed to be nonstrategic because of changing protean political platforms can also be questioned. One wonders whether the political platforms of terrorist groups are more protean than those of regular political parties or movements. The Basque, Fatah, and PKK terrorist movements shift in their political objectives according to calculations of what is achievable, similar to the mainstream Zionist political movement, which did not engage in terrorism. Although Theodor

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2. Gordon H. McCormick, "Terrorist Decision Making," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 6 (June 2003), p. 480.
3. See David C. Rapoport, "Inside Terrorist Organizations," in Rapoport, ed., *Inside Terrorist Organizations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 2.
4. Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), p. 57.

Herzl, who founded the World Zionist Organization, wrote about Jewish statehood even before the creation of the Zionist movement, statehood was never mentioned again as the movement's goal by mainstream Zionists at least until the Holocaust. The reason was because the leadership believed that disclosure of its ultimate objective of a Jewish state was not politically expedient. A terrorist movement that ratchets up its objective from achieving autonomy to statehood or ratchets down its demands from statehood to autonomy might be making a rational (re)assessment between its goals and its capabilities relative to those of the state. Yasir Arafat, for example, accepted the autonomy plan in 1993, to which he had been bitterly opposed for more than twenty years, when he signed the Declaration of Principles along with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on the White House lawn, for fear that Israel might make a deal with the leadership within the territories. Hamas prefers controlling Gaza compared to the much smaller probability that it would be allowed to build a radical Islamist Palestinian state. In short, terrorist movements can be strategic even when changing their political platforms over time.[5]

Abrahms also conflates the motivations of terrorists with those of the movement's leadership. Just as techniques used to motivate individual soldiers or small units do not necessarily reflect the strategic objectives of the national and military leadership, neither can one necessarily assume correspondence between the factors motivating terrorists and the strategic objectives of the terrorist movement. Terrorists might indeed join the movement in search of companionship, as Abrahms suggests, but this hardly reflects on the strategic goals of the movement itself.

Equally problematic is Abrahms's proposal that the social model is more relevant than the strategic model when assessing terrorists' motivations. If indeed "terrorists are rational people who use terrorism primarily to develop strong affective ties with fellow terrorists," collective terrorism should be more prevalent in Western states, as alienated individuals seek friendship and social interaction (p. 80). Nor can the social model account for why, in the Palestinian political-terrorist arena, organizations such as the Abu Nidal Organization and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command pursued violence at all costs, whereas the Fatah mainstream movement sharply reduced its terrorist activity during the Oslo years (1994–2000) and then returned to it with a vengeance once the al-Aqsa intifada broke out. Abrahms's explanation might account for why the Abu Nidals of the world exist (although even Abrahms concedes that they became guns for hire and thus might have been acting strategically, assuming the alternative would have meant a life sentence), but it cannot account for why Fatah, the dominant group in the Palestinian arena for decades, was strategic. Even in the life cycle of a single terrorist group, the salience of visceral psychological or social explanations might vary over time. Forty years ago, Fatah members were heavily influenced by Franz Fanon's thesis of violence as catharsis. Fanon's name and his legacy find almost no echo in more recent Fatah writings.

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5. Harvey Kushner, *Terrorism in America: A Structured Approach to Understanding the Terrorist Threat* (New York: Charles and Thomas, 1998), pp. 81–83. See also Leonard Weinberg and William Lee Eubank, "Cultural Differences in the Behavior of Terrorists," *Terrorism and Political Violence,* Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 6–8.

Instead of seeking to determine whether the strategic model or the social/psychological paradigm is correct—they are both right in the sense that some organizations act according to the expectations of the strategic model and others because of social/psychological expectations—scholars should be asking why some organizations seem to be more strategic and others less so or not at all.

An initial explanation can be derived from the works of Barry Collins and Harold Guetzkow, as well as Martha Crenshaw.[6] These scholars observed that, as movements go deeper underground, the "interpersonal" rewards of group membership become more important than the strategic goals of their political mission. One would assume that as long as organizations are able to grow more politically salient, they will maintain or cultivate a strategy to achieve definable political goals. Conversely, failure, setback, or prolonged marginality will make organizations less strategic, as their immediate social environment overwhelms them. The seeds of a competing argument to that proposed by Abrahms may have emerged. Abrahms argues that it is the quest for affective ties that drives terrorist organizations, whereas this alternative explanation is based on the premise that it is the competitive environment between terrorists and government and the relative success achieved by the terrorists over time that predicts how strategic or nonstrategic they may become. This is only one of many potential alternative explanations, however. What is important is the need to take up the challenge to explain the puzzle of why some terrorist organizations seem to be strategic, others not, and still others seem to be both over different time periods. One can then tease out the policy implications of the findings for conflict resolution or, short of that, for successful counterinsurgency.

Abrahms has made a valuable contribution to explaining why some terrorist organizations are not necessarily motivated by political goals, and many more at some time during their life cycles. The puzzle of why this is true of some organizations most of the time, or most organizations some of the time, remains a challenge that students of terrorism should endeavor to meet.

—*Hillel Frisch*
Ramat Gan, Israel

To the Editors (Paul Staniland writes):

In "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy,"[1] Max Abrahms argues that terrorists are "social solidarity maximizers" (p. 101), rather

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6. Barry E. Collins and Harold Guetzkow, *The Social Psychology of Group Processes for Decision Making* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964); and Martha Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism," *Orbis,* Vol. 29, No. 3 (Fall 1985), pp. 465–489. These works are analyzed in McCormick, "Terrorist Decision Making," p. 489.

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1. Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy," *International Security,* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Spring 2008), pp. 78–105. Further references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

than strategic political actors, meaning that individuals join terrorist groups "to develop strong affective ties with other terrorists" (p. 96). As a result, terrorist groups "routinely engage in actions to perpetuate and justify their existence, even when these undermine their official political agendas" (pp. 101–102). Abrahms argues that the seven predictions of the natural systems model find support in "the preponderance of theoretical and empirical evidence" (p. 103).

Abrahms makes a valuable contribution to scholars' understanding of terrorism. His argument, however, has significant theoretical and empirical shortcomings. I focus on three issues: the diverse motivations of individual participants, armed group elites' use of organizations to shape the actions of foot soldiers, and the behavior of terrorist organizations in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, two cases that Abrahms repeatedly refers to in support of his claims.

THE MULTIPLE LOGICS OF PARTICIPATION IN MILITANCY
Research on civil wars suggests that it is impossible to offer a single answer to the question, "What do terrorists want?"[2] This work shows that there is no dominant logic of participation in militancy. In a study of combatants in Sierra Leone's civil war, Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein find that "different logics of participation may coexist in a single war."[3] Social sanction, grievances, and selective incentives all provided motivation to join. Stathis Kalyvas and Ana Arjona's survey of former combatants in the Colombian civil war reveals that revenge, ideology, and material rewards were the dominant motivations for participation.[4]

Qualitative fieldwork makes similar points. Lucian Pye explores the varied reasons people joined communist guerrilla groups in Malaya.[5] Elisabeth Wood highlights multiple mechanisms that encourage participation, particularly oppressive state policy and the pleasure of agency.[6] Weinstein's work on insurgent organization suggests at least two types of participants—investors and consumers.[7] Roger Petersen's study of insurgent mobilization reveals several mechanisms that encourage participation, including community norms, rational calculations, psychological hopes, and a lack of other options.[8]

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2. It is possible that insurgent groups differ from purely terrorist groups; indeed Abrahms draws such a distinction on page 83 of his article. Still, he repeatedly references insurgents such as the Tamil Tigers; Hezbollah; PKK; Hamas; Afghan, Iraqi, and Chechen guerrillas; and FARC in support of his argument. Thus there does not appear to be an empirically relevant distinction. There are few major organizations that do not kill both civilians and agents of the state.
3. Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 52, No. 2 (April 2008), p. 437.
4. Stathis Kalyvas and Ana Arjona, "Preliminary Results of a Survey of Demobilized Combatants in Colombia," unpublished paper, Yale University, 2006.
5. Lucian Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956).
6. Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
7. Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
8. Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

ELITE GOALS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL

Abrahms assumes that individuals' motives for joining a group determine the goals and actions of the organization. The problem with this assumption is that insurgent elites often have political goals distinct from foot soldiers' varied motivations. Elites use organizational mechanisms to bring cadre behavior in line with leadership aims.

For instance, recruits joined the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) for many reasons (though only after the political crisis of the late 1960s). PIRA's ranks included thugs, intellectuals, ordinary people, criminals, Marxists, Catholics, and dozens of other types of individuals.[9] But throughout the conflict, the PIRA leadership pursued the political goal of unifying Ireland by calibrating offensives, strategizing about how to use the Sinn Féin political party, negotiating with other parties and the British government, and finally agreeing to a political settlement and disbandment. The leadership used coercion, material rewards, persuasion, and social pressures to largely keep its cadres in line, regardless of their original motivations for joining.[10]

Foot soldiers similarly end up in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or Tamil Tigers) through numerous mechanisms, but the core leadership has resolutely pursued the goal of an independent Eelam despite heterogeneous cadre-level motivations. Some foot soldiers were abducted as children; others fervently believe in the need for a Tamil state; others are in thrall to the personality cult of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran; others need a job; still others joined after seeing their mothers raped by soldiers.[11] The Tigers' leadership has harnessed these diverse motivations toward a consistent separatist goal.

Abrahms emphasizes organization theory, but he does not deal with the vast literature on the control, indoctrination, and incentives that leaders use to create coordinated outcomes from disparate individuals.[12] The Tigers and PIRA are fundamentally political, not affective. In the next section I show that both groups' leaders have used their organizational control to pursue strategic and political goals.[13]

HOW DO ARMED GROUPS BEHAVE?

Below I briefly survey the accuracy of Abrahms's seven predictions of group behavior. I find little support for his argument in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, where I have done detailed field research on armed groups. The failure of the natural systems model to illuminate these cases casts doubt on its broader accuracy. I focus on the Provisional IRA and LTTE but also discuss the other major groups in each war.

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9. Eamon Collins provides an inside picture of the range of personalities in the PIRA. See Collins with Mick McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London: Granta, 1998).
10. Rogelio Alonso highlights "internal repression" as central to PIRA operations. See Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle* (London: Routledge, 2007), especially pp. 3–4.
11. A knowledgeable aid worker in Sri Lanka listed six major motivations for individuals to join the Tigers, in addition to forced conscription. Interview by author, Colombo, March 2008.
12. A pioneering study is Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytical Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Chicago: Markham, 1970).
13. Between 1923 and 1968, the IRA was a peripheral and largely inactive organization. The LTTE was formed in 1972, the other Tamil militant groups between 1975 and 1980; major combat did not occur until 1983. It is hard to understand how the quest for affective ties explains this over-time variation, unless there were no socially alienated single males in these societies prior to the late 1960s. This seems unlikely. Abrahms is trying to explain a variable with a constant.

Abrahms's first prediction is that armed groups "prolong their existence by relying on a strategy that hardens target governments from making policy concessions" (p. 102). By contrast, the LTTE has repeatedly brought the government of Sri Lanka to the negotiating table. It won some concessions from the government in 1989–90 and 2002, though neither set of concessions went far enough for the Tigers. The PIRA extracted concessions from the British and then disbanded. There is little evidence that either group intentionally stopped the government from making concessions that it believed would advance its strategic goal. Conflicts endured because of fluctuating power and distrust between the state and its foe.

This is also true of the other armed groups. In Northern Ireland, the Official IRA (OIRA) unilaterally declared a cease-fire in 1972 despite the absence of concessions, and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) signed on to the 1998 Good Friday agreement. In Sri Lanka the other major Tamil militant groups—Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), and People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOT)—all agreed to the 1987 Indo-Lanka accord.[14]

Abrahms's second prediction is that armed groups "ensure their continued viability by resisting opportunities to peacefully participate in the democratic process" (p. 102). Cross-national research casts doubt on this claim.[15] Northern Ireland's history is similarly disconfirming. The PIRA's Sinn Féin political wing has engaged in the democratic process and now shares power in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The OIRA entered mainstream politics as the Workers' Party. The UVF declared a cease-fire in 1994 and put forward the Progressive Unionist Party as its electoral face. In Sri Lanka, EPRLF, PLOT, and TELO all agreed to lay down their arms and entered the democratic mainstream via the 1987 Indo-Lanka accord. Even after rearming during 1987–90 to protect themselves, EPRLF and TELO are now unarmed parties that regularly contest elections. The armed parties keep their weapons to protect themselves from the Tigers, who have deemed them political traitors.[16]

Abrahms's third prediction is that armed groups "avoid disbanding by reflexively rejecting negotiated settlements that offer significant policy concessions" (p. 102). In Northern Ireland, the PIRA and the OIRA have disbanded, and the UVF is in the process of doing so. The Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA) remain intact, but have become fractious drug dealers, not seekers of social solidarity.

In Sri Lanka, EPRLF, TELO, and a faction of EROS have disbanded as combatants. Groups that have not disbanded have plausible strategic rationales. The LTTE does not trust a Sinhalese-dominated government to deliver on the terms of a settlement, much

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14. M.R. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas* (Delhi: Konark, 1994), pp. 240–250.
15. Abrahms asserts, "No peace process has transformed a major terrorist organization into a completely nonviolent political party" (p. 86). A study of 648 terrorist groups between 1968 and 2006, however, reveals that "a transition to the political process is the most common way in which terrorist groups ended (43 percent)." Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida* (Washington, D.C.: RAND, 2008), p. xiii.
16. There are three pro-state Tamil armed groups that contest elections: the PLOT, the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), and Tamil Makkal Viduthalaip Puligal (TMVP).

less grant independence. PLOT, EPDP, and TMVP remain armed to protect themselves and reap rewards from extortion.[17]

Abrahms's fourth prediction is that armed groups "guarantee their survival by espousing a litany of protean political goals that can never be fully satisfied" (p. 102). Although protean political goals certainly are espoused by some groups around the world, in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, organizations have advanced clear separatist goals. The IRA wanted the unification of Ireland—an unlikely goal, but given the history of 1916–22, the isolation of Northern Ireland from the British mainstream, and demographic trends, not unthinkable.[18] The OIRA was willing to settle for democratization and popular participation, and the PIRA showed it would settle for power sharing. The Protestant paramilitaries wanted to maintain union with the United Kingdom.[19] In Sri Lanka, even the hardest-line Tamil groups have sought a straightforward goal—an independent Tamil homeland. As shown in 1987 and since, several Tamil groups have been willing to settle for power devolution.

Abrahms's fifth prediction is that armed groups "avert organization-threatening reprisals by conducting anonymous attacks" (p. 102). In Northern Ireland, the PIRA, OIRA, and INLA often claimed responsibility for their attacks. When they did not, it was because they did not want to lose support or be condemned internationally for an operation that went wrong. The INLA took credit for killing Member of Parliament Airey Neave, but not for the "Darkley massacre." The PIRA tried to distance itself from the Enniskillen bombing, but took credit for bombing Thiepval Barracks.[20] The Protestant paramilitaries claimed responsibility when it suited their purposes. In Sri Lanka in the 1980s, the competition between Tamil groups encouraged them to take credit for attacks. Since the LTTE gained primacy, it has publicized and claimed credit for many of its suicide attacks.

Abrahms's sixth prediction is that armed groups "annihilate ideologically identical terrorist organizations that compete for members" (p. 102). It is unclear what behavior this would refer to in either case. The PIRA was ideologically different from the OIRA, which it split from in 1969. The Irish National Liberation Army differed from the OIRA leadership, resulting in a break in 1974.[21] The PIRA espoused a hard-line Irish nationalism, in contrast to the mass mobilizing, violence-averse focus of the OIRA or the far-left vision of the INLA.[22] These ideological differences help to account for why the PIRA and the INLA broke away from the OIRA and why the OIRA stopped fighting. Despite feuds between these groups, there was no "annihilation."

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17. Human Rights Watch, "Sri Lanka: Political Killings during the Ceasefire," Human Rights News (New York: Human Rights Watch, August 7, 2003), http://hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/srilanka080603.htm.
18. For an analysis, see M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting for Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London: Routledge, 1995).
19. Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
20. The name used to take credit for PIRA attacks was P. O'Neill. After the disastrous Enniskillen bombing (which killed eleven civilians), the PIRA leadership blamed local mistakes by the Fermanagh Brigade.
21. Jack Holland and Henry McDonald, *INLA: Deadly Divisions* (Dublin: Torc, 1994).
22. Peter Taylor, *The Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); and Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Abrahms's discussion of Sri Lanka is empirically suspect. First, he incorrectly claims that the Tamil Tigers "did not target the Sinhalese government in the mid-1980s" (p. 90). The LTTE's initial killings in the 1970s targeted pro-government political figures—the mayor of Jaffna in 1975, two policemen in 1977, and two police inspectors and a member of Parliament in 1978. The LTTE's June 1983 ambush of a convoy in Jaffna, which killed thirteen soldiers, triggered a major escalation of violence between the Tigers and the state. The LTTE did make a bid for dominance (primarily between April 1986 and March 1987) by targeting other groups, but it was simultaneously involved in antigovernment insurgency throughout northeastern Sri Lanka. Second, there were important ideological differences among Tamil groups. The LTTE's closest ideological match was TELO, but it was an Indian proxy army. The LTTE, by contrast, distrusted the Indian state. PLOT broke away from the LTTE in part because of PLOT supporters' left-wing vision of Sinhalese-Tamil cooperation in seeking to forge an island-wide revolution.[23] EPRLF and EROS espoused leftist ideologies and emphasized lower-caste mobilization. These differences mattered in the negotiation and (failed) implementation of the Indo-Lanka accord of 1987: EPRLF and TELO supported it, the LTTE opposed it, and PLOT tried to remain neutral.[24] The remnants of PLOT and parts of EPRLF and EROS now support the Sri Lankan government; another faction of EROS was integrated into the Tigers.

Abrahms's seventh prediction is that armed groups "refuse to split up after the armed struggle has proven politically unsuccessful for decades or its political rationale has become moot" (p. 102). Contrary to Abrahms's emphasis on social solidarity, most of these organizations have suffered a variety of elite splits and internal conflict over politics and personalities. The origins of PIRA and INLA lie in disagreement with the OIRA leadership over how to respond to sectarian violence in Belfast and Derry.[25] In 1997 the Real IRA broke away from PIRA because of discontent with its growing politicization.[26] The Loyalist Volunteer Force split from the UVF in 1996 in part over the peace process.[27] Splits and clashes within the UDA and INLA have occurred because of personal and criminal rivalries.

In Sri Lanka, the LTTE suffered a major split when its eastern commander, Karuna Amman, broke away in 2004. This split was driven by personal rivalry and disagree-

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23. For discussion of PLOT ideology, see Mark P. Whitaker, *Learning Politics from Sivaram: The Life and Death of a Revolutionary Tamil Journalist in Sri Lanka* (London: Pluto, 2007).

24. Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies* (Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1993); and University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), *The Broken Palmyrah* (Jaffna, Sri Lanka: University Teachers for Human Rights, 1990).

25. Patrick Bishop and Eamon Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London: Corgi Books, 1987), pp. 119–138.

26. On the Continuity split, see Robert W. White, *Ruarí Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). On the Real split, see Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), chap. 17; and English, *Armed Struggle,* pp. 316–318.

27. Jim Cusack and Henry McDonald, *UVF* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1997).

ment over the desirability of armed struggle.[28] Internal factional struggles within the LTTE occurred in 1980 (leading to PLOT's formation) and the early 1990s. EPRLF broke from EROS in 1980, and the EPDP in turn from the EPRLF in 1987, partly because of disagreements about politics. EROS broke in two in the late 1980s over joining the LTTE. TELO was in the midst of an internal war when targeted by the Tigers in 1986.[29] Given the pervasiveness of intra-organizational splits, feuds, and factionalism, the idea that militants seek Chester Barnard's "condition of communion" (p. 95) is bizarre.

THE COMPLEXITY OF MILITANCY

Rather than apolitical but solidaristic collections of lonely men, many militant groups bear resemblance to militaries and even states—organizationally complex, often internally divided, driven by political goals, and sometimes willing to abandon violence. Individuals join for numerous reasons and, in turn, are shaped by mechanisms of discipline and indoctrination. This does not mean that either militants or armed groups are purely strategic or rational actors, but it does suggest that they are not simplistic solidarity maximizers.

—Paul Staniland
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Max Abrahms Replies:

I appreciate the thoughtful comments of Erica Chenoweth and her coauthors, Paul Staniland, and Hillel Frisch to my recent article, as well as this opportunity to address them.

In my article I presented a test of the strategic model, the dominant paradigm in the academic and policy communities on terrorist motives, behavior, and counterterrorism strategy. This model holds that rational people use terrorism to achieve a political return; terrorist groups hence operate as political maximizers; and governments can therefore combat terrorism by reducing the political utility for its practitioners. Contrary to the strategic model, I found that in practice terrorist groups engage in seven politically counterproductive behavioral tendencies that perpetuate the existence of the group at the expense of its official political goals. According to the natural systems model in the organization literature, this behavioral trade-off reveals that members of an organization attach greater importance to its social benefits than to its official ones. I concluded that if terrorists likewise prioritize the social benefits over the political benefits of participating in terrorist groups, then extant counterterrorism strategies require reform.[1]

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28. "Situation Report: The Rise and Fall of Karuna," *Sunday Times* (Colombo), April 11, 2004.
29. This history is based on Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka*.

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1. Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy," *International Security,* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Spring 2008), pp. 78–105.

Erica Chenoweth, Nicholas Miller, and Elizabeth McClellan raise three main objections to my argument.[2] First, they claim that my analysis of terrorist motives pertains only to foot soldiers, and not to their leaders. Second, they draw upon a recent RAND study to contest the empirical basis of the seven puzzling terrorist tendencies for the strategic model that I identified.[3] Third, they maintain that these putative puzzles, even if empirically valid, are not evidence of irrationality given the internal dynamics of terrorist groups. Each objection is misplaced.

First, demographic studies routinely find that terrorist foot soldiers are motivated by the social—not the political—return.[4] This is consistent with demographic research on national militaries, which finds that troops are also generally motivated by the social benefits of participation rather than by the mission's official political purpose.[5] In keeping with the strategic model, however, my study ascertained the motives of terrorists by analyzing the behavioral tendencies of terrorist groups. This approach helps to account for the motives of their leaders because they, by definition, influence the core decisions of the group.[6] My research shows that the behavior of terrorist groups is fundamentally different from that of national militaries. Unlike militaries, terrorist groups tend to act in ways that keep the fighting unit intact, even when these actions undercut these groups' given political rationale. This behavioral trade-off implies that terrorist members with the greatest capacity to influence the core decisions of the group attach utmost value to perpetuating the social unit.

Second, rather than undermining the seven puzzles to the strategic model, the RAND study lends empirical support to these politically irrational terrorist tendencies. In my article I demonstrated, for example, that the use of terrorism is itself an unproductive behavior for groups to achieve their political platforms, an obvious puzzle for the strategic model. Chenoweth, Miller, and McClellan cite the study to declare that terrorist groups have a political "success rate of 10 percent," and hence terrorism is per-

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2. Erica Chenoweth, Nicholas Miller, and Elizabeth McClellan, "Correspondence: Politics, Motivation, and Organization in the Study of Terrorism," *International Security,* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Spring 2009), pp. 180–202.

3. Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida* (Washington, D.C.: RAND, 2008).

4. See, for example, Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 92; Olivier Roy, "Terrorism and Deculturation," in Louise Richardson, ed., *The Roots of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 159–160; and Joseph Felter and Jarret Brachman, "An Assessment of 516 Combatant Status Review Tribunal (CSRT) Unclassified Summaries," CTC Report (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, July 15, 2007), pp. 24–25, 34.

5. See Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 58.

6. Inferring the motives of terrorists through their behavior makes additional sense as terrorist groups have become increasingly networked, blurring the distinction between leaders and foot soldiers. This trend applies not only to religious groups such as al-Qaida and its affiliates but also to ethnonationalist groups such as Fatah and Hamas. On the increasingly networked nature of even ethnonationalist terrorist groups, see Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger, "The Changing Nature of Suicide Attacks: A Social Network Perspective," *Social Forces,* Vol. 84, No. 4 (June 2006), pp. 1987–2008.

haps a rational political strategy. In fact, what Seth Jones and Martin Libicki found is that 10 percent of terrorist groups that have ended since 1968 accomplished their political platforms. An additional 244 groups still use terrorism, and another 136 groups have morphed into other terrorist groups. All told, the RAND study concluded that only 4 percent of terrorist groups since 1968 have attained their policy demands. Even more important, the study stresses that these outlying groups did not tend to accomplish these demands due to terrorism. For example, several Armenian groups achieved their political platforms only by dint of the Soviet Union's unraveling.[7] The study thus affirms the empirical puzzle for the strategic model that terrorism is ineffective in achieving terrorist groups' platforms. In the article I also demonstrated why it is politically irrational for terrorist groups to reflexively eschew peace processes, elections, and other potentially effective nonviolent political avenues. To challenge the external validity of these puzzles, Chenoweth, Miller, and McClellan repeatedly reference the RAND study as claiming that "since 1968, 43 percent of terrorist groups have ended by entering the political process," broadly defined. They seize on this figure to suggest that terrorist groups are rational political actors that survey their strategic options, often pursuing nonviolent alternatives when these serve their political ends. This figure, however, again excludes hundreds of terrorist groups that are hardest for the strategic model to explain, including those that have splintered for the purpose of derailing peace processes, elections, and other historically productive nonviolent political alternatives. When the universe of terrorist groups is included in the analysis, the RAND study found that since 1968 fewer than one in five groups have embraced any type of nonviolent political path, a strikingly low percentage given terrorism's manifest political impotence. In sum, a careful analysis of the RAND study bolsters my contention that terrorist groups tend to engage in behaviors that prolong their existence, even when these impede progress on their stated political aims. This trade-off can account for the pronounced disparity between the longevity of terrorist groups and their negligible political accomplishments.[8]

Third, Chenoweth, Miller, and McClellan also assert that the seven behavioral tendencies I discuss in my article are not evidence of terrorist irrationality. I agree; the seven politically counterproductive terrorist tendencies are irrational only from the vantage of the strategic model. They make perfect sense if terrorist groups are driven not to coerce government compliance, but to perpetuate the social unit. Indeed, Chenoweth and her coauthors note that terrorist groups rely on anonymous attacks both to prevent the target government from eliminating the organization and to generate new recruits by provoking government overreaction; that terrorist groups abruptly change their political platforms to retain current members and to attract new ones; and that to win recruits, terrorist groups often attack other groups that share their platform. Chenoweth, Miller, and McClellan ultimately reject a social explanation for terrorism, however, claiming that these terrorist behaviors are reconcilable with what they coin as

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7. Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End,* p. 15.
8. See Max Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security,* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), pp. 42–78.

"strategic models of terrorism." Yet they neither define this nomenclature nor demonstrate that prolonging the life span of terrorist groups helps to advance their policy demands—a necessary, empirically invalid assumption for their behaviors to be politically rational.[9]

Paul Staniland raises three other objections with my article.[10] First, he draws upon the civil war and guerrilla warfare literatures to argue that many "militant groups" do not behave in the manner I described. This was not my unit of analysis, however. Within terrorism studies, there is a widespread belief that for maximum analytic leverage, terrorist groups, as traditionally defined, should be distinguished from other types of violent substate groups.[11] This is precisely the reason we have the field of terrorism studies.

Second, Staniland states that "it is impossible to offer a single answer to the question, 'What do terrorists want?'" My goal, however, was more modest—to compare the power of a social explanation for terrorism to a political one by analyzing the behavioral tendencies of terrorist groups.

His third point, ironically, is that the behavior of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Tamil Tigers, and affiliates reveals that their leaders used terrorism rationally for a single purpose—to achieve concrete political aims. In defense of the conventional wisdom, Staniland claims to show that the seven politically counterproductive habits of terrorist groups are nowhere to be found in the histories of the IRA, Tigers, or associated groups, casting doubt on the broader accuracy of my study. His assessment is problematic for four reasons.

First, Staniland compares apples to oranges by testing slightly different terrorist group behaviors than I did. He quotes my work extensively, but none of the terrorist tendencies that he tests is culled from the sections that dealt with the strategic model. In fact, Staniland does not purport to test this model, even though that was the purpose of my study. Instead, he treats the deracinated variants of the terrorist tendencies as testable "predictions" to falsify the natural systems model. This model makes no such predictions, however. The natural systems model is not a terrorism model at all; it is a methodological device for assessing the social basis of organizational behavior.[12]

Second, in treating the seven terrorist tendencies as discrete predictions, Staniland strongly implies that a group's failure to engage in all of them constitutes disconfirming evidence of its political irrationality. The strategic model is clear, however, that a terror-

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9. See Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work."
10. Paul Staniland, "Correspondence: Politics, Motivation, and Organization in the Study of Terrorism," *International Security,* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Spring 2009), pp. 189–195.
11. On this distinction, see Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," pp. 52–54; Jeff Goodwin, "A Theory of Categorical Terrorism," *Social Forces,* Vol. 84, No. 4 (June 2006), pp. 2027–46; Assaf Moghadam, "Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of *Dying to Win," Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* Vol. 29, No. 6 (August 2006), p. 710; and Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End,* appendix.
12. On the perils of testing empirical relationships outside of their theoretical context, see David A. Lake, "Fair Fights? Evaluating Theories of Democracy and Victory," *International Security,* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003), p. 154.

ist group is politically irrational whenever it engages in any of these seven tendencies. Sun-Ki Chai has pointed out, for example, that if terrorism is itself politically ineffective behavior, then it is not politically rational, regardless of whether there exist alternative methods of inducing political change.[13] Conversely, if terrorist groups do not seize superior political outlets, their behavior is also politically irrational, even if it is true that a very limited number of groups that have used terrorism happened to accomplish their political platforms. A large portion of Staniland's test is thus irrelevant for demonstrating that a terrorist group did not behave as a political maximizer in accordance with the strategic model, even when its underlying rationality assumptions are relaxed.

Third, Staniland uses his case studies in a methodologically unorthodox and suspect way. To demonstrate the tendency of terrorist groups to engage in the seven politically irrational behaviors, I relied on large-*n* studies, citing my own and those of others. Staniland charges that his two cases disconfirm these terrorist tendencies. Case studies offer a number of methodological advantages over large-*n* studies, but generalizing empirical relationships is not considered one of them.[14] This is a particular concern because several of the actions highlighted in his two cases are seen as "exception[s]" that are "contextually specific" and thus "unlikely to be widely replicable."[15]

Fourth, Staniland is mistaken to conclude that none of the seven politically counterproductive tendencies was evident in the Irish or Tamil campaigns. In both cases, his empirical analysis suffers from problems of commission and omission. For reasons of space, I will restrict my analysis to the IRA and its republican affiliates, groups that Staniland claims to know best.[16] I will set aside the demographic studies of their members who were found to be principally motivated by social solidarity and not the political return.[17] Instead, I will focus on the first three politically irrational terrorist group behaviors that I identified, which the Irish case allegedly disconfirms.

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13. Sun-Ki Chai, "An Organizational Economics Theory of Antigovernment Violence," *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 26, No. 1 (October 1993), p. 100.

14. See Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 6.

15. Donald L. Horowitz, "Explaining the Northern Ireland Agreement: The Sources of an Unlikely Constitutional Consensus," *British Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 2002), p. 193; Andrew Reynolds, "A Constitutional Pied Piper: The Northern Irish Good Friday Agreement," *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 114, No. 4 (Winter 1999–2000), p. 617; and Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 72. These quotations refer to the Good Friday agreement and the Tigers' military capabilities, which greatly exceed those of typical groups that have used terrorism.

16. For two excellent accounts of organizational goals trumping political goals in the Tamil campaign, see Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), chap. 3; and Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism,* chap. 4. These accounts detail the Tigers' target selection, offering strong evidence that they did not behave as political maximizers.

17. See, for example, Robert W. White, "Political Violence by the Nonaggrieved," in Donatella della Porta, ed., *International Social Movement Research,* Vol. 4 (Greenwich, Conn.: Jai Press, 1992), p. 92; Robert W. White, "From Peaceful Protest to Guerrilla War: Micromobilization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army," *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 94, No. 6 (May 1989), pp. 1277–1302; and Edgar O'Ballance, *Terror in Ireland: The Heritage of Hate* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1981), p. 138.

Large-*n* studies show that terrorism is an ineffective coercive strategy.[18] Staniland argues that the 1998 Good Friday power-sharing agreement is countervailing evidence. His view of this agreement (or executive) is at odds, however, with that of longtime IRA experts. Louise Richardson explains, "Those who argue, for example, that the establishment of the power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland has rewarded the terrorism of the IRA are quite wrong. The IRA did not wage a terrorist campaign to share power with Protestants in Northern Ireland. . . . The IRA campaign was fought to bring about a united Ireland, which they have not succeeded in achieving."[19] Other IRA experts agree with Richardson that Irish republican terrorism was a political failure. In fact, a recurrent observation in the literature is that the attacks on civilians steeled London's resolve against making territorial concessions.[20]

In addition, large-*n* studies demonstrate that terrorist groups do not tend to use terrorism as a last resort, even when democratic political alternatives exist.[21] Staniland argues that the Irish case is again disconfirming. Yet the Sinn Féin regularly complained that republican terrorist groups were not only "non-electoral" but militantly "anti-electoral."[22] Following the Sunningdale agreement of 1973, Irish Catholics gravitated toward constitutional political parties. And yet the terrorism persisted vigorously for decades.[23] As Richardson points out, "It is surely reasonable to expect that the same [political] result could have been achieved through concerted peaceful political action over the past thirty years and without any significant loss of life."[24] Former IRA members go further, believing that a peaceful democratic strategy would have been politically superior.[25] This was eminently knowable even at the time, in the opinion of many authorities on the subject.[26]

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18. See Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work." In her comprehensive study on how terrorist campaigns end, Audrey Kurth Cronin also finds that terrorism has not paid politically. See Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).
19. Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 75.
20. See, for example, Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State,* 2d ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 163; Rogelio Alonso, "The Modernization in Irish Republican Thinking toward the Utility of Violence," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (January 2001), pp. 136–137, 141; and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "From War to Uneasy Peace in Northern Ireland," in Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen, eds., *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement,* 2d ed. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 51.
21. See Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want," pp. 84–85. For an important related study, see Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict," *International Security,* Vol. 33, No. 1 (Summer 2008), pp. 7–44. See also Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End.*
22. Quoted in Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), pp. 269–270.
23. See Alonso, "The Modernization in Irish Republican Thinking toward the Utility of Violence," p. 135.
24. Richardson, *What Terrorists Want,* p. 17.
25. See, for example, Eamon Collins with Mick McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London: Granta, 1997), p. 4.
26. See, for example, Loren E. Lomasky, "The Political Significance of Terrorism," in R.G. Frey and

Large-*n* studies suggest as well that terrorist groups tend to eschew compromise at the expense of their stated political goals.[27] Staniland maintains that the Irish case disproves this terrorist tendency. Yet a bevy of rejectionist splinter groups emerged after Sunningdale. Most of them developed for social reasons, not political ones.[28] Bruce Hoffman has likened these spoilers to sharks in the water that kept moving for no instrumental purpose other than to remain intact and avert their demise.[29] Irish leaders corroborate Hoffman's account. In an article entitled "The Futile Path of Militarism," the leading republican newspaper explained that "the tactic of armed struggle—rather than the political objective for which it is [supposedly] carried out—has been elevated to a principle."[30] Other authorities have likewise concluded that after Sunningdale, the IRA and its affiliates "ignored the political objective for which they claimed to be struggling and raised military actions to an end in itself."[31]

In sum, the historical record is replete with empirical evidence that Irish republican terrorist groups did not even remotely behave as political maximizers, notwithstanding the widespread belief in the strategic model. These terrorist groups acted in ways that served not to advance their political platform, but to sustain themselves, providing insight into the incentive structure of their leaders.

Hillel Frisch levels two other objections. First, he maintains that the terrorist behaviors that I identified are in fact consistent with the strategic model. As evidence, he purports to show how certain terrorist groups were acting in a politically rational manner by engaging in these seemingly puzzling behaviors for the strategic model. Yet none of his cases exemplify the behavioral tendencies that I described. To demonstrate that it is actually politically rational for terrorist groups with the same political platform to fight each other, Frisch lists several well-known cases of groups with different platforms that have done so. Similarly, to demonstrate that it is actually politically rational for terrorist groups to abruptly alter the entire nature of their political demands, he lists examples of groups that have only minimally "ratchet[ed] down" their original demands. His examples serve to demonstrate only that terrorist groups do not always engage in all of the behavioral tendencies that I enumerated. In highlighting cases that deviate from the puzzling terrorist tendencies, he fails to demonstrate how these puzzles conform to the strategic model.

Frisch's second contention is that whereas some terrorist groups are motivated by the social benefits, others are motivated by the political benefits.[32] He asserts that the

Christopher W. Morris, eds., *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 90.

27. See, for example, Andrew Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence," *International Organization,* Vol. 56, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 263–296. See also Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security,* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Fall 1997), pp. 5–53; and Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End,* p. 19.

28. Richardson, *What Terrorists Want,* p. 211.

29. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 162.

30. "The Futile Path of Militarism," *An Phoblacht,* August 20, 1998, at http://republican-news.org/archive/1998/August20/20pol.html.

31. Ibid.

32. Hillel Frisch, "Correspondence: Politics, Motivation, and Organization in the Study of Terrorism," *International Security,* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Spring 2009), pp. 180–202.

former applies to defunct groups of marginal historical importance, such as the November 17 group and the Popular Forces of 25 April, and that the latter applies to the most dangerous contemporary groups, such as al-Qaida and its affiliates. Frisch does not explain why he believes that such group types exist or how to discern them from each other.

The evidence is accumulating, however, that the terrorist groups of greatest concern to the United States and its allies are not rational political actors. Based on their behavior, al-Qaida and its affiliates do not appear (1) to be motivated by relatively stable and consistent political preferences; (2) to evaluate the expected political payoffs of the available options; or (3) to adopt terrorism because of its superior political return. On the contrary, terrorism is having a deleterious impact on al-Qaida's political platform, and the likelihood of advancing it with terrorism is "close to zero";[33] its leadership opposes elections, even when these would further its given political cause, such as in Iraq;[34] al-Qaida is reflexively averse to politically compromising;[35] it possesses what Jessica Stern has dubbed "protean" political demands, which constantly change to the befuddlement of even its military leadership;[36] al-Qaida attacks are generally anonymous, or at least we suspect this to be so;[37] it targets other Muslim groups even when they share major elements of its political platform;[38] and al-Qaida has resisted disbanding after consistently failing to achieve its policy demands or even when they have become moot for reasons that have nothing to do with terrorism.[39] These are rational behaviors only if the endgame for al-Qaida is to stay intact.

The future poses a natural experiment. Will al-Qaida and its affiliates immediately disband and renounce terrorism now that they have unambiguously failed to advance their political demands? Will their leaders finally embrace the ballot? Will they offer a credible compromise in the interests of achieving at least part of their ever-changing demands? If the Irish case is at all generalizable, do not hold your breath.

—*Max Abrahms*
Palo Alto, California

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33. Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End*, p. xvii.
34. Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want," p. 85.
35. Ashton B. Carter, John Deutch, and Philip Zelikow, "Catastrophic Terrorism: Tackling the New Danger," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 77, No. 6 (November/December 1998), p. 85.
36. Jessica Stern, "The Protean Enemy," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 82, No. 4 (July/August 2003), p. 1. See also Vahid Brown, "Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qaida from 1989–2006," CTC Report (West Point, N.Y.: September 2007), p. 10.
37. See Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 49–51.
38. Ibid., p. 34.
39. See Stern, "The Protean Enemy," p. 14.