Terrorism via Democracy? Assessing Democracy Promotion as a Security Rationale

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Democracy promotion has been a key tenet of U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Cold War and has been utilized to combat political extremism and transitional terrorist violence. This strategy assumes that democratic processes inhere within domestic politics and state institutions that the occurrence of terrorist acts will be less likely. As empirical data and case studies demonstrate, this assumption is misleading at best. A review of the literature concerning correlational studies on transnational terrorism and democracy illustrates that the presence of democracy—especially newly established, weaker democracy—often leads to terrorist violence more easily than authoritarianism where excessive rule of law preempts terrorist groups from organizing and carrying out violent political acts. The cases of India and China are reviewed to demonstrate that social and religious division, multipartyism, and the tendency toward extremism are more accurate predictors of terrorist attacks. Democracy promotion is a worthy strategy and should remain one of the pillars of U.S. foreign policy, but should not be seen as a solution to the problem of transnational terrorism.

American security policy since the end of the Cold War has been broadly yet consistently defined as promoting freedom and democracy abroad in order to expand the scope of basic human rights and also to ensure American strategic and economic interests. Promoting democracy has been particularly associated with the fight against terrorism and other forms of political extremism post-9/11. On March 8, 2005, in a speech to the National Defense University, President George W. Bush declared that establishing open, democratic societies is the main component in solving societal grievances that find irrevocable expression in violent terrorist acts:

Our strategy to keep the peace in the longer term is to help change the conditions that give rise to extremism and terror, especially in the broader Middle East. Parts of that region have been caught for generations in a cycle of tyranny and despair and radicalism. When a dictatorship controls the political life of a country, responsible opposition cannot develop, and dissent is driven underground and toward the extreme…It should be clear that the best antidote to radicalism and terror is the tolerance and hope kindled in free societies. And our duty is now clear: For the sake of our long-term security, all free nations must stand with the forces of democracy and justice that have begun to transform the Middle East (CNN International, 2005).

Candidates in the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign seem to echo this approach. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) stated, “The promotion of democracy and freedom is simply inseparable from the long term security of the United States” and “where repression rules, the lack of political participation and economic opportunity engenders despair and even extremism in the hearts of some” (2005). While not as explicit or consequential, President (then Senator) Barack Obama has demonstrated that democracy promotion must be an integral element in one’s foreign policy doctrine, specifically towards the Middle East and in fighting terrorism (Obama, 2007). In addition, these arguments are similar to ones used by John Kerry (D-MA) during the 2004 presidential campaign, by Martin Indyk, a senior Middle East policymaker for President Bill Clinton, and Morton Halperin, who was the director of policy planning in the State Department during the Clinton administration (Gause, 2005).1 The policy of democracy pro-

1 It should be noted that not all policymakers within the Clinton administration now agree that democracy promotion is effective in preventing terrorism. Ex-Secretary of State Madeline Albright recently wrote, “…we should keep a rein on our expectations. Bush has said that America ‘has a calling from beyond the stars’ to proclaim liberty throughout the world. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice argues that the democratic transformation of the Middle East is the only way to guarantee that men do not fly airplanes into buildings. Such rhetoric is overblown. Just because the denial of political freedom is bad, that doesn’t mean that the exercise of freedom will always be to our liking. Democracy is a form of government; it is not a ticket to some heavenly kingdom where all evil is vanquished and everyone agrees with us” (Albright, 2006).
motion has been an across-the-board bipartisan policy since the end of the Cold War and will most likely continue.

As has been previously argued, exporting democracy to the Middle East and other politically troubled areas has been a fruitful rhetorical strategy by U.S. leadership and while it certainly has much value in most cases regarding the constructive conversion of basic human rights structures, the security rationale for democracy promotion in the Middle East and elsewhere is based on an unsound premise (Gause, 2005). The empirical data demonstrate that political regime types and frequency of transnational terrorist acts are correlational, but vary from what American political sentiment would seemingly dictate. Terrorist acts are more likely to occur in new, recently established—but often stable—democratic societies than any other political system. This is acutely so in countries experiencing regime transformation from authoritarian to democratic rule (Weinberg and Eubank, 1998; Piazza, 2008; Eyerman, 1998).

The purpose of this essay is to help illuminate the quantitative analyses establishing the relationship between democracy and terrorism with a qualitative examination of factors contributing to terrorism cycles in Indian democracy and relative absence of terrorist activity in authoritarian China. India is a liberal democracy, yet experiences regular transnational terrorist activity within and on its borders while China, an undemocratic state, encounters very little terrorist violence. By analyzing the internal dynamics of Indian and Chinese politics and their democratic and undemocratic nature respectively, I conclude the policy of democracy promotion is too simple and ineffective a policy and that terrorism is not solved through the forced implementation of democratic institutions and norms in the western sense.

Using series of multiple regression analyses on terrorist occurrences and fatalities in ninety-six countries from 1986 to 2002, James Piazza (2006) determines weak economic development as an imperfect explanation for transnational terrorism and identifies ethnic and religious diversity, population characteristics, enhanced state suppression, and the dynamics of party politics as more accurate indicators of transnational terrorism’s capability of flourishing within a state. Fortunately, the “political opportunities” literature or so-called “social cleavage theory” illuminates the Chinese and Indian cases and gives U.S. policy-makers stronger causal links on which to focus.

THE LITERATURE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND TERRORISM

Two main schools of thought have emerged concerning the relationship of democratic countries and transnational terrorist acts. The strategic school argues that within democratic countries societal and economic costs are dramatically amplified so terrorist acts are more likely to be committed. They are “soft targets” because they are limited in the actions they can take against terrorists as a result of adherence to civil liberties. The contrary position of political access attempts to demonstrate that democracies present significant opportunities for non-violent political positions to be expressed. Both are consistent with rational choice theory, in that terrorists make calculated decisions based on costs and benefits and they respond to various perceptible incentives (Eyerman, 1998). The greater part of the literature on the relationship between transnational terrorism and regime types consists of theoretical interpretations of events data.

In their analyses of terrorist attacks occurring during the 1980s and 90s, William Eubank and Leonard Weinberg (1994) initially demonstrated that terrorist groups hail less often from non-democratic countries than from democratic ones. Todd Sandler (1995) replied with a methodological challenge that the frequency of terrorist groups is not enough to characterize democratic states as more likely to breed terrorist activity. Using international terrorism events data from the RAND-St. Andrew Chronology of International Terrorism and the U.S. State Department, Eubank and Weinberg responded (Li, 2005) with their findings that while democracies tend to educe nonviolent means for resolving political differences, terrorist attacks still occur more often in democratic countries (1998). They also found that transnational terrorism cases occurred more often in states experiencing regime change. Following-up on their work, Joe Eyerman (1998) employed a multivariate negative binomial regression using the ITERATE (International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events) database and determined that established democracies experience terrorist acts less frequently than do non-democratic states, and (more importantly) discovered a strong relationship between terrorist activity and new democracies. In looking at location and nationality of both the victim and person responsible using ITERATE data, Eubank and Weinberg (2001) later found that terrorist acts tend to be committed by members towards other members of the same nationality and most often in stable democratic states.

Interpretations of the data demonstrate that although there is contradictory evidence and varying emphases given to explain the linkage between terrorist activity and democracy, most of the empirical evidence seems to indicate that democracy encourages transnational terrorism. However, as Quan Li (2005) suggests, there are complicating factors that have not been accounted for on both the theoretical and empirical levels. First, there is an assumed positive effect of civil liberties on transnational terrorism, yet, in order to account for variation across democratic states, a more accurate indicator needs to be established. Li identifies this as institutional constraints on government. He further argues that instead of looking solely at aggregate indicators of regime type—as most empirical analyses do—scholars should isolate the primary contributing factors within democracies instead of consolidating the various elements and declaring the combined product a solitary causal mechanism. Li specifically crit-
izes the Eubank and Weinberg analyses for failing to account for economic development and income inequality within democratic states as contributing to the decision calculus of terrorist groups. Ultimately, the restraints placed on executives in liberal democracies seem to encourage terrorist activity (2005).

Focusing on the Middle East—and contributing to the assessment of Li—Gregory Gause (2005a) demonstrates that terrorism originates from causes more precise and nuanced than regime type. Evidence for democracy promotion in the Middle East as an American security rationale fails under close scrutiny, as “soft support” for terrorist organizations would most likely maintain even with the imposition of—or transition into—democracy. Gause (2005) argues further that public opinion in Middle Eastern countries favors a type of democracy more akin to principles and organizational characteristics consistent with Islamic principles, quite dissimilar to the secular political atmosphere and liberal-mindedness of the West. As elections in the Gaza Strip in 2006 demonstrate (Herzog, 2006), along with the strong showing of conservative and hard-liner Islamists in the Iranian elections (Peterson, 2008) and also recent political arrangements in Lebanon (Salem, 2008), there is very little strategic incentive for the U.S. to uphold its current democracy initiative as a solution to international terrorism. As Gause (2005) points out, a more effective approach would consist of bolstering liberal, secular, and nationalist organizations and individuals within Islamic countries that could genuinely counterbalance the recent gains of religious-extremists in the broader Middle East. Only then could the United States bring about domestic political reforms within Islamic states that are more in line with its own policies and perspectives.2

Focusing more specifically on the question of whether democracy promotion is an efficient U.S. foreign policy aim—in other words, if it actually accomplishes the stated goal of ameliorating the terrorist threat within the Middle East and without—Jennifer Windsor (2003) of Freedom House looks at post-September 11 initiatives that, if done correctly, have the potential of solving the terrorism problem in the Middle East. She argues the Middle East not only faces widespread economic crises, but also mass authoritarian rule. As evidence she cites the Freedom House annual survey of freedom, which characterizes 13 of the 18 countries in the Middle East as “not free” and 4 of the other 5 as only “partly free.” However, she acknowledges that the process of democratization—particularly if enacted by an outside military force—often generates conflict and tension within the targeted state, leading to increased violence, repression, and terrorist activity.

Finally, analyzing U.S. State department data in 152 countries from 1986 to 2003, James Piazza (2006) narrows the empirical literature more and finds that while democracy and economic openness are not adequate indicators of transnational terrorism, there is a statistically significant correlation when looking at failed states and their contributions to terrorist activity. Attacking American Enterprise Institute scholar Joshua Muravchik’s article in the Weekly Standard in 2001 prior to the invasion of Iraq, Piazza criticizes his ipso facto assessment that the prevalence of authoritarian rulers in the Middle East who govern in a repressive manner constitutes grounds for democracy promotion in the region (Muravchik, 2001). Instead, there is more support for the small body of qualitative literature demonstrating the connection between the existence of failed states and terrorist activity. Failed or failing states: 1) provide home bases of broad territory from which terrorists can more easily operate (Somalia, Indonesia, Chechnya, Bosnia, Lebanon, and Kosovo); 2) are seedbeds of economic underperformance; 3) contain authoritarian rulers more likely to put up with terrorists in exchange for political and economic support; and 4) provide terrorists with proper documentation (passport, visas, etc.) due to their nominal sovereignty status (Takeyh, and Gvosdev, 2002; Piazza, 2008).

As the bulk of the qualitative and quantitative literature demonstrates, democracy promotion is not a viable or realistic solution to the problem of transnational terrorism. The policy of democracy promotion has led to a dramatic increase of terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, further bolstered regimes more sympathetic to terrorists’ sentiments, and given ample propaganda to terrorist organizations—particularly in their recruitment efforts. This is not to say that democracy—with its numerous and broad components—is ill-equipped to defeat terrorism, nor that democracy promotion is a shortsighted policy. The (non-military) promotion of democracy has aided the security and wealth of the United States since World War II and has drastically contributed to the explosion of democracies across the globe. Still, the policy should not be pursued as a solution to transnational terrorist violence and extremism.

In order to establish that democracy often encourages terrorism and that traditional U.S. policy is shortsighted, I look at two case studies to further the above quantitative argument. I do a qualitative analysis of India, an established, “free” country, and China, a “not free” country to establish that it is not the presence of democracy that limits terrorist acts, but that the lack of terrorism within a country is more likely attributed to other variables—such as rule of law or level of religious extremism. This should fundamentally alter the policy of democracy promotion as exhibited by American political leaders since the end of the Cold War.

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1 As an “anecdotal” point, Gause demonstrates that a number of vicious terrorist organizations originated in democratic countries: the Red Brigades in Italy, the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Ireland and the UK, the Japanese Red Army in Japan, and the Red Army Faction (Baader-Meinhof Gang) in West Germany. Other terrorist groups that maintained even after democratic transition of the specified countries are the Basque separatists in Spain and terrorists or terrorist groups in Turkey, Israel, the UK, and the US (Gause, 2005b).
THE CASE OF INDIA

INDIAN PLURALIST DEMOCRACY

India is characterized as a “mature democracy” and has had generally free elections from the establishment of its independence in 1947. It maintains an independent judiciary; a free press, and free exercise of religion (although this has often been the source or cause of terrorist violence). Women and ethnic and religious minorities are represented in local and national government and enjoy many protections codified into the law (Freedom House, 2007). As one of the most culturally diverse countries in South Asia, India “has been remarkably successful in accommodating cultural diversity and managing ethnic conflict through democratic institutions” (Hardgrave, 1993).

Gandhi can be given some credit for his counter-communalism approach to politics where he attempted to institutionalize respect in the government for all religions by including various aspects of other religions (besides Hinduism) in his own public worship. He sought a “healthy balance between religious beliefs and conscience on the one hand and the demands of the modern society on the other” (Sahay, 1986; Malik and Vajpeyi, 1989). However, it was not until Nehru secularism that India became a truly democratic and pluralistic society.

India embraced liberal, democratic institutions despite sub-national community loyalties, which ended up dividing the country along religious and communal lines. Nehru instituted the necessary democratic processes to accommodate the numerous religious and ethnic factions, but failed to realize that deep seated religious and ethnic animosities present in the population would not go away (Malik and Vajpeyi, 1989).

The success of Indian democracy is profound. The country is unevenly industrialized and developed and is one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world. A healthy balance has been struck in terms of power centralization and decentralization with the elites maintaining a hold on issues important to them, but with ample middle class approval and participation. India has experienced five decades of successful elections where all political offices are challenged and all adults are eligible to vote (Kohli, 2001). There have been widespread political and economic reforms since the early 1990s with the Indian government moving away from central planning and interventionism to a more market-based approach under a regulatory structure. What once was a dominant party system and majority rule has been replaced by a multiparty system with minorities forming coalitions and contesting majority held seats. As India has turned into a regulatory state—versus an interventionist one—power has shifted from parliament to the president, legislature, the electoral commission, and the Supreme Court (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2001). This leaves little room to contest the authenticity of Indian democracy. However, the complexities of Indian democracy also serve to illustrate how terrorism is able to flourish despite ethnic minorities (and majorities) having increasing access to governmental reforms and processes.

THE INDIAN TERRORISM PROBLEM

Terrorism is by no means relegated exclusively to the Middle East. In fact, in 2003, India accounted fully for 75% of terrorist incidents in “free” countries. The attacks were considered transnational, as many of the terrorists originated in and operated out of Pakistan, a “not free” country. Forty-one percent of terrorist attacks within India occurred in Jammu and Kashmir, where a territorial proxy war with Pakistan continues (SATP, 2007). Yet, a substantial amount occurred far from the India-Pakistan border and the Kashmir region, demonstrating that transnational terrorism pouring out of Pakistan is not the only face of terrorist activity, but is also found more locally within India (Gause, 2005). Twenty-seven percent of terrorist incidents occurred in the “Naxalite” states and 23% in the Northeast. Since 1989, more than 40,000 people have lost their lives due to transnational terrorism within India (SATP, 2007), and in 2007—factoring Iraq and Afghanistan out of total deaths caused by terrorism—India accounted for 1,093 of 7,113 or 15% of total global deaths within its borders, more than any other country besides Pakistan (National Counterterrorism Center, 2008).

The most prominent terrorist organizations within India consist of 1) violent extremists residing in Jammu and Kashmir—organizations such as Harakat ul-Mujahideen (“Islamic Freedom Fighters’ Group”), Jaish-e-Muhammad (“Army of Muhammad”), Lashkar-e-Taiba (“Army of the Pure”), and various offshoots of these operate in and around the Pakistan-India-Kashmir area (Council on Foreign Relations, 2006a); 2) Maoists in eastern, southern, and central India—the so-called “Naxalite belt”—which consist of revolutionary communists, of which around 10,000 members are armed militias conducting a low-intensity insurgency within India (Human Rights Watch, 2006); and 3) ethno-linguistic nationalists in the northeastern states, formerly part of what is now Bangladesh, consisting of militant groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam which targets politicians and infrastructure in order to reduce government influence due to neglect in the region (U.S. Department of State, 2006; Council on Foreign Relations, 2006b).

Fatalities due to terrorism have decreased since 2002 in Jammu and Kashmir, yet this still amounts to around 100 deaths per month. Pakistan’s failure to ferret out terrorist organizations within its borders has contributed to most of the violence in this region, although they have made steps to dismantle their proxy-war with India on the border. Terrorism continues in this region despite an ongoing dialogue—termed the Composite Dialogue—between India and Pakistan that consists of confidence-building measures, such as increased communicational links. However, these measures have not sufficiently contributed to any significant decrease in terrorist acts (SATP, 2007). Any decline in terrorist violence is main-
ly due to increased policing efforts and localized resistance, and even support for opposition groups by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (National Counterterrorism Center, 2007), previously at odds with Indian counterterrorism efforts.

The Northeast has improved slightly in the last few years with total deaths decreasing from 715 insurgent/terrorist related deaths in 2005 to 627 killings in 2006. Tripura, one of the states in the region, has shown the most marked improvements—down 75 deaths from 2005-2006. This is due to a more perfected counter-insurgency strategy implemented in the region by Indian Police Forces. This advances despite continued Bangladeshi territorial and moral support to various militant groups. The state of Assam has seen an increase in the number of security forces and drop in terrorist violence like Tripura. However, the United Liberation Front of Asom receives sustained support from Bangladesh so still maintains a stronghold in the state. In contrast with Tripura and Assam, about 45 percent of fatalities in the Northeast occur in Manipur, primarily due to a weaker legal system and endemic instability. The primary variables differentiating Tripura and Assam and their recent successes from the increasingly violent state of Manipur is Indian legitimacy and rule of law (SATP, 2007).

Left-wing extremism—or naxalism—constitutes what Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called the “single biggest internal security challenge” facing the country of India (Rediff, 2006). The Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) carry out attacks on security forces and government symbols that amount to 27 percent of terrorist violence in India and are concentrated over the bulk of the country. CPI-Maoist primarily operates out of Chhattisgarh, which has become the most violent state after Jammu and Kashmir. However, while terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir decreases, CPI-Maoist spreads further across the state and garners an increasing share of terrorist acts (SATP, 2007).

While CPI-Maoist violence swells in Chhattisgarh, there has been a significant decline in Andhra Pradesh, a former bastion of communist-related terrorism. Police forces have increasingly demonstrated success in Andhra Pradesh, partly due to government interest in buttressing security engagements in the state. The local police, assisted by the armed reserve forces and the Grey Hounds (Strategic Comments, 2006), with a capable intelligence network, have curbed Naxalite terrorism and driven the leadership underground and into hiding (SATP, 2007).

In their study of the Naxalite insurgency in India, Pratul Ahuja and Rajat Ganguly (2007) characterize the violence as a response to exploitation and inequality lasting for centuries. Socio-economic conditions have changed relatively little and the “law and order” approach by the government has failed to bring about any lasting solution and has not addressed the primary grievances. This study points to the government as failing to respond in an effective way to communist grievances, but fails to mention the innumerable political and economic avenues open to this segment of Indian society. The economic argument that poverty breeds terrorism is an imperfect one, as evidenced by Al-Qaeda's leadership today, but even if poverty had a direct causal link to terrorist activity (which has not been substantiated), economic freedom is not the same as political autonomy and they do not necessarily correlate well (Sirowy and Inkeles, 1990). Because the Indian government fails to bring segments of its population out of poverty does not mean civil liberties are curbed or frustrated.

The Indian government has made considerable democratic efforts to bring militant organizations to the negotiating table to redress grievances and get to the bottom of the conflicts. They have even done this to the extent that government leverage is disappearing and Indian leaders are in a state of negotiating paralysis. As a result, Indian officials are unable to identify a coherent policy to fight transnational terrorism within their borders. Importantly, democratic processes are in place for militants to solve their problems peacefully without resorting to violence (SATP, 2007), yet the existence of a strong democracy is not sufficient to solve the proliferation of terrorist activity within India and on its borders.

**CHINA**

**Chinese Autocracy**

While Indian democracy holds as one of its main precepts rule of law, China's political climate has been more rule by law. There are many contributing factors to this dynamic. Culturally, the Chinese have lived for a long time with the elitist Confucian tradition that political rulers are a “symbol of virtue and morality” and so maintain superiority over the public. Within this context, individuals are required to submit to the established rules and norms and not question Chinese methods. Even Chinese translations of the word democracy mean "to make decisions for people." The laws were meant to be for the good of the people and made by political rulers, not through democratic processes. There are parallels with communist ideology in that political elites look for the economic and social welfare of the people and thus should not be questioned (Yongnian, 2000b). The state is absolute.

Organizationally, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) controls the functions of the state, and therefore, the laws of the state. Even though the National People’s Congress (NPC) retains the right to overturn or alter any laws passed that are different from those ratified by the NPC, they have never modified any laws or rules passed by the Party. This is a testament to the power of the Politburo and the inability of other political factions to check its power (Yongnian, 2000b). The problem of reform lies in the inconsistency of Chinese political practices and the state of its legal structure (Ping, 1995).

In focusing on power succession, Deng Xiaoping was not interested in democratic processes, but wanted to institution-
alize power succession. This is based on rules and methods followed by established power bases within the Communist party. Important aspects of power transition consist of “restructuring ideology, recruiting new types of elite into the leadership, building political ‘exit’ for aging leaders, and grooming the core of the future generation of leadership” (Yongnian, 2000a). The political environment in China leaves little room for democratic processes, especially when looking at elite bargaining and ideological power bases.

In addition to the CCP controlling the bulk of political power in China, party members hold most of the senior government positions and are also in command of police and military positions. They stress stability and social order over civil freedoms and expressions of opposition. There is not a semblance of independence in their judiciary even thought the constitution allows for it. The policies put forth by the Ministries of State Security and Public Security—and also the Peoples Armed Police and the People’s Liberation Army—bear resemblance to a police state in some cases, but mainly allow for excessive violations of human rights (U.S. Department of State, 2002).

The government’s human rights record is quite poor and the central leadership continues to suppress religious, political, and social groups that are deemed threats to the stability of the nation. In particular, their attacks on religious groups were striking. These included concentrated efforts on unregistered Protestant and Catholic groups, the Muslim Uyghurs, and Tibetan Buddhists. The government continued its restrictions on assembly and press freedoms and mass discrimination based on religious, ethnic, gender and social affiliations (U.S. Department of State, 2002). These violations are important to note, chiefly to address the claims by U.S. officials that an increase in democracy leads to a reduction in terrorist violence. The China case exhibits some prime instances where, if the democracy argument held true, there would be an attendant increase in transnational terrorism wherever political repression occurs. The democracy promoter’s claim that the “peaceful reconciliation of grievances and providing channels for participation in policymaking...can help to address [the] underlying conditions that have fueled the recent rise of...extremism” (Windsor, 2003) is inapplicable to the repressive political situation in China and the concomitant lack of terrorist activity.

When comparing China with India, if the claim that terrorism has a negative correlation with democracy is true, India should be better equipped to deal with political grievances as they arise. India’s democracy has been institutionalized for decades, similar to the British model of democracy. The institutions might be disorganized, but they are stable and have integrated checks and balances. China on the other hand, is resistant to change due to a very centralized political system (Sally, 2007). With its stronger democratic institutions and open society, India should be better able to provide pathways to conflict resolution, but the Chinese are more capable as demonstrated by the empirical evidence.

THE AL-QUEDA GHOST IN CHINA

The policy of democracy promotion—particularly the economic and political costs associated with it—appears quite foolish when looking at unsuccessful attempts by Al-Qaeda to support Muslim extremists in China. China has significantly limited popular support for terrorist organizations despite arguments of the Muslim Uyghurs that China is an occupying government. In Xinjiang, Uyghurs—a Turkic ethnic group consisting primarily of Muslims—are faced with the realization that any attempts to remedy political injustices with violence will only bring further repression to the area, not only for them but for the entire region (Wayne, 2007a). Al-Qaeda had apparently trained over 1,000 Uyghurs in Afghanistan before September 11, 2001. Ayman al-Zawahiri had called for these Uyghurs to take action against China. Yet many feel violent resistance is not a realistic way to express or fix their many political frustrations. Moreover, the Chinese have been successful at thwarting terrorist plots within their country (CNN International, 2008) and instead of keeping it secretive as they have in the past, they are currently advertising their efforts and accomplishments (Wayne, 2007b).

In comparing India with China, there is little evidence pointing to the validity of democracy promotion as a solution to the problem of terrorism. In “Patterns of Global Terrorism” from 2000-03, there are 203 international terrorist attacks in India recorded versus zero in China. From 1976 to 2004, 400 incidents occurred in India with only 18 in China. As Gregory Gause (2005) points out, even if China is underreporting and the number increases ten times, it still pales in comparison to the number of transnational terrorist incidents occurring in India.

In response to the growing insurgency in Xinjiang, China took effective action early and vehemently to avert a crisis from erupting. This insurgency had been compared previously to Chechnya and Kosovo, but it now has more parallels with Afghanistan and Iraq. It has faced cross-border terrorism from “religious extremism, separatism, and terrorism.” Although the Uyghurs once dominated their autonomous province of Xinjiang, they now are a minority due to increased numbers of Chinese moving into the area. With a massive enhancement in Chinese use of force and repressive strategies, the Uyghur movement peaked in the mid-1990s (Wayne, 2007b). In fact, Chinese responses to terrorism are often repressive to the point that human rights organizations have criticized China for using the popularity of counterterrorism to completely subjugate Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

In January of 2008, Chinese police raided a suspected terrorist camp run by the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, killed 18 people and arrested 17 others (Department of State, 2008). Importantly, there has been relatively little anti-state violence since 1998 and since the 1997 Urumqi bus bombings allegedly by the Uyghur terrorists, there have been no civilians targeted (Millward, 2004). This is most likely attributable to the successful attempts of Chinese officials to counter any terrorist strategies. The incentives to terrorize are absent
from China, even without the presence of democratic policies, institutions, and practices.

**Pinpointing the Causes of Terrorism**

Employing “social cleavage theory” (Powell Jr., 1976) to explain transnational terrorist incidents indicates that the causes of terrorism are based on social and cultural division in sociopolitical organizations like party structures. Ethnic and religiously diverse states—infused with significant and complicated multiparty systems—tend to produce terrorist violence more often than culturally and religiously homogenous states with little or no party affiliation. The former are weak party systems because they are plagued by socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and often regional stratification. This drives the various groups into small national parties that tend toward extremism and anti-establishment. The latter tend to be majority party systems with (usually) two moderate, center-leaning parties with internal diversity, but external similarity. These dynamics that push parties toward the center allow flexibility and adaptation to diverse segments of a population without solely catering to an ideologically-driven minority (Piazza, 2006).

The above literature identifies three measures that will elucidate the Indian and Chinese cases beyond looking at the ubiquity and ambiguity of democracy promotion to deter terrorist acts or the indirect links between socioeconomic factors and causes of terrorist violence. These indicators are: 1) sharp social, religious, and linguistic divisions; 2) a large and complex multiparty national government; and 3) the existence of parties that tend toward extremism and put pressure on the ruling authority. Only a short analysis of the two cases is necessary to establish the usefulness of these measures in determining the causes of transnational terrorism and how they compare with the presence of democracy as an explanatory variable. It is not within the scope of this essay to develop a theoretical model of the sources of transnational terrorism. The purpose here is to give a few consistent variables that contribute to the presence of terrorism and can be easily identified and measured, and then generalized across cases.

**India**

As noted above, India is one of the most culturally diverse countries in South Asia and is comprised of numerous ethnic factions and political parties. It maintains significant caste and religious rifts and is divided in many cases according to region and language. Although Hindi is the official and dominant language, only around 30 percent of the total population speaks it as a first language and its use is consigned to the northern part of the country (Piazza, 2006). These social and religious fissures play out detrimentally on the level of national government.

India’s lower house of parliament—Lok Sabha—had thirty-eight different parties from 1999-2004. The governing party of Bharatiya Janaata (BJP) only constituted 23.7% of total seats during this time with a tenuous hold on power working with nine other coalition partners. Within the legislature, the BJP obtained power in the early 1990s by aligning with the Shiv Sena Party—a radical Hindu-nationalist group—and a Sikh religious party made up of an unpredictable, loose-knit collection of regionalist parties. This uncertain political party structure defined largely along religious and ethnic lines demonstrates the precariousness of the Indian political situation and contributes to the persistence of tensions among the various groups.

**China**

China offers a striking contrast to the largely diverse social and religious circumstance in India. It is governed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which allows little or no opposition and has complete military control over all the provinces. The ruling structure allows for a unicameral legislative branch—the National People’s Congress—that according to China’s 1982 constitution is supposed to be the most powerful organ of the state, but really acts at all times at the behest of the Party and Politburo (BBC News, 2009). Other political opposition groups like the China Democracy Party and Falungong spiritual movement have been branded as dissident organizations. The Han Chinese comprise over 90 percent of the Chinese population (CIA Factbook: China, 2009) leaving much smaller groups like the Zhuang and Uyghur populations bereft of influence and power in this virtually homogenous political and social environment.

China has a somewhat diverse religious climate where practice is manifested mainly in the form of adherence to customs and traditional beliefs. However, these practices are limited by the invasive and prevailing atheistic political orthodoxy structured by the ruling Socialist establishment. Much of peoples’ religious practices are derived from mixtures of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. This “religious pluralism” differs from the more combative atmosphere in the Middle East (or South Asia) primarily because it is practiced by the same people with the similar ideals of “harmony” and “unity” (Xie, 2006).

Although China has experienced significant growth resulting from the implementation of certain free-market policies and also partial decentralization due to marginally increased political transparency, the CCP has limited “the tide of freedom and democracy sweeping the globe” noting the sudden collapse of the Soviet state and the ensuing anarchy that elicited an unstable political and economic environment (Mahbubani, 2005). This likely had the effect in China of curbing any potential resort to the type of political extremism that follows massive social and economic upheaval.

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CONCLUSION

The cases of democratic India and authoritarian China demonstrate that democracy does not reduce the enticements to commit terrorist acts. In many cases, terrorist organizations find it fruitful to take advantage of lax security policies and open political avenues present in most democratic countries. The strong democratic institutions and civil liberties in India pave the way for frustrated ethnic and political communities to strengthen associations and pursue their goals of political violence in a relatively laissez-faire security environment. The Indian government provides ample opportunity for grievances to be expressed and pursues outreach programs to facilitate increased government participation for traditionally isolated groups. Yet the ethnic and religious heterogeneity of India coupled with historical rivalries and disputed borders supplies the setting for terrorism to flourish.

China has very limited possibilities for its citizens to express political opposition or rectify injustices. Although the Uyghurs have often used terrorism as a way to counter the imposition of Chinese rule in Xinjiang, they now face stiff opposition from the local communities in which they live and increased fears that any sign of extremism results in an infusion of police forces and accompanying oppressive governmental policies. In China, there are strong disincentives to commit terrorist aggression, even when the avenues for peaceful expression are relatively closed. A relatively homogenous society and culture combined with “rule by law” policies and controlled subjugation play a large part in the dwindling levels of transnational terrorism within Chinese borders and the inability of terrorism as a method of political expression to take root as it has in India.

The contrasts between India and China drawn here should give pause to U.S. policymakers when considering the consequences of promoting democracy in the fight against terrorism. This is not a fix-all policy even though it sounds nice rhetorically. There have been tremendous costs in the loss of lives due to increased terrorist violence in the world as a result of the war on terrorism and the promotion of democracy using the U.S. military. The broad strategy of expanding democracy should be given priority as a long-term posture of the U.S., but not as a solution to the problem of terrorism. Countries more prone to terrorist violence due to ongoing historical rivalries and ethnic conflict are not going to see noticeable reductions in terrorist violence with the institution of democratic processes. These policies are already available in many countries that still witness transnational terrorist acts on a regular basis. What are left to policymakers are rigorous and nuanced assessments of contextual causes of terrorism without relying on vague notions as comprehensive fixes to global problems.

REFERENCES


