

A Spiral View of Terrorism

by Dr. Don Beck and Chris Cowan

© 1996 National Values Center, Inc.

Introduction

The diversity and complexity of views expressed over the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and its aftermath have now reached Tower of Babel-like proportions. Even with the conviction of Timothy McVeigh and the upcoming trial of his accused accomplice, Terry Nichols, there is great confusion over how people can find reasons for such seemingly illogical acts. A suspect in the bombing of the US barracks in Saudia Arabia has been located and a man suspected of the shootings near CIA headquarters is in custody. There has at least been some resolution of the World Trade Center incident. In light of these highly publicized events, many Americans are quite willing to surrender individual rights and be searched, screened, and scrutinized on the promise of greater security against a perceived terrorist threat. Others perceive a government over-reaching its authority and justify their well-armed paranoia on the grounds of black helicopters and intrusive one-worlde's.

It seems that all of our respective -ism's, ideologies, grudges, and guilt have surfaced around the terrorism issue. Charges of political opportunism and inflammatory hate-talk fill the airwaves. Individuals and groups are stereotyped with broad brushstrokes across the political landscape. "Us" versus "Them" polarities deepen and pull further apart. Amateur psychologists have a field day assigning blame and projecting motives. The murderous OKC blast continues to send its toxic shock waves through our fragile and vulnerable society. They resonate off other incidents equally terrible for those involved. Certainly the matter of terrorism has stripped away the surface to allow us to examine some of the deeper cultural forces that have been building since the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the simpler bipolar world it represented.

A Search for Patterns

Let us suppose we could collect and assemble everything that has been thought, written, or said on these horrible events. We would then enter every bit, byte, and scene into a super powerful computer, one that could track dynamic perceptual processes and detect deep, underlying mindset-motives. What might we actually find in this computer search? Is there any order to be found in this chaos? Is there a pathway through the carnage?

This brief analysis will open windows onto two such patterns. The first is **horizontal** in that it examines the lens through which we are trying to make sense out of this tragedy. It reflects the manner in which different positions on the traditional political "left" versus "right," "liberal versus conservative," spectrum interact with each other. This will explain the repositioning of people and ideas into new alliances and enemy-making as they form and reform along the sliding continuum. This *assimilation-contrast* effect, as it is called in academic circles, becomes dangerous when it keeps us from focusing like a laser beam on serious conditions. The same principles apply to thinking about any ego-involving thing, whether politics, religion, lifestyle choices, abortion, territory, or family values.

The other window opens a **vertical** slice through five psycho-social levels in the human strata. Just as the Federal Building housed different functions on different floors, we will uncover worlds of diverse thinking below the terrorism breeding grounds and scan a range of motives and behaviors that operate at each level in societal emergence. Anti-terrorism campaigns designed for one level will be ineffective against the "viruses" that are multiplying on other levels. Counter measures which defuse one threat will, if not carefully managed, actually nourish another which lives in a different stratum.

The kind of analysis summarized here could well form the foundation for the crafting of a "full-court press" strategy to deal with this growing and deadly menace. It is vital to begin dealing with both the **horizontal** and the less recognized **vertical** aspects of this multidimensional problem, now.

Push-Pull Dynamics on the Horizontal Continuum

President Clinton's attack on "hate talk" right after the bombing triggered a feeding frenzy among what are called "conservative" talk show hosts and political interests. This blinding media-enhanced thunderstorm diverted us from the real issues regarding terrorism, just as our focus is shifted to side-issues on almost every other problem we are trying to solve from youth gangs to welfare reform. There are **horizontal** forces at work.

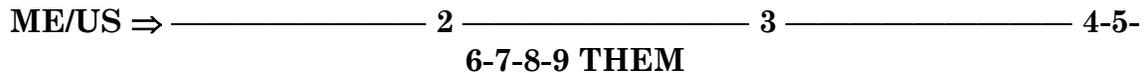
Think of a political spectrum with nine hypothetical positions:

Radical	Principled	Pragmatic	Tilted	Middle	Tilted	Pragmatic	Principled	Radical
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
left wing		moderate		neutral		moderate		right wing

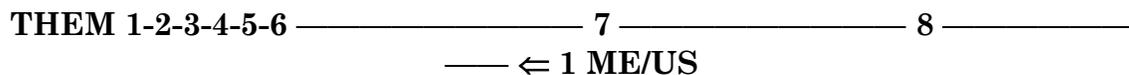
Because of their different **horizontal** windows, not every person on this continuum will be able to separate out the different shades, gradations, or degrees. Two kinds of distortions occur. First, if a position on the 1-9 scale is close to "my own" on the same scale, I may deny the differences and *assimilate* it as equivalent to my own. Thus, we have the formation of political alliances that deny differences among the various wings of a party as they attempt to unite and speak with one voice. One could see that today in the Republican Party as it tried to rally behind (and then abandoned) the Contract with America or in the briefly civil Congress after the Hershey civility summit. Often, these entities make for strange bedfellows while the differences are ignored and they pull together in common cause.



Second, under other conditions, a person will push the other position away from his or her own, thus shoving it further into the camp of the enemy. "You" may think we are singing from the same page, but "I" conclude that you are one of "them" because we sing slightly different notes. This is known as the *contrast* effect. For example, someone at position one sees...



...or, from the other pole, someone at position nine sees...



In the former case, the "extreme" left-wing position was unable to recognize the positions within its own wing but, instead, will displace or contrast them into the camp of the enemy. The person will be unable to "see" any differences among positions 4 through 9. Thus it is that "Uncle Tom's" have sold out and former friends become traitors as the "either you are FOR me or you are AGAINST me" sentiment sets in.

In the second illustration, this same process works in the opposite direction as extreme right-wing positions push the more "moderate" right-wing positions across the neutral line into left-wing persuasions. Extreme positions on both wings, as a result, are unable to differentiate ideas and projects, but will continue to define them as part and parcel of extreme thinking on the other side.

Thus, President Clinton will be seen as a "flaming liberal" in the minds of right-wing positions 8 and 9 since they will be unable to see the differences

among positions 1 through 6. Rush Limbaugh will be seen as a "fire-breathing reactionary" by positions 1 and 2 who will bunch 5 through 9 into a single rejected group. (Interestingly enough, Limbaugh was accused of supporting "one world government" by extreme positions 8-9, thus pushing him across the neutral line into the "left wing" with the President.) Clearly, Mr. Clinton's "hate talk" condemnation, apparently targeted at extreme 9 position rhetoric, was interpreted to be "a broad brush" that also tarred 6 and 7. From a research standpoint, how a person defines all the positions on the continuum will reveal that person's own position on the same scale.

Our point, here, is that it has become difficult to develop "non-partisan" solutions to complex problems because every proposal has to run the gauntlet through this distorting *assimilation-contrast* effect. This has been the case in many Palestinian/Israeli conflicts (as well as recent splits within Israel) and a historic pattern in Northern Ireland. This is certainly the case when it comes to understanding the motives of the terrorists, the influence of the anti-government militia movements, and the role of more "conservative" talk radio hosts in encouraging, giving aid to, or creating the atmosphere for the entire right-wing spectrum to flourish. (The same comment could have been made about the so-called "left-wing" during the anti-war polarization in the midst of the Vietnam war protests of the 1960's and 1970's.) To "lower the rhetoric" on explosive, inflammatory issues should mean "moderate the *assimilation-contrast* effect." Only then can we begin to see the whole and act for the greater good.

Mindsets of Terrorism: The Vertical Logic

Whether an act of terrorism is "senseless" or not resides in the eye of the beholder. While one person sees a terrorist, the other sees a freedom-fighter. We inhabit diverse conceptual worlds with conflicting sets of ethics, right-and-wrong's, and good-and-bad's. Think of these as layers or zones in a stratified structure, levels on a spiral, or stages in a developmental stack. Each will produce its own expression or strain of "terrorism."

We call the underlying process Spiral Dynamics. By that we mean that value systems, world views, belief structures, and mindsets in people, organizations, and societies are not frozen in time. We are not permanent types with universal, locked-in traits. Rather, there are systems within us that form in response to life conditions and can then ebb and flow as life conditions get better or worse. These *systems-within* are invisible, but shape thoughts and actions that are then seen in surface-level behaviors. Think of them as deep tides that are in constant motion.

The model describes a **vertical** continuum of increasingly complex thinking systems. Each builds on those that came before and adds new elements. Five of these may produce terrorists. These fundamental core patterns, although expressed in different ways in various cultures and subcultures, are common themes across all humanity, all over the planet. Their evolutionary awakenings are akin to the growth rings on a tree.

GREEN: "Eco/Info-Terrorism" – attack environment, infrastructure, and information systems to stop exploitation and free human spirit

ORANGE: "Strategic Terrorism" – seek political and economic advantage by assault through media and incitement of lower level activities; sell technologies and build niche

BLUE: "Dogmatic Terrorism" – ongoing fight against evil forces in the name of a political system, religion, or other all-powerful "Truth;" sacrifice self/others in name of a cause

RED: "Predatory Terrorism" – personal grudges, retribution, vendettas, and acts of vengeance to eliminate enemies and enhance power; energized by the danger and action

PURPLE: "Tribal Terrorism" – ethnic assaults and folk-on-folk purges which seek to preserve a group, honor ancestors, and spread its "seed;" often based in historic grudges and territory

[A note of warning: If you are a "Flatlander" in your thinking, you will be unable to recognize these **vertical** differences. Rather, you will put everybody through the same car wash, paint only with broad horizontal brush strokes, and project your own motives, fears, and feelings into others. See the enclosed supporting documents for a fuller explanation of some other

Spiral Dynamics concepts, though our focus, here, is on the forms of terrorist behaviors that flow out of five general psycho-social strata.]

If you take an end of the "left-wing" and "right-wing" **horizontal** political spectrum above and bend it down into a tight horseshoe shape, you can begin to see why extremists of both wings appear to act in the same ways, even though their ideas and beliefs at first seem worlds apart. In a **vertical** sense, they are folded in the same place. In fact, it is not at all unusual for a person to leap across the mid-ranges of the continuum and stay equally radical, but become a rigid, True Believer ideologue on the other wing. Fundamentalist dogmatism is a **vertical** dynamic; absolutism about **WHAT** is believed is the **horizontal** question.

Spiral Dynamics, then, offers a powerful insight into the political, economic, religious, and social behavior of people all along the continuum. We believe it provides the key to **(1)** understanding the range of deeper motives that result in terrorist acts and **(2)** how to best counter those threats. [Request the matrix, *Vertical Dynamics of Terrorism*, for some trademarks of the various expressions and their logical streams.]

Note these other principles from Spiral Dynamics:

1. Terrorism occurs first in the mind before it is displayed in destructive behavior. In this sense, **WHY** people do things is of more importance than **WHAT** they actually say or do. We have discovered five basic mindset themes that may take a terroristic turn.

2. The minds behind terrorist acts, either sponsors or willing beneficiaries, may be at different levels of complexity with quite different motives than the actual perpetrators of the deeds; i.e., they will be functioning at different levels in the **vertical** psycho-social strata. All potential levels must be considered in analysis of the event and prevention of future acts.

3. While we have mentioned five basic mindset themes, these are not fixed positions or simple categories, but they are clearly-defined zones that contain particular kinds of mixtures, seams, and in-between stages. The breeding ground for most terrorist behaviors will be in the crevices, cusps, and transition stages where energy is highest.

4. In most cases, terrorist behaviors are the result of frustrations, the need to attack and overcome barriers, or retrieve something that has been lost. They appear when the

human organism is in the throes of chaotic change and transformation and are symptoms of such instability. Terrorist acts increase as more people and groups feel like misfits or believe they are being left behind in their rapidly changing world.

5. Each system will target, perceive, and feel about its victims in a different way. The nature and content of its belief structure will determine how it justifies its acts, regardless what others may think or feel. Knowing which mindsets are activated helps predict motives for and forms of terrorism.

A Strategy for Dealing with Domestic Terrorism

In responding to terrorism, we must consider these critical factors:

1. It is imperative that we, as a nation, understand both the **horizontal** and **vertical** forces that are at work within our society because they will continue to generate toxic environments and explosive acts well into the next century. Dealing with the perception of widening gaps — the have/have-not, can/can-not, and know/know-not — is essential for internal stability. Because of many psycho-social transitions underway simultaneously around the world, the threat from outside is also increased.

2. Both surface-level law enforcement/criminal justice responses and deep-level preventive measures must occur simultaneously for the short and long term. The President's anti-terrorism act will not be enough since it focuses primarily on **horizontal** factors and will trigger *assimilation-contrast* responses. The feelings of fear, alienation from authorities, and having been passed by socially must be addressed directly from the **vertical** perspective, as well.

3. The entire federal law enforcement function, including FBI, ATF, DEA and even IRS, must be "transformed" to help remove the threat they are perceived to represent by many Americans. To some extent and in spite of their best efforts, these agencies may, in fact, be the "thesis" that is creating the "antithesis." The more power, resources, permission, and access they are given through increased funding and reduced restrictions may make things worse, not better unless the *assimilation-contrast* forces are taken into account. In transformational change, every

segment has to change at once and respond to both **horizontal** and **vertical** dynamics.

4. It is imperative that the US military, including the National Guard, remain apart from this issue. Any inference that Department of Defense assets are preparing to operate domestically will only escalate the **contrast**-based polarities. Instead, a series of strategic alliances among American citizens, both military and civilian personnel, must begin to rebuild common ground.

5. The President, himself, must take the lead in moving to the positive by shaping a national dialogue on these trouble zones. Part of the strategy is the creation of **superordinate goals** for the whole society. The **vertical** strata that are most susceptible to arguments for domestic violence are also most open to assertive leadership; they crave stability, order, and a sense of purpose. President Clinton has an opportunity to take an assertive stance to open this national wound so that it can begin to heal from deep within rather than continue to fester and polarize.

The Vertical Dynamics of Terrorism			
Psycho-Social Strata	Motivational Flow	Emotional Loading	Examples & Illustrations
<p>LEVEL 5</p> <p><i>GREEN</i></p> <p>ECO-INFO</p> <p><i>"We react on behalf of living things"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> act on higher purpose for broader justice greater good for natural systems liberation of oppressed (others as victim) stop crimes against nature/humanity defense of freedom for living entities self-appointed "Robin Hood" syndrome rearrange power ratios for consensus prevent waste & needless consumption interfere with greed and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> self-sacrifice for good of life, not necessarily human life, while rationalizing deep guilt situational, contextual ethics group affiliations may be important or not rescuer of victims from evils serving greater cause and higher calling prepared to "pay the price" concern for own group's health and community self-satisfied and often rather arrogant smug convictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eco-terrorism: green extremist protests, deep ecology fringe and pro-industry anti-environmentalist movements Info-terrorism: computer hacking with political agenda, disruption of information nets, destruction of databases Infra-terrorism: attacks on infrastructure components - energy, transport, water supplies, air, biosphere violent animal rights activism; preservationist extreme "peace" attacks on military/law enforcement installations use of high tech against itself to garner attention biologic and chemical agents viewed as both tools and enemies

	exploitation		
<p>LEVEL 4</p> <p><i>ORANGE</i></p> <p>STRATEGIC</p> <p><i>"I manipulate the system to fix it"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conflicts with imposed authority • leverage fear to "buy" allegiance/rights • niche competition for political control • media attention and notoriety • recognition as a significant "player" • marketing products/services • anti-establishment "wake-up" calls • use "the system" against itself • redistribution of economic spoils/rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • competitive for recognition • excitement in the hunt • win:lose games with pawns • pragmatic, strategic ploys, game-like • quiet, coldly guiltlessness • forms principles to fit desires • ruthlessness in frustration • pretensions of being superior • judgmental of other authority • air of superiority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategic use of chem/bio agents and small nuclear for "theatrical effect" • sponsored terrorism – state-, interest group-, faction, wealthy fanatic- • Techno-terror (Japanese nerve gas incidents) -- mass casualty goals • attacks on newspapers/media (South America) -- also depend on media • "business" reprisals by drug cartels, criminal syndicates • arms dealing, suppliers, and publishers showing wares to potential clients • Econo-terrorism: financial centers, industrial base, mass destruction • liberationist movements freeing individuals from systems • sophisticated militia backers and global sponsors, suppliers, Terror Industry
<p>LEVEL 3</p> <p><i>BLUE</i></p> <p>DOGMATIC</p> <p><i>"We defend and extend the one True Way against its enemies"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • just retribution and punishment • agents of Divine will on Earth • righteous defense of sacred Truth • cleanse evil ways and smite evil doers • impose guilt and seek apologies • force conversions to believe the "right" • missionary, self-sacrificial zeal • fights "wrong" authority to the death • demands obedience, loyalty, "honor" • revolutionary ideology/guerrilla faction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deal with guilt as necessary • split of "good" and "bad" people • obedience to proper authority • patiently fulfilling a grand destiny • need law, order, and stability • noble virtues of self-sacrifice • focus on a version of higher good/purpose • arrogance of blind faith • committed to prevail and finish at all costs • disciplined and duty-bound • ultimate reward yet to come 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atrocities of ethnic cleansing -- former Yugoslavia, Holocaust, Chechnya, Kurds -- based on -ism's • racist separatist & supremacist movements • state-sponsored (Iran, Libya, Iraq, etc.) • absolutist religious fundamentalists and theocrats -- Jihadin, etc. • Skinheads, Aryan Nation, KKK, JDL, PLO, IRA, Contras, Brüderbond, Shining Path, Inquisitions, München, World Trade Center, Contras, Branch Davidian militants • extremist militias and out-of-control bureaucracies • abortion clinic violence, Pan Am 103, Oklahoma City • theocratic states dedicated to extending "The One True Way," regardless • Holy Warriors of all sects
<p>LEVEL 2</p> <p><i>RED</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revenge, retribution, and payback • personal glory and heroic reputation • eye-for-an-eye personal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • angry without guilt • short-term hedonistic payoff • saving face regardless • vengeful desperation • cruelty while "earning spurs" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gangland massacres & drive-by shootings • War crimes incidents in Vietnam, Bosnia, W.W.II, Korea • Scalping raids, Custer's Last Stand, hit squads • Pol Pot regime's killing fields, Somalia, Sudan • Red Brigades of Mao's cultural revolution • survivalist fringe and environmental militants

<p>PREDATORY</p> <p><i>"I fight as I must to destroy enemies"</i></p>	<p>vengeance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dominance over turf and prizes • show disrespect and put-down enemy • kill or be killed with a big bang • glorious martyrdom for vague cause • live long in legend, if not in fact • punish evil doers and evil thinkers • rip down restrictive establishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking pain feels good • self-righteous arrogance • unconcern with consequences • life has little value • paranoid defensiveness • proving own worth through attachment to cause • loves the tools of violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • religion-based fanatical militancy's and splinter groups • mercenary "Soldiers of Fortune" warriors • anarchists and fear-mongers without guiding doctrine • West Bank incidents, excessive force & "wilding"
<p>LEVEL 1</p> <p><i>PURPLE</i></p> <p>TRIBAL</p> <p><i>"We protect our kind"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preserve sacred lands, defend relics • protect tribal honor and sacred ways • honor ancestors' spirits • continue trans-generational feuds • drive enemy groups away • insure continuity of own kind • implant own "seed" for future • serve the folk as warriors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fear begets anger • self-sacrificing obligations to family • obedience to "chiefs" • the self = the group • signs/omens dictate actions • challenged for survival • spirit-driven • "us" versus the non-persons • crosses generations • defense of ability to exist as a people • absolute self-sacrifice for leader's desires 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnicity conflicts and tribal wars (Balkans, Bosnia, Rwanda, Liberia, Mohawks, Chiapas, Basques, etc.) • rape to impact gene pool & create children of one's own kind • Inner-city ethnic and gang wars - Korean, African-American, Aryan, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Jamaican, etc. • Idi Amin Dada's Uganda, Ethiopia • undercurrents of racial prejudice: anti-Semitism, etc. • historic massacres of indigenous peoples in niche battles • cult members obedient to a god-like figure • kill off rivals for food & territory