

**EXTREMISM AND POWER**

**with illustrations from**

**The End of History, the 2004 US Election and the Rise of Al Qaeda**

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## **1. Introduction**

Extremist leaders often end up either as heroes or villains. Sometimes they can be both at the same time, depending on who you are reading or talking to. Vladimir Illyich Lenin is usually considered a villain in the West, but to many people for a long, long time he was a hero. Mahatma Gandhi was often considered an extremist villain by the British government, as Nelson Mandela was to the apartheid South African government. Slobodan Milosevic is largely considered a villain now, but not by everyone, and he was once a hero to many Serbs.

One reason extremist leaders are either villains or heroes is that they have big goals. Like a Communist society, independence for India a democratic South Africa or Greater Serbia. Leaders with big goals or radical agendas obviously are going to come into conflict with other groups in society who don't share those goals. The conflicts between communism and capitalism, independence vs British rule for India, black votes or white rule in South Africa, and Serbian aspirations vs those of the Croatians, Albanians, and Slovenians are obvious.

Our point of view is that extremists are rational. Their goals may be bigger than those of most of us, but from an economist's point of view, rationality just means that, whatever the goal, a person chooses the best means to achieve it. The goals themselves are neither rational nor irrational, we just take them as given. The simplest way to think of an extremist leader is someone whose goals or views are outside the mainstream on some issue or dimension. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, extremists were typically persons on the extreme right or the extreme left, but the dimension could also be nationalism, religion, or security or any other politically important dimension.

However, there is another way to think of extremism in politics, in which extremism refers to the use of extreme *methods* of political competition, usually violent ones, such as assassinations or terrorism. Often (not always) those with extremist beliefs also use extremist methods.

What explains the attraction of violence to people with extreme goals? I show why when a group has extremist goals, extremist methods are indeed more likely to be attractive to its leaders than if its goals were moderate. Indeed, I show that, under certain conditions, the more extreme the goals of the group, the more likely it is to use extremist methods to further those goals.

I begin with extremist leaders of groups which lack power and are trying to attain it to achieve certain goals, such as Osama bin Laden today or Lenin in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century or the Red Brigades in Italy in the 1970's. All of them used violence in their pursuit of power. Of course other leaders in similar positions who were also labeled extreme succeeded without violence or with very little violence. Some of these are heroes to many today. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King are the most obvious examples. They are both mainstream today, and in my view justly heroic, but they were considered extreme by many in their heyday, Gandhi by the British, King by many in the US South. But they both expressed a profound moral aversion to violence. That they were able to succeed without it is, of course, in part, a tribute to their genius. But it is also because they saw the possibility of attracting mass support to their cause without it. And it is also because their goals were universal:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and

live out the true meaning of its creeds. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal. I have a dream that, one day, on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of farmers' slaves and the sons of farmers' slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that, one day, even the State of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream<sup>1</sup>.

It's still moving to read that speech today, and it is hard nowadays to think of Martin Luther King as an "extremist". But from the standpoint of many in the southern United States in the 1950's and the early 1960's, where segregation was the norm, that's what he was. Of course, among civil rights leaders he was a moderate, and he was supported by many federal leaders, including the Kennedys. Extremism is always relative to a particular context, time or place. But King was not afraid of the label:

Was not Jesus an extremist for love -- "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice -- "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ -- "I bear in

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. (Delivered on the Steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC on August 28, 1963). From the Martin Luther King Papers Project at Stanford University. <http://www-leland.stanford.edu/group/King/>

my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist -- "Here I stand; I can do none other so help me God." Was not John Bunyan an extremist -- "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist -- "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist -- "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." So the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice--or will we be extremists for the cause of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill, three men were crucified. We must not forget that all three were crucified for the same crime-- *the crime of extremism*....( Letter from Birmingham Jail (April 1963), taken from Martin Luther King Day quotes <http://grove.ufl.edu/~leo/mlk.html>, italics added)

Nelson Mandela is another of today's heroes, and, like King, he is certainly a hero of mine. But he faced entrenched opposition from the apartheid government of South Africa, and sometimes he despaired of achieving his goals without violence. In 1961, he formed an armed wing of the African National Congress, arguing that the violence of the government could possibly only be combated by violence. He still advocated this on his release from prison in 1990:

Today the majority of South Africans, black and white, recognise that apartheid has no future. It has to be ended by our own decisive mass action in order to build

peace and security. The mass campaign of defiance and other actions of our organisation and people can only culminate in the establishment of democracy. The destruction caused by apartheid on our sub-continent is incalculable. The fabric of family life of millions of my people has been shattered. Millions are homeless and unemployed. Our economy lies in ruins and our people are embroiled in political strife. Our resort to the armed struggle in 1960 with the formation of the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was a purely defensive action against the violence of apartheid. The factors which necessitated the armed struggle still exist today. We have no option but to continue. We express the hope that a climate conducive to a negotiated settlement will be created soon so that there may no longer be the need for the armed struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, in the end, Mandela and the African National Congress won their fight for democracy in South Africa, and if it was not entirely without violence, there was no bloody revolution, and Nelson Mandela became the first president of an integrated South Africa.

I next turn to another category of extremist leader –people who turned extreme when in power. One case like this, moving towards the other end of the “violence – nonviolence” spectrum, there is the case of Slobodan Milosevic. He did not shrink from using violence: He launched four wars during his time as President of Serbia. Ultimately he went to war with NATO. He lost that war, of course, and is currently still on trial at the Hague for “crimes against humanity”. Few think of him as a hero today. But he too

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<sup>2</sup> Nelson Mandela's Address to Rally in Cape Town on his Release from Prison, 11 February 1990. To be found at <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/speeches/release.html>

had big goals, and dreamed of a greater Serbia.

Three million Serbs were scattered outside the borders of the largest Republic, Serbia, as the patchwork country once known as Yugoslavia unravels. Many of these people long to be part of a greater Serbia. It's a dream the Serbian President Slobidan Milosevic has encouraged.<sup>3</sup>

The explosion of nationalism in Serbia prefigured the explosion of radical Islamic nationalism. Both were "organic" movements, fuelled by what too many seemed the disappearance of the basis of solidarity in their societies - Communism in the former Yugoslavia, the Islamic community in the Arab world.

Yet a different kind of violence has been practiced by Osama bin Laden. His goals are big, too. He dreams of a truly Islamic society, like that in the Prophet Mohammad's time. Among the chief obstacles to that dream are the secular, US -- supported governments in places like Egypt, and the US and other secular, Western societies themselves, which bin Laden thinks of as living in a state of *jahiliyya*, or barbarism.

To most people in the West, myself included, Osama's methods are repulsive. But, to my mind, the best way to understand what he is about is to assume he is rational. His goals are huge, but they are hardly universal. And he faces entrenched opposition to his goals, not only from within Arab countries, but from much of the rest of the world.

Is Osama rational? The place to start in understanding Osama is that he is weak. From the military point of view, he is a Holy Warrior without an army. Politically, he does not command an organized political party that could take power anywhere in the

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<sup>3</sup> Milosevic: CBC Sunday Morning, July 5, 1992.

Muslim world. Even in Afghanistan, bin Laden was at best the “guest” of the Taliban government. His choice of methods may be gruesome, but it is not irrational. He needs to get his enemies to get so angry that they use their strength against themselves, judo – style. As has been said, George Bush has been his best “recruiting sergeant”. But, it must be remembered, he has a lot of support. And he, too, is a hero to many.

Martin Luther King, Mandela, Milosevic and Osama bin Laden were (or are) all considered extremists. They wanted to effect radical change in society. King abhorred violence. Mandela was willing to use it only reluctantly. For Milosevic, it was a principal tool. For Osama bin Laden, it is virtually the only tool, and he appears to see the hand of God in it.

What explains the attraction of violence to people with extreme goals? The first part of this paper (sections 2 and 3) is devoted to this question. I look at some examples, including Nationalism (control over territory is an intermediate goal to the achievement of nationhood) and Islamic Fundamentalism (ridding the Muslim nations of foreign and secular influences is an intermediate goal to the achievement of an Islamic society). The basic argument is that leaders whose views are outside the mainstream adopt extremist methods when there is an indivisibility which characterizes the relationship between the intermediate goal of the group and its ultimate goal.

If correct, the argument of this paper would appear to raise a troubling challenge to liberal theory. Freedom of thought is central to liberal theory provided that democratic methods are used to pursue that goal. If there tends to be a correlation between extremist positions and extremist methods, then it may be difficult for the state to combat the latter without imposing controls on the former.

The second part of the paper (sections 4) looks at extremism in power in democracy. I first ask how extremism can come to power in a democracy and I provide an answer based on an argument first put forth by Pierre Salmon (2002). I then ask whether the argument about the connection between extremist policies or ideas and extremist methods also holds true for extremism in power. I illustrate these arguments with the election of George W. Bush in 2004 on a platform that was extreme by American standards, and the subsequent methods used that administration.

Finally (in section 5) I revisit the famous prediction made by Francis Fukuyama while the Soviet Empire was collapsing about “The End of History” (1989, 1992) and ask whether there is a sense in which extremism is always with us. I use this argument to explain some of the forces which gave rise to the Al Qaeda movement. Section 6 concludes the paper.

Perhaps the most important policy implication of the paper is that one should look at the goals of extremist groups in order to understand their actions. The reason is that it is the indivisibility of the goal which explains the extremism of the actions, and if one can un- bundle the goal or make the indivisible divisible, then there may be ways to provide these goals in a way which satisfies some of the members of the group and thus dries up support for the grander ambitions of the leaders of extremist groups.

## **2. Extremist ideologies vs Extremist methods**

At the beginning of this paper I noted a common distinction between two kinds of

extremism:

1. An extremist person or group can be defined as one whose equilibrium position is located at a "corner" rather than in the interior on some dimension (for example, the left -- right dimension in political space).
- 2.. Alternatively, a political extremist could be defined as one who uses extremist methods, for example, bombings, inflammatory language, terrorist activity, and so forth, but whose platform is or may be centrist rather than extremist in political (left -- right) space.

Some, for example Galeotti (2002), expand on this distinction to develop a typology of extremism. Assuming all types are possible there are four combinations, as shown in Figure 1. The horizontal axis shows extremism in method, the vertical one extremism in ideological position. The Green party, for example, adopts what to some is an extremist position with respect to the environment, but never uses terrorism or other violent methods of protest (although Greens have famously used civil disobedience). On the other hand, Italian fascism of the 1920's has been described as an "extremism of the middle"—that is, it was extremist in the use of violent methods of political competition, but its policies were centrist<sup>4</sup>. Modern Italian parties like the Ulivo and Forza Italia are centrist (centre – left and centre – right) in both method and policies, as Democrats and Republicans usually are in the US.. And groups like Al Qaeda, Hamas and the Red Brigades are extremist in both their proposed policies and their methods.

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<sup>4</sup> Paxton (2004) suggests that the reason for this was the necessity to compromise with other groups in the Fascist coalitions. At the beginning and at the end of the Fascist era, this compromise was less necessary and the movement showed its true colors.

[FIGURE.1 HERE]

However there is something missing here which is central to many kinds of extremism, especially its historically most important kinds. This is the fact that in many cases the goals of extremist groups are indivisible. The most obvious examples are groups which feel dispossessed from their “homeland” and take extremist actions for this cause. Of course a homeland can be larger or smaller but still there is this element: a group either has one, or it doesn’t. And there are minimum requirements. Is the area under the group’s control sufficiently large that the government can provide the basic functions of the modern state? Does the group have sufficient control over citizenship, taxation, property rights, security and the means of coercion and violence to function effectively? Similarly, for years many the Communist movement fought for the goal of a communist society, and a central tenet of that movement is that the achievement of communism necessitated a revolution and the overthrow of the bourgeois order. One reason is that it is obviously difficult to implement central planning unless the government controls most of the economy. Nor can an economy which is half communist / half capitalist give birth to a communist society in the classic sense in which there would be a “new man” and so forth.

A third example is control over the means of violence. In successful states this is a monopoly of the state. It can be eroded through gangs, terrorism, etc., but in the end the state is either basically “in control” of the means of violence or it is not, and when the state loses control over it, that state has essentially failed.

Yet another example is Osama bin Laden’s goal of a restoration of Islamic rule in

Arabic countries (see Lewis (2003), Zakaria (2003)). Either a country is secular, based on Roman law or the Napoleonic code or some other secular source or it is religious, based on a religious doctrine such as Catholicism or Sharia law. Finally the same point applies to the aspirations for independence of a group which is under occupation. To look at some historical examples, either the British were going to leave India or Israel, or the French leave Algeria, or they were not, either the blacks were going to get the vote in South Africa (in which case they would control the government, being an overwhelming majority) or they were not. All of these goals, which were, of course, achieved in the end, are indivisible.

In all of these cases, my basic argument is that there is a natural complementarity between the goal of the extremist group, which is indivisible, and the methods, which are extremist<sup>5</sup>. That is, there is a natural complementarity between extremist goals and extremist methods. Thus it is difficult to separate the two, as we have in Figure 1 above.

Other extremist groups have goals which are clearly divisible: examples are the Greens's goal of a cleaner environment, the National Rifle Association's goal of fewer restrictions on gun ownership, and so forth. Implicitly, I will argue, these groups never reach the heights of fanaticism characteristic of groups which have indivisible goals.

### **3. Why do they choose extremist methods? The Case of Terrorism**

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, other distinctions could be made. One of these is the distinction between ordinary extremism and what might be called "totalitarian" extremism. Members of totalitarian extremist groups, as exemplified by classical Nazism and communism, and possibly some variants of Islamic fundamentalism, tend to be extreme in their "worldview" and this viewpoint dictates extremist positions on a whole host of issues, not just a single dimension. The classic analysis of American extremism by Lipset and Rabb (1970, 1978) implicitly referred to this type of extremism when they defined the essence of extremism as "monism" or "anti-pluralism". Thus their book was titled "The Politics of Unreason" and they described such people as unable to compromise. Their analysis points to another distinction - the *comprehensiveness* of the extremist outlook - or the number of dimensions covered by the extremist world view.

**(i) Extremist methods are risky**

Suppose to begin with that terrorism is simply a form of political competition or rent seeking. If so, then the central difference between extremist methods compared to normal democratic methods of political competition or rent seeking is that extremist methods are *risky*. Because they are illegal, or can get out of hand easily, or can provoke a negative reaction either from the state or from other political groups, they are therefore more likely to involve greater losses than conventional politics. On the other hand, when they succeed they sometimes do so in a spectacular fashion. Consequently the choice between extremist methods and moderation can be analyzed in the same way as the choice between a criminal career and a legitimate one, as in models of the decision to commit crimes pioneered by Becker (1968). This point is explored in the model that follows.<sup>6</sup> I will show that under certain circumstances the use of extremist means (e.g., terrorism, violence) follows from the extremist goals of the group. Thus it is no accident that the most serious forms of extremism also use terrorist methods. The main conclusion is that one has to understand the goals of the groups in order to understand their actions and to formulate policy towards them.

**(ii) A basic model of the Calculus of Discontent**

I assume a political organization with some ideological goal Z, which might be a state for the group which lacks a homeland, or a communist society, or a law banning abortions, or throwing all people of a certain race out of the country or an Islamic society governed by *sharia* law. I do not inquire into the rationality of the belief in this goal but take it as given, as is normal in economic theory. The group tries to further this goal by

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<sup>6</sup> (Landes (1978) and Sandler and Lapan (1988) have also exploited this analogy, though in different ways from that followed here.)

exerting political pressure. So the product of either moderate pressure or terrorism is an increase in Z. Of particular importance, as emphasized previously, is that this goal is often indivisible, or displays increasing returns.. This property is illustrated in 2a, 4.2b and 4.2c, where the horizontal axis indicates the level of an intermediate goal -- land to the Palestinians or Jews, control over the means of production, the extent to which foreign forces are thrown out of the homeland, etc. -- and the vertical axis the relationship between this intermediate goal and the final goal of the group (respectively, a Palestinian (or Jewish) state, a communist society, or an Islamic society). This is the relationship that displays an indivisibility or increasing returns<sup>7</sup>. In each case there is a critical point, where enough of the intermediate goal has been obtained that the final goal is possible.

[FIGURES 2 and 3 HERE]

Thus Figure 2 illustrates the case of Palestine- Israel, and Figure 3 with contemporary Islamic extremism. In each case there is an indivisibility or area of increasing returns between the intermediate goal and the ultimate goal of the group. To fix ideas, it might be useful to think of an example where there is no indivisibility. The objective of reducing *income inequality*, for example, is *divisible*. The level of income inequality in a society is a continuous variable which can take on any level from complete inequality to complete equality. The most common way to represent this is via a Gini coefficient. A graph of this (not shown) would display no indivisibility or increasing returns. Hence income inequality alone is not indivisible and does not provide

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<sup>7</sup> In turn, the indivisibility or zone of increasing returns arises because the intermediate goal can be likened to a missing “factor or production” in the production function of the ultimate goals. See Wintrobe (forthcoming 2006a or b) for details

a motive for extremist methods in the same way that nationalist or religious society aspirations do. Consequently, if the argument of this paper is correct, the latter provide a more important source of extremism than the former.

However, income inequality could be an intermediate goal for some group, and the relationship between it and some ultimate objective indivisible. Marx, who relied on the income inequality of capitalist societies to provide the basic argument for revolution may have realized this and therefore substituted “class” for income. He argued that the normal workings of a capitalist economy would result in the proletariat becoming progressively poorer, and this progressive poverty would result, at some point, in the attainment of class consciousness. Here is an indivisibility (class consciousness as a function of inequality). But, instead, the poor got richer, and it turned out to be entirely feasible in many societies for many people to move from one class to another. The basic reason for the failure of Marxist predictions to hold is that the poor got rich in most Western societies, and many of them moved from working class to middle class thus destroying the purported immobility between classes.

Perhaps this argument could be generalized, to the effect that indivisible variables are always the source of revolution.

How does the existence of an indivisibility explain why a group would choose methods like terror to pursue its objectives? According to the argument at the beginning of this section, the basic difference between terror and moderate pressure from the point of view of the group is that terror is risky. I try to capture this feature in the choice among methods of pressure, e.g., that between moderate and extremist methods. I represent that as follows:

Assume the organization has a production function which can either produce moderate (M) pressure or extremist incidents (I) in any combination from fixed levels of labour (L), capital (K) and organizational capacity (O). Of course in reality there is a continuum of methods, beginning with voting, peaceful and lawful demonstrations, then continuing with civil disobedience, violence towards property, assassination of political enemies and ending with violence towards innocent civilians. For the purpose of modeling I assume only two methods, one moderate (peaceful and lawful, and therefore riskless) and the other violent and risky. Then the level of moderate and extremist pressures are:

$$(1) \quad M = M(L_M, K_M, O_M), \quad I = I(L_I, K_I, O_I)$$

in which

I = the number of violent Incidents and

M = the level of Moderate pressure.

The organization's total stock of L, K and O are fixed:

$$(2) \quad L = L_M + L_I,$$

$$K = K_M + K_I,$$

$$O = O_I + O_M$$

The organization can use any combination of moderate or extreme methods. The more it chooses extreme or violent methods, the greater the level of risk undertaken. Let us first illustrate the general argument with a simple example. Then we will develop it in more detail.

Figure 4 shows the goal of the group Z on the vertical axis. Z therefore represents variables such as nationhood N or an Islamic Society IS in Figure 2. The horizontal axis

shows the product of applying various methods of pressure. Suppose that from the risky method there are three possible “states of the world” – success (and the achievement of a high level of pressure  $I_1$ , in which case the level of the goal achieved is  $Z_0 + g$ , or failure (with level of pressure  $I_0$ ). Failure results in one of two possible outcomes. In the first of these, the attempt to impose pressure fails and the outcome is simply the status quo  $Z_0$ . In the second, the attempt also fails and in addition, the leadership is caught, convicted and sanctioned, retarding the goals of the group. If the value of the sanction *as measured by its cost to the goal of the group* is  $-f$ , then the outcome in that case is  $Z_0 - f$ . On the other hand the outcome of applying a moderate level of pressure is always the level of pressure  $M$ , with gains for the group equal to  $Z_0 + m$ .

[FIGURE 4 HERE ]

Thus  $g$  = the gains to the group as estimated by its leader from using its organization and other factors of production to produce successful terrorist incidents  
 $m$  = the (certain) gain to the group from using only moderate methods of pressure  
 Then one dimension of the level of increasing returns may be summarized by the ratio  $g/m$ . This is the ratio of the gains from successful terrorist pressure to moderate pressure. The higher this is, the more the function displays increasing returns.  
 $q$  = the probability that extremist methods succeed and the state accedes to the demands of the group  
 $1 - q$  = the probability that the methods fail  
 $p$  = the probability that, in addition to failure, the leadership of the extremist group is

caught, convicted and sanctioned

$f$  = the cost of the sanction to the goals of the group

$Z_0$  = status quo income

$U$  = the utility function of the leadership

Then extremist methods will be chosen if:

$$(3) \quad qU(Z_0 + g) + (1-q)pU(Z_0 - f) + (1-q)(1-p)U(Z_0) > U(Z_0 + m)$$

This equation shows how terror can be a rational choice. A moderate level of pressure may leave the group stuck in the region of increasing returns, with the goal hardly advanced. With terrorist or risky methods, on the other hand, it is *possible* that the group can achieve its goal. Of course it is also possible that the group will fail, but note that the costs of failure may not be that large if there are increasing returns ( $Z_0 - f$  is not that far from  $Z_0$ ). Thus, given that the goal displays increasing returns, terrorism may be a rational choice.

Whether terrorism is rational also depends on other elements in the structure of opportunities. The greater the indivisibility, the larger the ratio  $g/m$ , and the more likely extremist methods will be chosen, as shown in equation (3). An increase in the likelihood that the methods succeed ( $q$ ) will also raise the likelihood that these methods are chosen. Similarly, an increase in the capacity to manufacture terrorist incidents  $I$  would on the other hand raise the level of terror by raising the ratio  $g/m$ .

The other main determinants are the deterrence variables  $p$  and  $f$ . Equation (3) appears to imply that increases in these variables are effective in deterring extremism, if they can be raised high enough. But note that increasing returns may limit the effectiveness of these variables. If these are very large, as depicted in the figure, the

enormous *potential* gains from terror explain the indifference of many extremist groups to loss of life, either that of their victims or the losses to members of the group who sacrifice themselves for the cause. Thus it shows that sanctions and other punitive measures against the group may not be effective. Second, raising  $p$  sufficiently high to act as an effective deterrent may involve a conflict with civil liberties, as is often remarked.

Finally, the figure shows the importance of paying attention to the goals of the group, as their indivisibility is central to the reason for the choice of terror as a mode of political competition. And one way to combat terror is to try to make the indivisible goals divisible.

A more general formulation of the extremist leader's choice of method is displayed in Figure 5. Here, the allocation of resources between pressure and terror is a continuous variable: the leader can use any combination of moderate and extreme methods. The horizontal axis displays the ratio of extreme to moderate methods  $I/M$ . The larger the use of extremist methods, the greater is the risk. The use of either method of pressure results in some level of achievement of the goal  $Z$ , as shown on the vertical axis. The expected level of  $Z$  from various combinations of  $I/M$ , and their expected utility to the group leader is displayed on the vertical axis. The indifference curves displayed are those of the leader. Of course extremism can backfire and reduce goal achievement (meaning the slope of  $EZ$  will turn downwards after some point) but we restrict ourselves here to the region where the methods are successful<sup>i</sup>. In effect, the figure is a simple adaptation of two – asset portfolio theory where moderate pressure is the riskless asset and extreme methods the risky one.

[Figure 5 HERE]

The point of the figure is to show that the more extreme ideology of the leader, the more likely he or she is to use extremist methods like terror. To see this point, consider a shift towards a more extreme ideology. This is represented in the figure by a rightwards shift of the EZ curve (from  $EZ_0$  to  $EZ_1$ ). To illustrate with our examples, this means that, after the shift, Palestinians (Israelis) believe they need *more* of the land in the middle east before they can be a true nation, or Communists believe the government must control *more* of the economy before Communism can be achieved, or Islamic radicals believe they must get rid of *more* foreign and secular influences before a genuine Islamic *ummah* (community) can be achieved. As the figure clearly shows, a rightward shift of the EZ curve results in an equilibrium involving more risk taking, i.e., a greater use of terror.

Whether terrorism is rational depends on the structure of opportunities. The greater the indivisibility, the larger the ratio  $g/m$ , and the more likely extremist methods will be chosen, as shown in equation (3). An increase in the likelihood that the methods succeed ( $q$ ) will also raise the likelihood that these methods are chosen. Similarly, an increase in the capacity to manufacture terrorist incidents  $I$  would raise the level of terror by raising the ratio  $g/m$ .

The other main determinants are the deterrence variables  $p$  and  $f$ . Increases in these variables are effective in deterring extremism, if they can be raised high enough. But note that increasing returns may limit the effectiveness of these variables. If increasing returns are large, as depicted in the figure, the enormous potential gains from terror and the small potential losses to the goals of the group explain

the indifference of many extremist groups to loss of life, either that of their victims or the losses to members of the group who sacrifice themselves for the cause. For the same reason, sanctions and other punitive measures against the group may not be effective. Second, raising  $p$  sufficiently high to act as an effective deterrent may involve a conflict with civil liberties, as is often remarked.

#### **4. Extremism in power: democracy**

Extremist politicians seldom get elected in democracies, since their position are far from the mainstream. The general result of political competition under various assumptions (either Downsian, or multi party with probabilistic voting) is the median voter theorem. The basic idea is that, by moving to the centre, each party can gain more votes from centrist voters, and, as long as there are only two parties, not lose any at the extremes. This median solution is also welfare maximizing (Brennan (2002), p. 93, Mueller (2003))

One can then list all of the conditions under which non- convergence would occur: many parties, ideological preferences (especially the preferences of party activists), extra dimensions, etc. But these outcomes are inherently unstable and do not represent an extremist equilibrium (Brennan (2002)). Public choice also looks for socially rational outcomes (Brennan (2002)) and extremism is usually held to represent an irrational outcome.

How then can an extremist equilibrium result from democratic processes?

1. The simplest way for an extremist group to obtain power is via a coalition,

implicit or explicit, with centrists (for example, the National Rifle Association in the US, and the fundamentalist Jews in Israel have obtained power to have their preferred policies implemented via formal or informal deals with centrist parties).

2. Another, more complex way that extremists can take power is via a coalition of “monomaniac” extremists. These are people who a) care only about one issue, and b) take an extreme position on that issue. The idea was put forward by Pierre Salmon (2002). Thus two or more groups, each of which is “monomaniacal” in a separate dimension, can form a coalition large enough to win power. As Salmon explains:

“For instance, you could have a [monomaniac] coalition if you have 20 per cent of a group who are violently anti-homosexual, for instance, 20 per cent who are Catholic fundamentalists, 20 per cent who are anti-immigrants, 20 per cent who are anti-Semitic and 20 per cent who are in favour of complete free markets, then you could have a coalition in which, if you look at the overall figures, you would find only 20 per cent of the people being anti-homosexual, and this would be below the number which is given in moderate parties, in which you have more than 20 per cent of person anti-homosexual.”<sup>8</sup>

So, even though most people in the coalition, let’s say, might not be particularly anti-Semitic, nevertheless, the position of the coalition is anti-Semitic. Most people in the coalition might not particularly care about free markets, but the coalition, as a whole, has a very extreme position on free markets. So, *even though most people in the coalition are not extreme on most issues, since the group takes the position of the extremists in the coalition on each issue, the group as a whole is extreme on every dimension.*

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Pierre Salmon, in Wintrobe (2004).

Pierre Salmon's ideas can be used to interpret the 2004 American election. Of course, there are some people who always vote Democrat and some who always vote Republican. But they didn't decide the election. George Bush won that election on a platform with three main components. All of them seem radical or extreme by the normal standards of American politics. The first is that the way to prevent terrorists from attacking America is to wage unprovoked wars on countries that have supported terrorism, like Iraq, even if there is no evidence that those countries had anything to do with the 9/11 attack. The second is tax cuts that disproportionately favour the rich. And the third is religious fundamentalism, including opposition to abortions, stem cell research, and gay civil unions, and the promotion of religious censorship on television media and of a religious point of view in American life.

There are two ways to interpret his victory. The first is the median voter model, in which case one has to conclude that a majority of Americans are extreme on all these issues. That means the median American is a religious fundamentalist who is in favour of preventive wars and tax cuts for the rich. But most Americans don't seem to be like that.

Salmon's ideas suggest a different interpretation. This is that Bush won because he put together a coalition of three groups of voters. For each of these groups, *one* of these issues was paramount and determined their voting. So those in favour of tax cuts for the rich were not necessarily against gay unions or for preventive wars, but they voted for Bush because of his position on tax cuts. Similarly the so-called "security moms" may have voted for Bush for his stand on keeping American safe. But they are not necessarily extremist on the other two issues: it's just that those issues were less

important to them. And the religious evangelicals may not have cared for Bush's stands on war and tax cuts, but for them the religious issue was paramount. So in the end, a coalition was forged which was extremist on *all* of these issues even though the average American is not. This is another way of explaining his victory.

Some support for this interpretation can be found in a description by a leading conservative activist, Grover Norquist, of the strategy used in forging the US conservative coalition. Norquist is the head of the advocacy group Americans for Tax Reform, and was described by former US House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gringrich as "the single most effective conservative advocate in the country" in a *New Yorker* profile by John Cassidy<sup>9</sup>. In the profile, Norquist talks to Cassidy about how to build a coalition:

If you want the votes of people who are good on guns, good on taxes, and good on faith issues, that is a very small intersection of voters".....but if you say, Give me the votes of anybody who agrees with you on any one of these issues, that's a much bigger section of the population." To illustrate what he meant, Norquist drew three intersecting circles on a piece of paper. In the first one, he wrote "guns", in the second he wrote "taxes", in the third he wrote "faith" There was a small area where the three circles intersected. "With that group, you can take over the country, if you start with the airports and the radio stations", he said. But with all of the three circles that's sixty per cent of the population, and you can win politically (Cassidy (2005), p. 46).

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Cassidy (2005), p. 42.

Suppose then we are correct in depicting Bush's victory this way. The question then is, under what circumstances does the theory predict that he would use extremist *methods* to support his extremist *positions*? The argument developed in the previous section suggests that this would be true provided that, in addition to the extreme position on a particular issue, there is an indivisibility between the intermediate goal and the ultimate goal. In the case of the war on terror, this seems uncontroversial. The ultimate goal is "keeping America safe" and the method for doing that was, in part, going after the terrorists "over there" to keep them from coming "over here" to repeat a phrase Bush often used in the campaign. This meant the invasion of Iraq. The campaign linked the war in Iraq to the war on terror, on the basis of evidence that Bush has himself admitted recently (in a speech on December 12, 2005) was "flawed", and "victory" in that war was an intermediate goal on the way to the ultimate goal. Here is an obvious indivisibility. So extreme methods, including the waging of an unprovoked war, were used to pursue that goal. Other illustrations of the use of extreme methods by historical American standards include the practice of "renditions" (sending people to foreign countries where they may be tortured), the passing of special legislation such as the Patriot Act which constitutes a substantial interference with democratic human rights<sup>10</sup>, the use of torture at Abu Graib, the holding of suspects for indefinite periods without charge at Guantanamo Bay, the fabrication of "news" and "news sources" <sup>11</sup>and the use of distorted evidence (such as the claim repeatedly made by Vice President Cheney that Iraqis were involved in the September 11 attacks) to support the pursuit of the war.

Of course, some think that Bush has not been extreme, but only pursuing

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<sup>10</sup> See Niskanen (forthcoming 2006)

<sup>11</sup> As documented, for example by Frank Rich in the New York Times ( )

the right course of action in the face of a dire external threat. But the logical argument here is simply that the threat (terrorism) is extreme, and warrants extremist methods. This was the argument put forth, for example by Attorney General Gonzales to justify the use of torture. It is difficult to argue that the methods themselves have not been extreme. In any case, just what was and is the threat of 9/11? Is there not another explanation for what happened? Why did history not “end” after the cold war in the way it was supposed to? We will pursue this subject (in the next section ) but first we need to look at the two other aspects of extremism—on taxes and on the intrusion of religion into every day life.

On taxes it seems clear that while the policies may have been extreme the methods used to implement them have been normal democratic methods. This is in accordance with our theory, since the level of redistribution from the rich to the poor (in this case, from the poor to the rich!<sup>12</sup>) is not an intermediate goal to some final goal and therefore there is no indivisibility. So the *absence* of extremist methods in pursuit of the goal of the redistribution of the tax burden is in accordance with our model’s predictions.

On the other hand, some religious – type issues such as abortion *do* contain an indivisibility. In the case of abortions, the indivisibility is the point at which the foetus becomes a human being, with those who object to abortion usually if not invariably arguing that that the foetus becomes fully human while still in the mother’s womb, thus abortion after that point can be likened to murder. On the other hand, those who favour the right to abortion argue that the foetus only becomes a human being once born. So far, however, the method for pursuing this policy (the appointment of pro – life justices) has not, to my knowledge been extreme. Of course, it may be simply that these policies have not really been implemented to date, as many on the religious right

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<sup>12</sup> See Krugman ( )

complain ( ). But to the extent that they have, using moderate methods, the behaviour of the Bush administration in this respect does not accord with the theory advanced here..

## **5 Why is extremism always with us? The rise of Al Qaeda**

At the end of the cold war, commentators were full of optimistic pronouncements for a global order based on liberal capitalism and democracy (e.g, Friedman (1999)). In 1989 Frances Fukuyama famously announced the end of history, “.....not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama (1989), p.2).

What happened? In the view of many, the answer is simple: the world changed on 9/11. But where did 9/11 come from? And what does it represent? Norman Podhoretz saw in it the beginning of World War IV in his article entitled: “World War IV: How It Started, What it Means, and Why We Have to Win” (2004). An alternative view is that

“The U.S. Government has greatly *overreacted* to the terrorist threat to Americans, creating “a false sense of insecurity” ... Over the past decade, fewer than 400 Americans a year have died as a consequence of domestic and foreign terrorism, about the same number who drown from using a bathtub and less than one percent of the number who die from traffic accidents. He pointed out that one’s chances of dying from a terrorist attack are

smaller than the chance that you will die because of an accident in your bathtub” (William Niskanen (forthcoming)) .

Does the current conflict with Radical Islam represent a temporary blip on the road to the end of history, or can we consign the latter concept to the wastebasket? While I will not of course attempt a definitive answer to this question, there are three things which are relevant to this question. (1) The end of (most) Soviet –style totalitarian systems did not mean the end of dictatorship, and in fact other forms of dictatorship such as tyranny are more likely to engender terrorism. In a globalized world, terrorist acts are also increasingly likely to be directed against countries in the West to the extent that they are seen as supporting tyrannies.

(2) Globalization itself carries with it the seeds of *jihad*

(3) Extremism is in a sense always with us, and the particular manifestations of it that we see today in the form of Radical Islam was itself a response to the convergence observed at the end of the Cold War, a response that could have been foreseen;

To elaborate, the first point is

*1. The end of totalitarianism and the rise of tyranny implied an upsurge in terrorism.* Put another way, tyrannies are more likely to engender terrorism than totalitarian regimes or democracies. To see this point, note that what distinguishes tyranny from totalitarianism is that loyalty to tyrannical regimes is relatively low<sup>13</sup>. For example, most of the regimes in the Middle East, for example, especially Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia would be classified as tyrannies. Such regimes typically simply repress dissent and so they do not fulfill their citizens’ demands for public goods and for solidarity. Elsewhere (Wintrobe (2006a and b) I argue that this demand for solidarity is what motivates people

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<sup>13</sup> For more details on the different regimes, and on their derivation, see Wintrobe ((1998) or 2006c)).

to support or join terrorist organizations, and to commit even radical actions such as suicide martyrdom for the cause. Thus there are typically no organizations propagandizing the citizens of the regime, and there is little or no provision of clubs, social services, medicare, etc. under tyrannies. These regimes can be effective at stamping out moderate methods of dissent by simply banning demonstrations, disloyal news media and other forms of opposition to the regime, and by hunting down and neutralizing potential sources of opposition. But they do not satisfy the demand for solidarity, as the Chinese and Milosevic regimes tried to do with nationalism, or as the former Soviet Union did with Communism and later nationalism as an ideology and way of life, and with an array of social and welfare services delivered, if not equally, at least relatively unequally, to all. So, looking at the model from the supply side, under tyrannies, people are left looking for ways to have their demands for solidarity fulfilled.

Like totalitarian regimes, democracies can provide social cohesion. But unlike totalitarian regimes, there are typically many competitive suppliers of solidarity in democracies, including churches and other religious groups, youth gangs, unions, and firms and so on in modern democracies like those in North America and Europe. So people do not have to turn to extremist groups in democracies to fulfill their desires for solidarity. To sum up, on the supply side, it seems that the most natural places for extremist groups to prosper is under tyrannies.

Turning to demand, democracies provide the freedom for extreme groups to organize, for their leaders to publicize their cause and participate in democratic elections if they wish to, so long as they do not engage in violence. Typically democracies also find ways to satisfy at least some of the demands of even those who are deeply opposed

to the government. That is one reason why Communist and Fascist parties have lost most of their appeal in western democracies. Totalitarian regimes provide no such freedom, and because of their centralization of power do not feature institutions such as federalism or the division of powers which allow for the unbundling of the indivisibility which is central to the programs of extremist groups. But, so long as they remain strong, totalitarian regimes are capable of wiping out dissent. For example, there was no breakaway movement in Chechnya under the old Soviet system. Again, therefore, we expect that the demand for terror is most likely to occur under tyrannies, or at least weak totalitarian regimes.

So, on balance it would appear that both the demand for and the supply of terror in particular will be largest under tyrannies or weak totalitarian regimes.

What does this mean for policy? One implication is that the US, in subsidizing tyrannies like those in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan, is, in a world of globalized terror, effectively subsidizing the production of terror against itself. Indeed, it is interesting that many of the “outposts of tyranny” identified as such by US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice in 2005 -- and therefore not entitled to subsidies<sup>14</sup> — North Korea, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Belarus and Myanmar-- are in fact totalitarian regimes, which typically do not engender terror.

The political scientist (and former Ambassador to the United Nations Jeanne Kirkpatrick did make the distinction between the two types of regimes (1982). She argued that the attempt to overthrow what she called a “traditional autocracy” (tinpot or tyrant, in my language) often simply resulted in the replacement of the regime by a

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<sup>14</sup> The remarks of Rice are discussed in the *International Herald Tribune*, 2005/8/14. On implementing this the classification of regimes empirically, see the independent attempt to do so and the evidence that they do indeed fall into distinct types by Islam and Winer (2004).

totalitarian one, as she argued happened in Iran and increasingly looks to be the long run outcome of US policy in Iraq.

So with the fall of the Soviet system and the rise of globalized markets, the main terrorist threat to countries in the West arose in tyrannies.. The fact that the United States, in funding the *mujahadeen* in their attempt to undermine the Soviet system, themselves gave the terrorists the training they needed was an additional reason to expect trouble but this is a separate and *ad hoc* point, whereas the conclusion I have just drawn is systematic.

Totalitarian regimes did not disappear with the fall of the Soviet system, but the ones that remained, or aspired to that status, like the Milosevic regime, now lacked the over- arching ideology which had been provided by Communism. Such dictators are particularly tempted to use nationalism and jihad as a way of solving the dictator's dilemma, and building support for their regimes, and it is no accident that Milosevic launched four wars in his quest for Greater Serbia. The misunderstanding of his aims by democratic leaders in the West, who typically did not then and do not now understand that dictators cannot survive in office by simply repressing their populations makes war particularly likely between democracies and dictatorships, especially totalitarian ones.<sup>15</sup> But nationalism is contagious, and it is particularly likely to spread through its interaction with the security dilemma, and because of this we do not know how much of the process remained under Milosevic's control, however guilty he was to play with fire in the first place (see Wintrobe 2006a).

## 2. *Globalization itself causes jihad.*

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<sup>15</sup> It is possible that it was also misunderstanding of the nature of dictatorship led also to the second Iraq war, but in this case there are explanations which seem more obvious, and which have been put forth in many places. The misunderstanding certainly contributed to the problems in the aftermath of the war.

At the same time as the fall in information costs was making transatlantic communication possible as never before and spinning businessmen around the world in search of opportunities, transporting academics to exotic locations for conferences etc., it also made obsolete the old dreams of communism and fascism based on insular communities. The reaction against these developments in the form of the “no- global” movement was predictable. But at the same time it made possible new global communities to satisfy the demands for solidarity. For popular music lovers this meant “world music.” Other forms of communities more suited to the information age include globalized religious communities, including global Radical Islam. In addition, the lure of markets which tends to pull people out of communities where the demands of the group on the individual are intense threatened to dilute the quality of those groups, and they in turn became more radical to keep up their appeal. And one way for clubs, groups and nations to satisfy the wants for solidarity of their peoples was to launch  *jihad*.

### 3. *Convergence causes extremism.*

To my knowledge Kitschelt (1997) was the first to point out that a move towards convergence mainstream political groupings leaves those on the extremes with less reason to negotiate with central groups and so they tend to turn more extreme. In this way, one can explain the extremism of the Red Brigades in Italy and the Baader Meinhof gang in Germany in the 1970's. Roy (2004) has made a similar argument with respect to the contemporary Middle East. The movement to the centre of many regimes in the middle east, and the failure of the religious theocratic option in Iran, implies the forces of moderation have come to the fore. But where does that leave the people who don't like

the policies of the centre? So the upsurge of Radical Islam can be analyzed in the same way as the earlier bouts of terrorism in Italy and Germany. Once again, the centrifugal forces of globalization leading to convergence gave rise to a contrary, centripetal movement which was entirely predictable.

## **6. Conclusion**

The most important policy implication of the paper is that one should look at the goals of extremist groups in order to understand its actions. The reason is that it is the purported indivisibility of the goal which explains the extremism of the actions, and if one can un- bundle the goal or make the indivisible divisible, then there may be ways to provide these goals in a way which satisfies some of the members of the group and thus dries up support for the grander ambitions of their leaders. In turn this policy implication shows the difficulties with restrictions on freedom of speech: the more one sanctions and prevents freedom of speech, the less likely is it that moderate forces will be able to understand the case for and against the goals of the extremists, and the more difficult it will be to satisfy the demands of moderates, driving them into the arms of extremists.

Extremism has to be considered separately from terrorism, and is a much broader category than that, or even than other particular manifestations of extremism like extreme nationalism, revolution or jihad. Many extremists are innovators, and the fruits of their innovation invigorate society. Freedom of speech is the lifeblood of democracy. Many new ideas appear extreme when they are first uttered, and serious curbs on freedom of speech will destroy democratic life. At the same time, the basic model of extremist

groups in this book implies that extremist groups will naturally find violence a temptation. So policy should draw a line between the advocacy of new ideas and solutions and “hate” speech and the advocacy of violence. Such laws can be consistent with democracy.

Extremists, including revolutionaries, nationalists, religious extremists who dream of “Global Islam,” or people who long for a homeland, are dreamers. In rational choice terms, in their dreams they identify the “missing factor” for making their dreams a reality. For Gandhi this was independence from the British, for King equal rights for American blacks, for Milosevic this was Greater Serbia, for Osama bin Laden a new *ummah*. Sometimes their dreams turn into nightmares for the rest of us. But a society which tries to stamp out extremism is trying to stamp out its own capacity to dream.

Extremism in power can be analyzed in the same way as extremism on the part of extremist groups. Once again, the basic proposition of this paper is that extremist *positions* imply extremist *actions* when there is an indivisibility between the intermediate and the ultimate goal. I argued that George W. Bush’s positions on security, taxes and the intrusion of religion in daily life are all extreme by historic standards in the US, and that on the issue of security, his *methods* have also been extreme, as the theory predicts. With respect to taxes the prediction of the theory is that, since no indivisibility is involved, extreme methods would not be used and they were not. With respect to religious policies (on abortion for example), there clearly is an indivisibility but so far extreme methods have not been used, possibly contradicting the theory.

Finally I asked whether there is a sense in which “extremism is always with us”, in the context of Fukuyama’s arguments about the end of history, and argued that the

very forces of convergence which Fukuyama used to justify his case in fact can be predicted to generate extremist movements, of which Al Qaeda and other Radical Islamic movements are paradigm examples, thus upsetting the prediction of the end of history.

<b>POSITION</b>	<b>Extreme</b>	<b>Greens</b>	<b>Al Qaeda Red Brigades  Hamas</b>
	<b>Normal</b>	<b>Democrats, Republicans (Forza Italia Ulivo)</b>	<b>Italian fascism of the 1920's</b>
		<b>Normal</b>	<b>Extreme</b>
		<b>METHOD</b>	

Figure 1. Two kinds of extremism  
(adapted from Galeotti (2002))

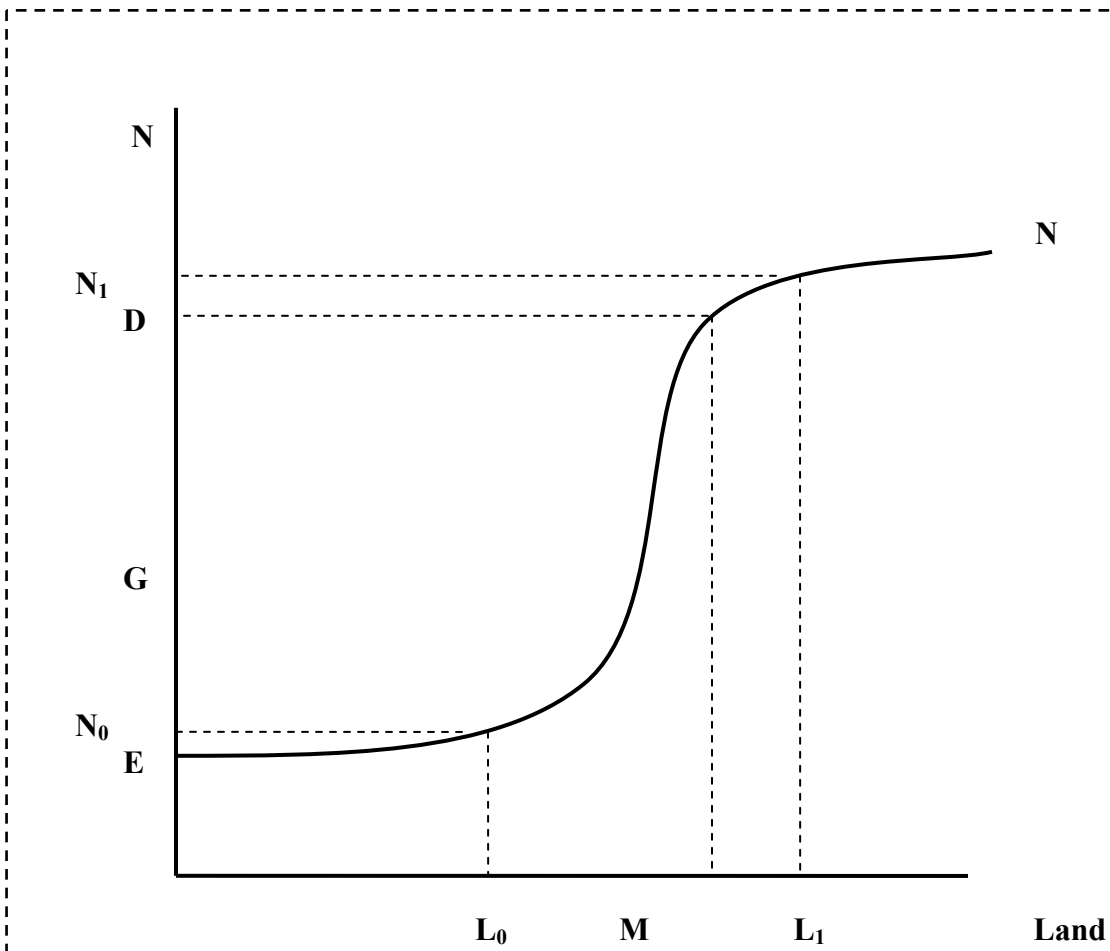


Figure 2  
Increasing returns in Palestine – Israel

N = nationhood

E = even with no land, the Palestinians are “conscious” of nationhood.

D = critical point (where increasing returns region ends), as (some) Palestinians feel that this is the minimum they need to form a nation. (Some) Israelis feel that if they give them that much THEY won’t have enough land to constitute a state because their borders will be insecure. So D could be the critical point for these two groups.

G = area where more land is still insufficient to provide enough space to enable the group to fully become a nation

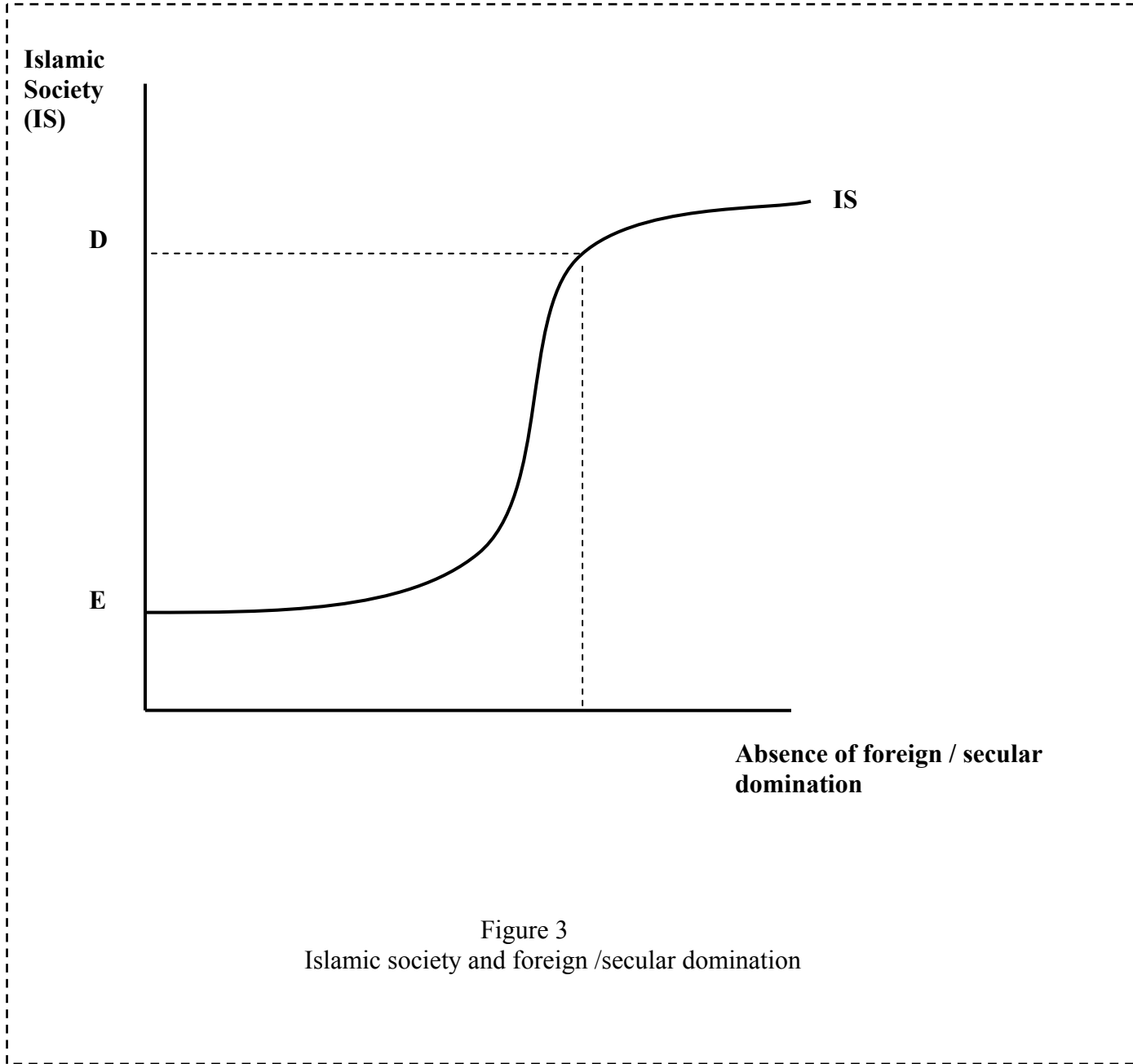


Figure 3  
Islamic society and foreign /secular domination

At D, enough foreign or secular domination has been removed to make an Islamic society possible.

E = Even with total domination, one can still have a little bit of an *ummah*

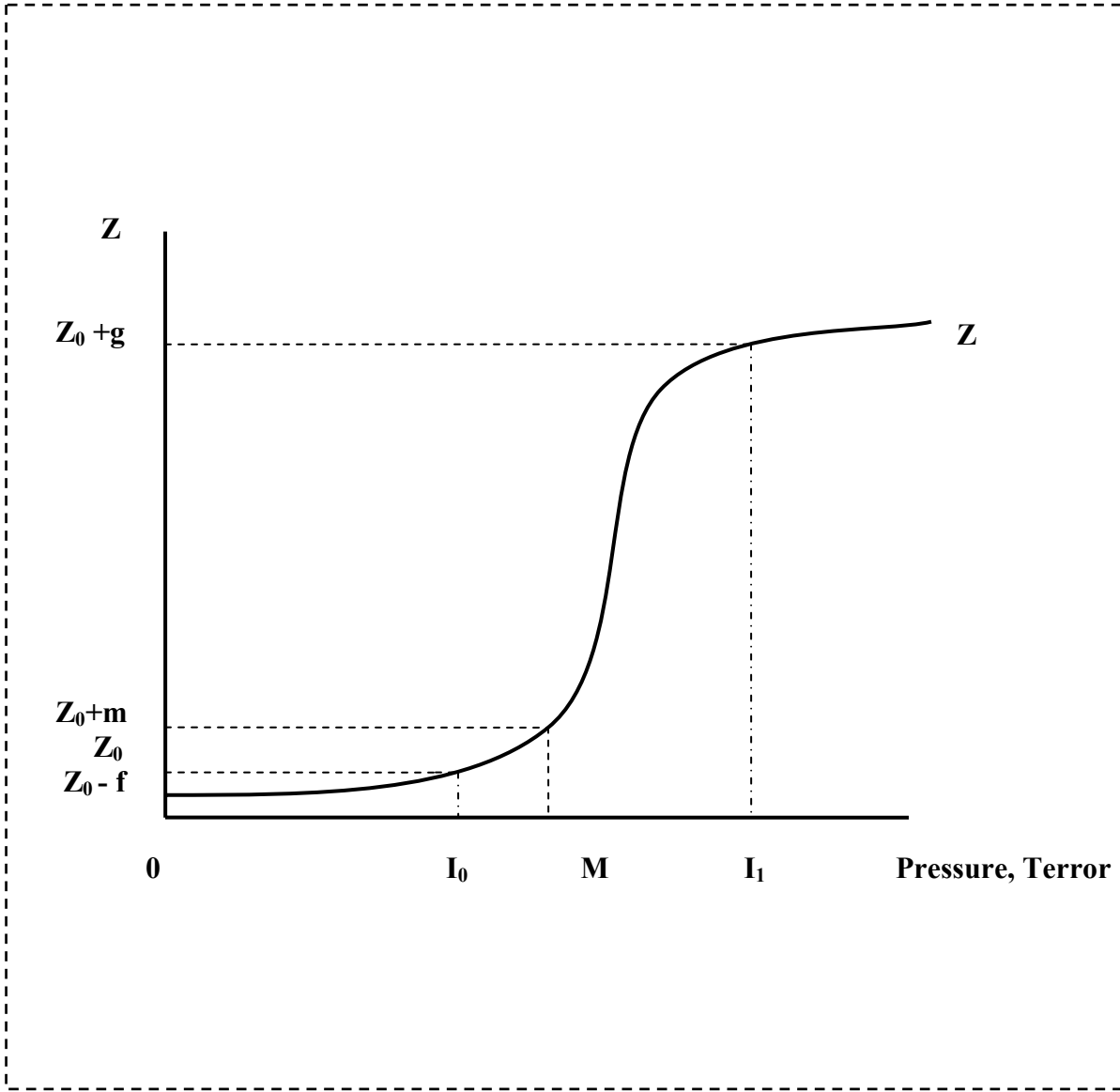


Figure 4 . The case of terror. The starting point is  $Z_0$ . The relationship depicted is the one believed to exist between pressure or terror and the level of the ultimate objective ( $Z$ ) that is achieved.

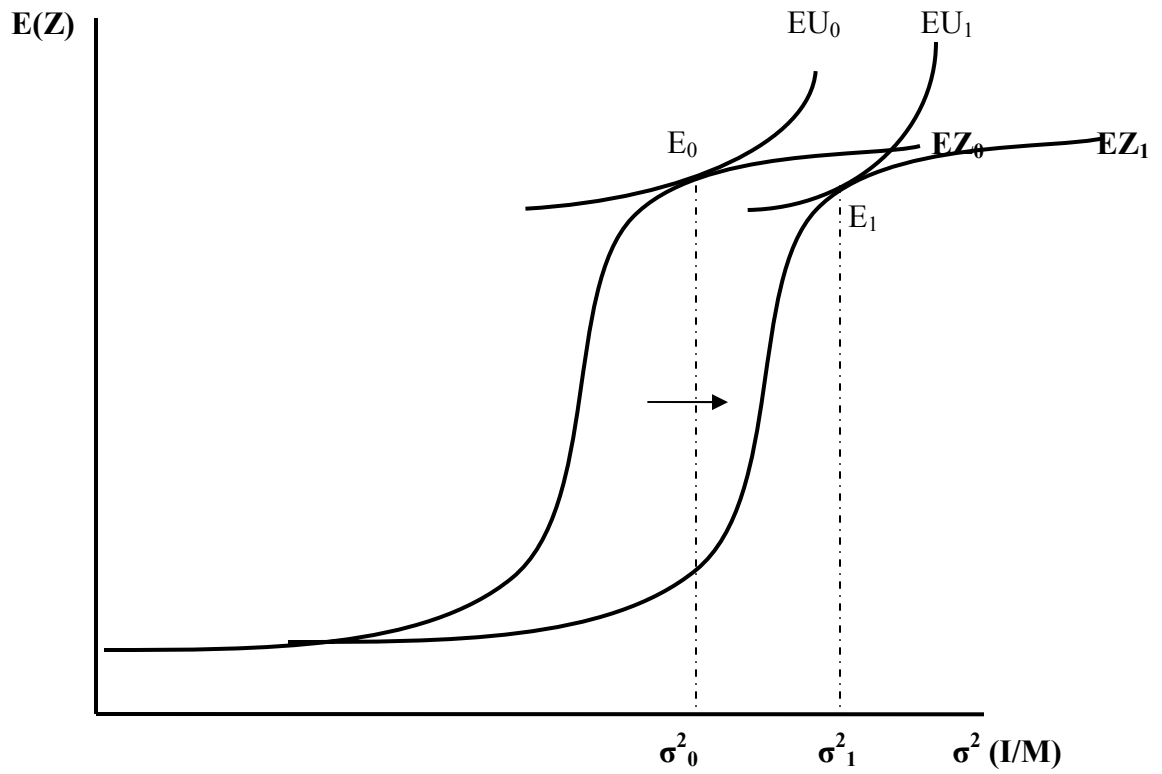


Figure 5 A turn to a more extremist ideology (shown by the arrow) implies greater use of violence (extremist methods), shown by the shift from  $E_0$  to  $E_1$

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