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Becoming a European homegrown jihadist: a multilevel analysis of involvement in the Dutch Hofstadgroup, 2002-2005

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7. Group dynamics II: Involvement in acts of terrorist violence[671]

7.1 Introduction

An individual's participation in a terrorist group, the mere act of 'joining', does not necessarily lead to their involvement in terrorist attacks.[672] As Taylor and Horgan argue, 'involvement decisions' are distinct from 'event decisions'.[673] As such, any attempt to understand the commission of terrorist acts must go beyond explanations for why people join and remain in terrorist groups to look specifically at how the decision to use violence came about. The previous chapter discussed the group-level factors that initiated and sustained involvement in the Hofstadgroup. The following pages complete the group-level analysis by analyzing whether it offers answers to why some participants became involved in actual terrorist violence or intended to do so.

7.1.1 Group-level explanations for terrorist violence

The literature reveals several group-level explanations for the use of terrorist violence, all of which will be discussed in the following paragraphs (Table 8). The most common assumption is that terrorism is *strategic*; a consciously chosen means to achieve certain (political) ends.[674] A second and perhaps less widely acknowledged perspective states that terrorism can stem from *organizational* motives for violence such as the desire to avenge killed or captured comrades.[675] The literature also reveals two other subjects relevant to a group's ability and inclination to use such violence. The first is the relationship between a terrorist group's organizational structure and its lethality.[676] The second consists of various social-psychological factors that can lower individuals' inhibitions towards harming or killing others. These are the diffusion of responsibility that can take place in group settings, the closely related phenomenon of deindividuation and the role of authority figures in ordering or legitimizing violence.[677]

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671 This chapter has been published in amended form as: Bart Schuurman and John G. Horgan, "Rationales for terrorist violence in homegrown jihadist groups: a case study from the Netherlands," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 27(2016).

672 Taylor and Horgan, "A conceptual framework," 592; Horgan, *Walking away from terrorism*, 142-143.

673 Taylor, "Is terrorism a group phenomenon?," 125-126.

674 Martha Crenshaw, "The logic of terrorism: terrorist behavior as a product of strategic choice," in *Psychology of terrorism: classic and contemporary insights*, ed. Jeff Victoroff and Arie W. Kruglanski (New York / Hove: Psychology Press, 2009), 371-382.

675 Crenshaw, "Theories of terrorism," 13-31.

676 Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "The nature of the beast: organizational structures and the lethality of terrorist attacks," *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 437-449.

677 Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 48-49.

Committing acts of terrorism		
Organizational lethality	***Overcoming barriers to violence***	***Rationales for terrorism***
Organizational lethality	Diffusion of responsibility	Strategic
	Deindividuation	Organizational
	Authorization of violence	

Table 8

7.2 Organizational structure and lethality

Research has found several organizational characteristics that increase a terrorist group's lethality.[678] The first is rallying around a religious or ethno-nationalist ideology, which is seen as leading to stronger 'othering' of out-groups perceived to be inferior. The second characteristic is a positive correlation between group size and lethality, possibly due to larger groups having access to more human capital in the form of people with the skills required for organizing and executing terrorist attacks. Ties to other terrorist organizations and control of territory make up characteristics three and four, which are respectively explained as providing increased access to relevant information, means and expertise and as conveying resources and shelter conducive to organizational growth and longevity.[679] Later research by Asal et al. also underscored terrorists' technical expertise as a lethality increasing factor.[680]

7.2.1 Organizational lethality and the Hofstadgroup

The Hofstadgroup could count on few of the above characteristics. It had no territorial control whatsoever. It did have international links to several individuals who may have been involved in terrorism. But as chapter 5 argued, these ties did not provide the Hofstadgroup with significant benefits in terms of increasing its ability to plan and execute a terrorist attack, beyond the *possibility* that two participants had undergone basic paramilitary training overseas. Neither did the Hofstadgroup's fairly large size of approximately forty participants provide it with much in the way of terrorism-relevant human capital. None of the group's participants were experienced militants and the largely unsuccessful trips abroad did little to alter this fact. Neither did the group contain people knowledgeable about such terrorist essentials as the construction of explosives.

The one organizational characteristic conducive to increased lethality that the Hofstadgroup had was a religious ideology based on an extremist interpretation of Islam. This allowed a dichotomous 'us versus them' worldview to take hold, especially among the more militant participants. This sharp distinction between a small in-group of the righteous and various out-group enemies, ranging from apostate Muslims to Western states engaged in a perceived 'war against Islam',

678 Asal and Rethemeyer, "The nature of the beast," 437-449.
679 Ibid., 437-441, 443-444, 446.
680 Victor Asal et al., "Killing range: explaining lethality variance within a terrorist organization," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 3 (2015): 401-427.

lowered the threshold to seeing the use of violence as acceptable. On the whole, however, the Hofstadgroup's organizational characteristics conferred upon it a relatively low level of inherent lethality. This is a potential explanation for why so few participants actually became involved in (preparations for) terrorism and why Van Gogh's murder was the only successful attack to be carried out by a group participant.

7.3 Group influences that lower barriers to violent behavior

In his review of the relevant literature, Borum identifies four group effects that can lower individuals' thresholds to using violence.[681] One of these, group norms that legitimize the use of violence, will not be repeated here as both the previous paragraph and the last chapter have affirmed that such norms existed. Instead, the next paragraphs focus on the diffusion of individual responsibility, the related concept of deindividuation and, thirdly, obedience to authority.

7.3.1 Diffusion of responsibility and deindividuation

Soccer hooliganism and mass looting show that crowds can bring out antisocial behavior in the individuals that constitute them.[682] Given the propensity for large groups to behave violently, early social scientists described such collective behavior in terms of irrationality and anarchy.[683] While recent research has shown such qualifications to be inaccurate,[684] group participation can affect individuals' behavior by 'diffusing' their personal sense of responsibility to the collective.[685] When everyone is responsible for what happens, no one person can be held accountable.[686] In such a setting, individuals' internal barriers to otherwise prohibited behavior, including involvement in acts of violence, are lowered.[687]

The lowering of inhibitions to deviant behavior can also result from 'deindividuation'. Postmes and Spears define it as a 'psychological state of decreased self-evaluation and decreased evaluation apprehension causing antinormative and disinhibitive behavior'.[688] Put another way, people are more likely to act in otherwise prohibited ways when they lose the sense that they will or can be held accountable for their actions. Silke has argued that anonymity-induced deindividuation

681 Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 48-49.
682 Gordon W. Russell, "Sport riots: a social-psychological review," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 9, no. 4 (2004): 367-368.
683 Stephen Reicher, "The psychology of crowd dynamics," in *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: group processes*, ed. Michael A. Hogg and R. Scott Tindale (Malden / Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 185-186.
684 Ibid., 182-208.
685 Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 49.
686 John Garnett, "The causes of war and the conditions of peace," in *Strategy in the contemporary world: an introduction to strategic studies*, ed. John Baylis, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81.
687 Pynchon and Borum, "Assessing threats," 345-346.
688 Tom Postmes and Russell Spears, "Deindividuation and antinormative behavior: a meta-analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 123, no. 3 (1998): 238.

is particularly likely to lead to an increased likeliness of violent behavior.[689] His research on interpersonal assaults in Northern Ireland shows that masked attackers were significantly more likely to display higher levels of aggression and punitive treatment of their victims than those whose identities were not similarly concealed.[690]

7.3.1.1 Diffusion of responsibility, deindividuation and the Hofstadgroup

Hofstadgroup participants were involved in two acts of violence; the murder of Van Gogh and the throwing of a hand grenade at police officers. As neither of the two perpetrators was disguised or in any other sense unrecognizable, anonymity-induced deindividuation is ruled out as an explanatory variable. Likewise, there is currently no data to suggest that either of these individuals experienced a diffusion of responsibility based on their participation in a larger group. Van Gogh's killer clearly acted alone and while the hand grenade thrower was accompanied by another Hofstadgroup participant at the time of the incident, there is no data to suggest the other person's presence induced a diffusion of personal responsibility. A 'group' of two seems simply too small for its participants to experience such an effect.

7.3.2 Authorization of violence

Milgram's famous 1963 study dramatically highlighted humans' willingness to use violence when ordered to do so.[691] In the experiment, test subjects administered what they thought were increasingly strong electric shocks to other people on the instigation of a scientific authority figure, despite being able to hear the screams and pleas of the 'victim' (who in actuality was an accomplice of the experimenter).[692] The test subjects clearly believed that their actions were causing pain to another human being and displayed high levels of stress while following the instructions given to them. Nevertheless, a majority of test subjects continued to perform as ordered. Milgram's study highlights a mechanism known as 'displacement of authority'.[693] Most test subjects continued to give 'electric shocks' because in their perception it was ultimately not they who were responsible, but the experimenter issuing commands. Can obedience to authority explain why some Hofstadgroup participants planned or executed acts of terrorism?

7.3.2.1 Authorization of violence and the Hofstadgroup

The most notable authority figures were the middle-aged Syrian religious instructor Abu Khaled and Van Gogh's future murderer. As the previous chapter noted, the Syrian was crucial to the

689 Andrew Silke, "The Internet & terrorist radicalisation: the psychological dimension," in *Terrorism and the internet: threats - target groups - deradicalisation strategies*, ed. Hans-Liudger Dienel, et al. (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2010), 33.

690 Andrew Silke, "Deindividuation, anonymity, and violence: findings from Northern Ireland," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 143, no. 4 (2003): 493-494, 496.

691 Stanley Milgram, "Behavorial study of obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67, no. 4 (1963): 371-378.

692 Ibid.

693 Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 49-50.

conveyance of fundamentalist and radical convictions that contributed to the delegitimization of Dutch society and politics. Although it is *plausible* that he was in some way involved with the murder of Van Gogh seeing as he left for Syria on the very day of the attack, and despite speculation to this end,[694] there is no concrete data to suggest that Abu Khaled *directly* legitimized or encouraged the use of violence.[695] It could well be that future research will convincing show this individual *did* have a role in the murder of Van Gogh or the other planned attacks. For now, however, there is no concrete empirical evidence to support this line of reasoning.

The writings of Van Gogh's to-be murderer show that he developed extremist views from approximately March 2004 onward.[696] One participant recalled that he preached that the 'blood and money' of unbelievers was fair game.[697] As such Van Gogh's future assailant certainly provided justifications for the use of violence, but he too never appears to have directly instigated other participants to commit such acts. Both Abu Khaled and Van Gogh's assailant conferred ideas that, to different degrees, provided participants with legitimizations for the use of violence. However, they did not explicitly order its use.

In November 2004, just after Van Gogh's murder, a listening device recorded one participant telling another to use a hand grenade should the police come to arrest them. 'Because there will be a ring at the door before their arrival, what do you do? You make…you wait until they enter and then you throw one, yes?'[698] In an earlier conversation, however, the 'instructor' uses 'we' to refer to how they would react to a police raid.[699] Likewise, during the 'siege' of their apartment on November 10th, this individual spoke in the 'we' when phoning several friends to tell them they had thrown a grenade at the police.[700] On that day he was also heard to say '[y]ou just need to get that thing and throw it outside' to his compatriot.[701] But none of the remaining three hand grenades were used. These conversations suggest that this individual either was not trying to or lacked the authority to command the use of violence, making it unlikely the authorization of violence was a factor in the use of the grenade.

Based on the above examples and the remainder of the empirical data, there is little to suggest that among the group's participants were those with the authority, ability and desire to order the

694 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 4, "Personal interview 2," 4.
695 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/13: 136-140; AHA104/121: 1632-1635, 1646; 1601/1617: 4002, 4026, 4048-4050, 4090-4091, 4096, 4098, 4129, 4179, 4146, 4201; AHB1611/1626: 3796-3803; VERD: 19480, 20131, 20213, 20363; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 1," 2-3; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 8-9; A[.], "Deurwaarders," 24; Erkel, *Samir*, 190-192.
696 Peters, "Dutch extremist Islamism," 150-159.
697 Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 81.
698 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA07/24: 3047.
699 Ibid., AHA07/24: 3034.
700 Ibid., AHA07/24: 3091.
701 Ibid., AHA07/24: 3119; Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 49.

execution of terrorist attacks.[702] But what about those authority figures outside its borders? It has been noted several times that there is no concrete evidence that the Moroccan jihadist residing in Spain and the unnamed Afghan or Pakistani 'emir' authorized or instigated the use of violence by those participants they were in contact with.[703] But they were not the only external authority figures.

In chat conversations dated to September 2003, two participants describe their separate encounters with a Dutch convert to Islam who became a radical preacher. In these chats, both participants claim to have received confirmation from this preacher that it was religiously justified to steal from or kill representatives of the Dutch government.[704] The preacher in question has denied any involvement with the two Hofstadgroup participants and claims to have barely met them.[705] While the Hofstadgroup men may have given a more militant interpretation to his words than the preacher intended, the latter's radical convictions seem in little doubt. During a November 2004 television appearance, he said to have been pleased to hear of Van Gogh's death and would not feel sorry if Wilders contracted a deadly disease.[706] These remarks lend credibility to the idea that both participants were able to construe from the preacher's words a legitimization for violence, although it is unlikely he ever issued any kind of direct 'order' to that extent.

One of the imams of the Salafist as-Soennah mosque in The Hague gained notoriety for a sermon he delivered shortly before the murder of Van Gogh. The imam provided various examples of the punishment reserved for those who mock the Prophet Muhammad and beseeched his god to give Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali deadly, incurable diseases. He was, however, careful to not openly incite to violence.[707] Although Van Gogh's killer does not appear to have attended this particular sermon, he and other participants in the Hofstadgroup were known to have frequented the imam's mosque.[708] The imam has claimed that his sermon was intended to channel his listeners' anger and frustration over the activities of Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali as a means of creating a buffer against violence.[709] Even if this surprising interpretation of his words is true, the incident suggests that participants had access to authority figures whose words could easily be *interpreted* as justifications for violence.

Extremist imams, ideologues and militants that influenced the Hofstadgroup through books, television and the Internet, provided the clearest justifications for and calls to violence. Yet their

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702 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," VERD: 19479, 19876; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 14-15; Vidino, "The Hofstad group," 586-587.

703 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 23-25.

704 Ibid., AHD08/37: 8713-8714, 8765-8766; NOVA, "Chatgesprekken Jason W.," NOVA, http://www.novatv.nl/page/detail/nieuws/516.

705 Alberts and Derix, "Balkenende in 2003 al op dodenlijst Jason W.."

706 "'U wilt misschien wel dat Wilders doodgaat?'," *NRC Handelsblad*, 24 November 2004.

707 Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 233-240.

708 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," VERD: 19562, 19853, 20004, 20114-20115; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*.

709 Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 236-245.

influence was indirect. Men like Osama bin Laden or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi never specifically instructed or authorized the Hofstadgroup to carry out an attack. Van Gogh's murderer found justification to murder blasphemers in the work of the fourteenth century Salafist scholar Ahmad ibn Taymiyya. Crucially, however, interpreting this work as a personal duty for the individual believer to act as judge, jury and executioner was something that the killer *had to do himself.*[710]

To the previous chapter's conclusion that the Hofstadgroup lacked leaders who shaped the group ideologically or organizationally, this section adds the finding that it also lacked what could be termed *operational* leaders.[711] Authority figures both in and outside of the group, as well as jihadist 'role models' provided plentiful (implied) justifications for the use of terrorism. But none actively moved participants from the conviction that violence was permissible to actual participation in violent behavior. The lack of direct personal contacts with people authorizing or ordering the use of terrorism was significant. It meant that the degree to which Hofstadgroup participants could displace responsibility for any harm they inflicted on others was limited, leaving a significant obstacle to the use of violence intact. It also supports a previous finding that the impetus for acts of terrorism was left to the initiative of individual participants. Planning or perpetrating acts of terrorism remained a predominantly *personal* rather than *group-based* undertaking.

7.4 The rationality of terrorism

The remainder of this chapter addresses whether strategic or organizational rationales for terrorism can explain the Hofstadgroup's planned and perpetrated attacks. This discussion, however, builds on the assumption that terrorism can be seen as the end-result of an essentially rational decision making process, that it is not the domain of the irrational fanatic or the mentally disturbed. The following paragraphs briefly outline this argument in order to support the analysis of strategic and organizational rationales that follows.

All rationality is 'bounded' in the sense that people seldom have perfect information on which to base their decisions or may simply not be able to accurately foresee all possible consequences of the courses of action available to them.[712] Thus, the decision to engage in high-risk behavior such as terrorism does not necessarily imply irrationality; it may simply have seemed the best option available at the time. Secondly, although rational choice theory posits that decision making is motivated by the maximization of narrowly defined self-interest,[713] in reality many people engage in collective action at considerable personal risk, such as strikes or rebellions.[714] This indicates

710 Peters, "Dutch extremist Islamism," 156.
711 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," VERD: 19479, 19876; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 14-15; Vidino, "The Hofstad group," 586-587.
712 Herbert A. Simon, "Rationality in political behavior," *Political Psychology* 16, no. 1 (1995): 46-47.
713 Bryan Caplan, "Terrorism: the relevance of the rational choice model," *Public Choice* 128, no. 1-2 (2006): 94-95.
714 John Scott, "Rational choice theory," in *Understanding contemporary society: theories of the present*, ed. Gary Browning, Abigail Halcli, and Frank Webster (London: Sage, 2000), 132-133.

that self-interest can extend to the pursuit of altruistic or collectively-held goals.[715] Even suicide terrorism, seemingly the ultimate negation of self-interest, can be construed as rational behavior provided that the perpetrator believes death in pursuit of his or her cause will guarantee the bestowment of status, benefits to family or rewards in an afterlife that warrant the loss of life.[716]

A substantial body of empirical research lends further credence to the notion of terrorists' rationality. Terrorists have been shown to adapt their behavior in response to the obstacles and opportunities provided by prevailing physical, social and political circumstances.[717] For instance by adjusting operational methods or switching to different targets in response to heightened security measures,[718] reserving suicide attacks for targets against which 'conventional' modes of attack are less likely to be successful[719] and considering beforehand how the use of suicide attacks will affect their popular standing.[720] Terrorist organizations have also been found to time their attacks in an attempt to maximize both their long-term and immediate effects.[721]

It has been noted that terrorism is seldom effective in the long-run[722] and that the stated goals of contemporary religious terrorists are so utopian as to defy rational expectations of achievability.[723] However, there *are* examples of terrorism proving strategically effective,[724] and its short-term benefits, such as limited concessions or simple recognition, may obscure its poor long-term chances of success.[725] The literature also cautions against taking terrorists' utopian rhetoric at

715 William F. Shughart, II, "Terrorism in rational choice perspective," in *The handbook on the political economy of war*, ed. Christopher J. Coyne and Rachel L. Mathers (Cheltenham / Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2011), 126.

716 Mohammed M. Hafez, "Rationality, culture, and structure in the making of suicide bombers: a preliminary theoretical synthesis and illustrative case study," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 2 (2006): 180-181; Amien Kacou, "Five arguments on the rationality of suicide terrorists," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 18, no. 5 (2013): 539-547; Domenico Tosini, "Calculated, passionate, pious extremism: beyond a rational choice theory of suicide terrorism," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38, no. 3 (2010): 394-415.

717 Jacob N. Shapiro, "Terrorist decision making: insights from economics and political science," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 4-5 (2012): 9-13.

718 Berrebi, "Evidence about the link between education," 172-173; Aaron Clauset et al., "The strategic calculus of terrorism: substitution and competition in the Israel-Palestine conflict," *Cooperation and Conflict* 45, no. 1 (2010): 6-33; Laura Dugan, Gary LaFree, and Alex R. Piquero, "Testing a rational choice model of airline hijackings," in *Intelligence and security informatics*, ed. Paul Kantor, et al. (Berlin / Heidelberg: Springer, 2005), 356-357; Todd Sandler and Walter Enders, "An economic perspective on transnational terrorism," *European Journal of Political Economy* 20, no. 2 (2004): 311-313.

719 Eli Berman and David D. Laitin, "Hard targets: theory and evidence on suicide attacks," (Stanford: Stanford University, 2006), 30-31.

720 Mia Bloom, *Dying to kill: the allure of suicide terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 78.

721 Nurit Kliot and Igal Charney, "The geography of suicide terrorism in Israel," *GeoJournal* 66, no. 4 (2006): 353.

722 Max Abrahms, "The political effectiveness of terrorism revisited," *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012): 366-393; Cronin, *How terrorism ends*, 211-212, 215-217.

723 Robert Nalbandov, "Irrational rationality of terrorism," *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 4 (2013): 92-96, 102.

724 Bruce Hoffman, "The rationality of terrorism and other forms of political violence: lessons from the Jewish campaign in Palestine, 1939-1947," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 2 (2011): 258-272; Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The strategies of terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 49.

725 Eric D. Gould and Esteban F. Klor, "Does terrorism work?," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 125, no. 4 (2010): 1459-1510; Peter Krause, "The political effectiveness of non-state violence: a two-level framework to transform a deceptive debate," *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 259-294; Sarah V. Marsden, "Successful terrorism: framework and review," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 4, no. 2 (2012): 134-150.

face value. While terrorist groups may claim to be driven by religious motives and otherworldly rewards, their behavior often belies realism and a focus on the here and now. For instance, the fact that Hamas videotapes would-be suicide bombers last will to reinforce their resolve, indicates that even these ideological extremists realize that when put to the test, their operatives may not hold to professed beliefs as closely as they claimed.[726] In short, existing research makes a strong case for viewing terrorism as a rational form of behavior.

7.5 Terrorism as the result of strategic considerations

The academic literature widely considers terrorism to be a strategy; a means consciously chosen to achieve certain (political) ends.[727] Despite projecting an image of irrational fanaticism, suicide terrorism is no exception in this regard, especially when viewed from the perspective of the *organizations* deploying such attacks.[728] As Pape states, it is not simple fanaticism that explains organizations' use of suicide terrorism, but a belief in the efficacy of this mode of attack.[729] From the strategic perspective, terrorism is just one particular form of political violence whose adoption is dictated by circumstances.[730] The strategic rationale brings to light that terrorism is a form of behavior rather than an inherent quality of certain types of people; it is something individuals can opt to *do*, not an expression of what they *are*.Any group may opt to utilize terrorist violence as a strategy for a variety of reasons.[731] Some employ it as a form of psychological warfare, extracting concessions from opponents through the use and threat of indiscriminate violence.[732] Groups might also utilize terrorist violence to demonstrate a government's impotence,[733] to advertize their goals and grievances to a (global) audience, to establish revolutionary conditions or to entice government over-reaction as a means of delegitimizing the authorities.[734] Furthermore, terrorist attacks can be intended to alter the behavior of the groups) with which the perpetrators identify,

726 Gregory D. Miller, "Terrorist decision making and the deterrence problem," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 2 (2013): 138.

727 Crenshaw, "The logic of terrorism," 371-382; Gary LaFree et al., "Spatial and temporal patterns of terrorist attacks by ETA 1970 to 2007," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 28, no. 1 (2012): 7-29; David A. Lake, "Rational extremism: understanding terrorism in the twenty-first century," *Dialogue IO* 1, no. 1 (2002): 15-29; Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, *The strategy of terrorism: how it works, and why it fails* (London / New York: Routledge, 2008); Shapiro, "Terrorist decision making," 5-20.

728 Bruce Hoffman and Gordon H. McCormick, "Terrorism, signaling, and suicide attack," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27, no. 4 (2004): 243-281; Robert A. Pape, "The strategic logic of suicide terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 3 (2003): 1-19; Pape, *Dying to win*; Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide terrorism* (Cambridge / Malden: Polity Press, 2005).

729 Pape, "The strategic logic," 1-19.

730 Ariel Merari, "Terrorism as a strategy of insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (1993): 213-251.

731 Brian A. Jackson, "Organizational decisionmaking by terrorist groups," in *Social science for counterterrorism: putting the pieces together*, ed. Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin (Santa Monica: RAND, 2009), 221-228; Kydd and Walter, "The strategies of terrorism," 59.

732 Alex P. Schmid, "Terrorism as psychological warfare," *Democracy and Security* 1, no. 2 (2005): 137-146.

733 Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, "Strategic terrorism: the framework and its fallacies," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 571-595.

734 Crenshaw, "The logic of terrorism," 371, 377-379.

for instance by gaining popular support or new recruits or by convincing their supporters that armed resistance is feasible.[735]

Scenarios in which a cost-benefit analysis could swing in favor of terrorism include the exhaustion of non-violent options or seeing other groups successfully utilize this form of political violence. Alternatively, the narrow popular appeal of extremist groups' goals or strong government repression may rule out political attempts at achieving change, making terrorism more attractive from the outset. There may also be a sudden opportunity that makes terrorism seem an appealing option, such as repressive government measures that (temporarily) provide popular legitimacy for striking at the authorities. Finally, terrorism can become attractive when a group is forced onto the defensive, turning it into a means of showing continued strength and ability to act despite state success or increased repression.[736]

7.5.1 Strategic rationales and the Hofstadgroup

Van Gogh's attacker left behind numerous writings that provide an interesting perspective on his views. In some of these texts, he threatened perceived enemies or called upon Muslims to rise up and fight in defense of their faith.[737] But to what end? Beyond advocacy of religious dogmatism and general calls to militancy and resistance, concrete strategic goals are absent. While Van Gogh's murderer does at one point declare that it is 'but a matter of time' before the Dutch government will fall to Islamist forces, there is no indication that he worked to hasten this ultimate victory or had any practical ideas about how to bring it about.[738]

The *lack* of strategic motives is also apparent in the final statement that Van Gogh's murderer gave in court on 9 August 2005. 'I acted out of faith. And I have even declared that had it been my father or my brother, I would have done exactly the same.'[739] Neither is there a clear indication that he killed for political motives in any of the seven 'open letters' he wrote prior to carrying out his attack. The letters threaten the Dutch people as a whole with further acts of terrorism and single out several politicians known for their critical stance on Islam. The letters also admonish the (global) Muslim community for standing by in the face of oppression and encourage young Dutch Muslims to follow the 'true' path of (extremist) Islam.[740] They suggest that the murderer was motivated by a strongly-held belief that it was his personal duty to kill blasphemers, as a well as a desire to avenge perceived injustices, rather than an ambition to attain political goals more specific than rallying potential supporters to his worldview.

735 Ibid., 514-552; Ian S. Lustick, "Terrorism in the Arab-Israeli conflict: targets and audiences," in *Terrorism in context*, ed. Martha Crenshaw (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 514-552.
736 Crenshaw, "The logic of terrorism," 373-376.
737 Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 12-56.
738 Peters, "Dutch extremist Islamism," 158-159.
739 NOS, "Verklaring Mohammed B. in tekst," 2.
740 Peters, "Dutch extremist Islamism," 156-157.

In 2005, another member of the group's extremist inner circle made a videotape in which he threatens the Dutch government and its citizens for their participation in the Iraq war. He also calls upon his fellow believers to 'attack or be attacked' in defense of oppressed Muslims worldwide.[741] But other than a call for the Dutch to 'keep your hands off of the Muslims everywhere in the world', he does not formulate clear political goals in his taped message.[742] A concrete strategic rationale was also absent from this individual's 2003 attempt to reach Chechnya and, prior to that, his ambition to go to the Palestinian territories. Instead, both the videotaped message and his unfinished autobiography reveal an idealistic desire to help oppressed Muslims, the need to find a release for feelings of anger and revenge, a sense of personal religious duty and the emulation of jihadist role models. In a telling reference to his desire to go to the Palestinian territories, he writes 'I did not think at all, about where I would go, what I would do, about nothing'.[743] The need to 'do something' was all-important.

The motives of other Hofstadgroup participants with violent intentions follow a similar pattern. The letter a third inner-circle member left his mother before embarking for Pakistan or Afghanistan makes clear that he left to 'drive out the unbelievers' and 'establish the Islamic state'.[744] Although these are clear goals on paper they hardly appear outside of this one letter. When he mentions his travels in chat conversations during the fall of 2003, the emphasis is always on the action itself, rather than its significance as a means towards certain ends. Rather than stressing the need for an Islamic state in Afghanistan, for instance, this individual seemed almost singularly interested in discussing the specific weapons he used, the training he allegedly underwent, the hardships he faced and the people he met.[745] Adventure and action trumped strategic considerations.

Political-strategic considerations were not entirely absent from the motives of those Hofstadgroup participants who actually carried out or planned to carry out a terrorist attack. There are also some indications that the group's most militant participants discussed – and disagreed – about how the use of violence could best suit their aims; some wanted to focus on attacks in the Netherlands while others wished to join Islamist insurgents overseas.[746] But as the various examples given above have shown, strategic rationales were never clearly expressed. Instead, such ambitions to commit acts of terrorism as emerged from the group hinted at strongly held convictions and violent emotions as motivational forces. The next section considers whether organizational rationales for violence can shed light on their origins.

741 NOVA, "Videotestament Samir A. - vertaling NOVA".
742 Ibid.
743 A[.], "Deurwaarders," 4.
744 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/13: 163.
745 Ibid., 01/01: 123-126; AHA105/122: 2176; AHD2107/2136: 8401-8402; AHD2108/2137: 8569-8571, 8595-8597, 8618-8619, 8635-8637, 8715-8717, 8767-8769, 8773-8775, 8880, 8919-8931; AHD2109/2138: 9049, 9054-9056.
746 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 4, "Personal interview 2," 3-4.

7.6 Terrorism as the result of organizational dynamics

Semi-clandestine and ideologically oriented organizations such as terrorist groups face considerable constraints on decision making processes. Their social isolation or in some cases even completely underground existence makes them inherently inward looking. Among the effects of such an existence are increased cohesion among militants and a heightened desire to strike out at those who threaten the group.[747] But studies reveal that by making the group the sole source and filter for information about the outside world, increased solidarity can skew the analysis of the likely consequences of attacks as well as the cost benefit calculation that led to the adoption of terrorism in the first place.[748]

Furthermore, highly cohesive in-groups that need to make decisions in times of crisis and in conditions of considerable stress are vulnerable to 'groupthink'. This refers to a setting in which loyalty to group norms and social pressures towards conformity override critical thinking and the voicing of doubts.[749] Groupthink further deteriorates the ability of (terrorist) groups to objectively interpret reality, leads them to overestimate their own capabilities, to dismiss information or criticisms that do not fit their preconceptions and to hold stereotypical views of the enemy that prohibit a realistic assessment of their opponents' capabilities and likely responses.[750]

The effects of group psychology surpass merely placing constraints on the rationality of decision making processes. Some authors propose that group dynamics override strategic considerations in contributing to the decision to use terrorist violence.[751] Although terrorist groups often present themselves as ideologically driven organizations that use violence to achieve political aims, such strategic rationales are not necessarily the primary incentive guiding members' participation. Instead, personnel may be drawn by a host of non-political considerations such as social solidarity, status or the personal gratification found in adherence to the group's worldview.[752] Through its ability to deliver these benefits, the group's importance can become so great that its wellbeing becomes its members' greatest priority.[753] Over time, 'proximate' objectives such as group survival

747 McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of political radicalization," 421-424.
748 Della Porta, "Recruitment processes," 310; Crenshaw, "The logic of terrorism," 372; Della Porta, *Social movements*, 114, 186, 204.
749 Irving L. Janis, "Groupthink," *Psychology Today*, November 1971, 84-85.
750 Ibid., 85-88; Gordon H. McCormick, "Terrorist decision making," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6(2003): 488-489; Crenshaw, *Explaining terrorism*, 107.
751 Murat Ozer, "The impact of group dynamics on terrorist decision making," in *Understanding terrorism: analysis of sociological and psychological aspects*, ed. Suleyman Ozeren, Ismail Dincer Gunes, and Diab M. Al-Badayneh (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2007), 63-75.
752 Abrahms, "What terrorists really want," 101-103.
753 Della Porta, *Social movements*, 134, 177-178, 183.

can supersede 'ultimate' political purpose, leading terrorist groups to persevere even in the face of outright failure and making terrorism a goal in itself.[754]

The literature review revealed six group-based motives for terrorist violence. The first is the incentive of redemption, whereby membership of violent groups that adhere to strict moral or religious codes offers individual participants a road to salvation.[755] In such a setting, the 'motivation for terrorism may be to transcend reality as much as to transform it'.[756] The second is the action imperative. Impatient for results and disillusioned with or otherwise dismissive of the path of non-violence, terrorist groups frequently develop a strong internal pressure towards carrying out a violent act. Such a need to 'do something' is not necessarily tied to instrumental reasoning.[757] Thirdly there is the emulation of other terrorists held in high esteem by the group. Their modus operandi, their justifications for violence and even the manner in which these role models issue communiqués can become templates and incentives for admirers' own actions.[758]

The fourth group-driven motivation for terrorism found in the literature sees such violence occur as a response to counter-terrorism measures taken by the authorities.[759] Attacking the state is of course most readily associated with strategic rationales for terrorism. But as the state reacts to terrorist attacks and terrorist groups lose comrades to shoot-outs or arrests, what began as a politically-strategic use of force has a tendency to devolve into a highly personal struggle in which the desire for vengeance can override strategic considerations and instigate further violence.[760] Such a spiral of revenge is documented, for instance, by Della Porta in her research on the Italian and German left-wing terrorist groups that were active between the 1960s and 1980s.[761]

The fifth and sixth organizational rationales for terrorism are competition with other extremist groups and intragroup conflict. When different terrorist groups emerge who share the same goals, appeal to the same ideology and (claim to) represent the same segment of a population, the likeliness of competition increases. In the struggle for such resources as media attention, recruits and popular legitimacy, terrorist groups may begin to use violence against their competitors as

754 Crenshaw, "Theories of terrorism," 19-22; McCauley and Segal, "Social psychology of terrorist groups," 336-337; McCormick, "Terrorist decision making," 489-490; McAllister and Schmid, "Theories of terrorism," 227; Jerrold M. Post, "Terrorist psycho-logic: terrorist behavior as a product of psychological forces," in *Origins of terrorism: psychologies, ideologies, theologies, states of mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1990), 38.

755 Crenshaw, "Theories of terrorism," 20.

756 Ibid.

757 McCormick, "Terrorist decision making," 487; Crenshaw, "Theories of terrorism," 20; Sageman, "The next generation of terror," 4-5.

758 McCormick, "Terrorist decision making," 488; Manni Crone, "Religion and violence: governing Muslim militancy through aesthetic assemblages," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 1 (2014): 291-307.

759 Lia and Skjølberg, "Causes of terrorism," 17.

760 McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of political radicalization," 425.

761 Della Porta, *Social movements*, 155, 183.

well as their primary out-group enemy.[762] Intragroup conflicts and disagreements, finally, have been hypothesized to lead to violence when they become so extreme that the projection of this disaffection onto external enemies is the only way of keeping the terrorist group from falling apart.[763]

7.6.1 Organizational rationales for terrorism and the Hofstadgroup

The empirical data on the Hofstadgroup appears to match four of the six organizational rationales for violence outlined above. These are the 'redemption', 'emulation', 'reactions to state countermeasures' and 'competition with other extremist groups' hypotheses.

7.6.1.1 The group as a vehicle for redemptive violence

Van Gogh's murderer was clearly motivated by the incentive of religious salvation. His declaration in court and the farewell letter he left his family revealed a man driven by the desire to act in accordance with his religious convictions and the hope that he would gain a favored place in an afterlife.[764] Although these themes are less prominent in the case of the individual who videotaped a threat to the Dutch public, he similarly stresses that waging defensive jihad is a religious duty. He also told his parents that he 'commits this deed' out of fear for disobeying his god's commandments and his message appears to glorify self-sacrifice in name of Islam.[765] A desire for martyrdom and its associated awards is also a commonly recurring theme in a third participant's chat conversations about his motives for traveling to Pakistan or Afghanistan.[766]

It is clear that group processes contributed to the adoption of such radical and extremist convictions. However, there is little to indicate that the aforementioned individuals' desire to engage in religiously-inspired violence resulted directly from their participation in the Hofstadgroup. Neither is there cause to assume that they sought out the Hofstadgroup because they hoped it would enable them to engage in such violence. Instead, as the next chapter will detail, the available evidence points to the influential role of largely idiosyncratic personal factors. In the case of Van Gogh's murderer these were the loss of this mother and his discovery of religious texts mandating the murder of blasphemers.[767] For the videotaped individual, a desire to assist oppressed Muslims worldwide mixed with personal animosity towards the Dutch state. These findings once again hint at motives for terrorism that were primarily personal rather than group-based.

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762 Bloom, *Dying to kill*, 78-79, 94-97; Crenshaw, "Theories of terrorism," 24; McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of political radicalization," 424; McCauley and Segal, "Social psychology of terrorist groups," 335; Ross, "Structural causes," 323; Tilly, *The politics of collective violence*, 76.

763 McCauley and Segal, "Social psychology of terrorist groups," 335.

764 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHB03/27: 4033-4041; NOS, "Verklaring Mohammed B. in tekst."

765 NOVA, "Videotestament Samir A. - vertaling NOVA".

766 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHD08/37: 8573-8574, 8594, 8773.

767 Peters, "Dutch extremist Islamism," 145-159.

7.6.1.2 The influence of role models on the use of violence

Emulation of role models certainly formed an incentive for violence among some Hofstadgroup participants. Van Gogh's murderer followed precepts mandating the murder of blasphemers set out in a centuries' old work by a leading Salafist scholar.[768] The videotaped message discussed earlier bore close stylistic resemblance to similar communiqués published by jihadists like Osama Bin Laden; studded with Quranic recitation and a firearm clearly displayed.[769] However, in both examples the sources being emulated lay outside of the Hofstadgroup itself, meaning they cannot be earmarked as reflecting organizational rationales for violence.

There is only one notable example where emulation of a Hofstadgroup participant contributed to another's motivation for violence. One interviewee explained that he and his comrades saw the murder of Van Gogh as setting an example that they too needed to follow.[770] Thus, Van Gogh's murder inspired the interviewee to start considering an attack of his own. Fortunately, the individual in question was arrested before he was able to act on his intentions. Although only one example, it points to the potentially significant influence of copy-cat behavior in bringing about further acts of terrorism.

7.6.1.3 Interaction with the Dutch authorities

The organizational dynamic that most clearly contributed to some participants' desire to use violence was the Hofstadgroup's development of a sense of competition with the Dutch state. First of all, the experience of being arrested and imprisoned clearly increased the antagonism felt by some of those in and around the group towards the state and its representatives.[771] For instance, one participant claimed that his arrest following an altercation with a police officer in 2002 strengthened his conviction that Muslims were being persecuted by unbelievers.[772] The female participants interviewed by Groen and Kranenberg were furious about the rough manner in which they had been apprehended and the authors noted the radicalizing effects of these experiences.[773] Similarly, one interviewee mentioned that initially his incarceration only strengthened his convictions and his hatred.[774]

Most importantly, the counterterrorism activities of the Dutch state seem to have engendered within some participants a desire to strike back. In chat messages dated to October 2003 an inner-circle member expressed anger at the drafting of new laws which, he claimed, would land him and his compatriots in jail.[775] Although he does not specify them, he was probably referring

768 Ibid., 155-156.
769 NOVA, "Videotestament Samir A. - vertaling NOVA".
770 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 27.
771 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, "Personal interview 1," 5-6; Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 215.
772 Erkel, *Samir*, 35-40.
773 Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 147, 183.
774 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 1," 4.
775 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHD08/37: 8600.

to the legislative proposals that would result in the 2004 Crimes of Terrorism Act.[776] The sources also make clear that this person felt a strong antipathy towards the AIVD.[777] Furthermore, in a letter likely written by this same individual, he responds to the then Deputy Prime Minister's 'declaration of war' against terrorism that was issued in the wake of Van Gogh's murder. With those words, the letter warns, the 'gates of hell' have been opened and a total war begun that can only end in the victory of either the forces of unbelief or those of Islam.[778]

No-one was more strongly affected by the Hofstadgroup's increasingly antagonistic relations with the Dutch state than the participant who in 2005 would record a threatening video message. This person appears to have developed a particular hatred for the Dutch justice system and the AIVD.[779] After his release from custody in early 2005, police intelligence revealed that he was driven to rectify the '1-0' the Dutch state had scored against him, indicating that he was at least partly motivated by a desire for revenge.[780] While the participants' antagonistic interactions with the Dutch authorities were arguably the single most important organizational rationale for violence, the examples given in this paragraph once again hint that this sense of competition may have been as much *personal* as it was *group*-based.

7.6.1.4 Competition with other extremist groups

Rivalry with other extremist groups did not occur because of an absence of potential competitors with whom to vie for recruits, resources or standing. The Hofstadgroup was not one of many similar entities but, at the time, a relatively unique phenomenon in the Netherlands. However, if this line of reasoning is broadened slightly to encompass disagreements between an extremist group and the wider (non-violent) social movement to which it relates, then a new perspective comes to the fore centered on the Hofstadgroup's discontent with the wider Dutch Salafist community and moderate Muslims in general.

De Koning and Meijer attribute particular importance to this relationship. They argue that the progressively harsher tone of the public debate on Islam in the Netherlands, coupled with the increased public scrutiny of Salafist mosques after two young Dutch Salafists were killed in Kashmir in 2002, pressured representatives of mainstream Salafism to become more moderate. This accommodating attitude left the Hofstadgroup's young radicals disappointed with mainstream Salafism, which contributed both to the group's formation as well as to the conviction of its more extremist participants that jihad was the only legitimate way forward.[781]

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776 M.A.H. Van der Woude, *Wetgeving in een veiligheidscultuur: totstandkoming van antiterrorismewetgeving in Nederland bezien vanuit maatschappelijke en (rechts)politieke context* (The Hague: Boom Juridische Uitgevers, 2010), 206-207; Cees Van der Laan, "Donners rigoureuze maatregelen," *Trouw*, 11 September 2003.

777 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA05/22: 2169; AHD2108/2137: 8552, 8607-8608.

778 Ibid., 01/13: 151; "Kabinet bindt strijd aan met moslimterreur," *Het Financieele Dagblad*, 5 November 2004.

779 Erkel, *Samir*, 35-40, 199-200, 206-208, 218-219, 227-228, 240-241; Calis, "Iedereen wil martelaar zijn," 3; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHD08/37: 8552.

780 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "PIRANHA," 151, INL105: 8327.

781 De Koning and Meijer, "Going all the way," 225, 231, 233-234, 236.

The available empirical data partly supports this line of reasoning. Various sources reveal that Dutch Salafist imams' unwillingness or inability to discuss jihad-related topics led to considerable frustration and resentment among the Hofstadgroup's participants. This was exacerbated by the 2003 decision of influential Saudi-Arabian Salafist religious authorities to follow their government's line in condemning jihadists such as Bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. To at least several members of the Hofstadgroup, the Dutch Salafist mosques' decision to adopt a similar stance epitomized their betrayal of 'true Islam' and its champions. Both of these developments led to a reorientation on other, more extremist, sources of information and to a stronger focus on the group as a venue for discussing and learning about Islam rather than the mosque, leading to the elimination of the latter's potentially moderating influence.[782]

However, this falling out with the Salafist movement does not appear to have formed a direct motive for violence. While the group felt a strong disdain for Salafists, moderate Muslims and organizations claiming to represent the interests of Muslims in the Netherlands, clear indications that this sparked a strong desire to use violence against them are lacking. With the exception of an October 2003 chat message in which one participant expressed his desire to slaughter 'fake Muslims', and which reads more like bragging than an actual intention to use violence, the sources predominantly convey a sense of disappointment and disgust. For instance, one of the letters left behind by Van Gogh's murderer shows his disappointment with Muslim scholars and religious leaders for concealing the truth of their religion from their followers. By contrast, the message to Dutch citizens and politicians is not one of disappointment, but of death threats.[783]

In conclusion, the empirical data reveals several motives for terrorism that resemble a number of the organizational rationales for terrorism identified in the literature. However, the most important conclusion to be drawn here is that the extent to which these motives truly had their basis in group dynamics is in most cases limited. Mirroring the conclusion reached with regard to strategic rationales, it seems that the motives for violence found among Hofstadgroup participants are more accurately explained as the result of factors at the individual level of analysis.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter assessed whether group-level explanations for terrorist violence could account for the Hofstadgroup's planned and perpetrated attacks. The discussion began with an examination of the ways in which a terrorist group's organizational structure can influence its lethality. Except

782 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, "Personal interview 1," 7-8; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 1," 7; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 16; A[.], "Deurwaarders," 3-5; Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 42-45; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHD02/31: 5791; AHB5701/5725: 3303; AHA5705/5722: 2168, 2172, 2179; AHD5707/5736: 8412; AHD5708/5737: 8614, 8638-8642; De Koning, "Changing worldviews and friendship," 374, 385-388.

783 Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 32-56.

for adherence to an extremist interpretation of Islam that portrayed violence as necessary and justified, the Hofstadgroup lacked the characteristics thought to correspond with a higher degree of deadliness, such as skilled operatives.

Next, the analysis turned to group effects that can lower individual participants' thresholds to engaging in violent behavior; diffusion of responsibility, deindividuation and displacement or responsibility to authority figures. Only the last of these factors was found to have exerted an influence, albeit in a very limited capacity. While the group had access to authority figures ranging from its Syrian religious instructor Abu Khaled to jihadist role models like Bin Laden who provided (implicit) justifications for the use of violence, none directly authorized or ordered the use of terrorism. This meant that participants were limited in the degree to which they could displace responsibility for harming and killing others, leaving a significant obstacle to the use of violence in place and making the development of terrorist plots dependent on their own initiative.

The remainder of the chapter dealt with strategic and organizational rationales for terrorism. On the whole, neither rationale could provide a convincing explanation for the terrorist acts perpetrated or planned by Hofstadgroup participants. There is little to indicate that the group's most militant participants did more than pay lip service to strategic motives such as establishing theocratic rule in the Netherlands or inspiring potential followers to copy their violent examples. Organizational dynamics had a more noticeable, if still minor, influence. The most salient being the Hofstadgroup's competition with the Dutch state, which may have engendered the desire to commit attacks as a form of revenge within at least one participant, and the example set by the murder of Van Gogh, which inspired at least one other participant to plan an attack of his own.

This chapter's most important contribution to understanding the factors that governed processes of involvement in the Hofstadgroup has been to highlight where group-level accounts for terrorism fall short. The Hofstadgroup's planned and executed terrorist attacks cannot convincingly be explained as the result of either strategic or organizational rationales. Instead, they appear to have originated from these individuals' personal backgrounds, experiences and convictions. Gaining a clearer understanding of why some participants (planned to) engage in terrorism therefore requires turning to the individual level of analysis.