

## Urban Terrorism

Not only has terrorism taken on a global cast, with international linkages, it is also apparent that cities have become the stage on which this tragic drama is played. Between 1993 and 2000 there were more than 500 terrorist incidents in cities around the world. Even before the dramatic terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, on commuter trains in Madrid in 2004, and on London buses and underground trains in 2005 (Figure 10.A), cities had become the central venues of terror.

There are several reasons for this. First, cities—especially world cities—have considerable symbolic value. They are not only dense agglomerations of people and buildings but symbols of national prestige and military, political, and financial power. A blast in a mountain town or in the countryside may arouse local concern, but it is generally of little or no consequence for the rest of the world. But an attack on Wall Street (New York), a massacre in Piccadilly Circus (London), the bombing of the Eiffel Tower (Paris), or poison gas



**Figure 10.A Terrorist attack** Railway workers remove debris from the wreckage of a public train near to Atocha train station in Madrid, Spain, March 11, 2004. Thirteen bombs on four packed commuter trains killed 191 people and wounded more than 1,500. The attack was attributed to the Islamic militant group al-Qaeda.

in a Tokyo metro arouses international alarm. Any such event will be instantly telegraphed to a larger world and alarm a much larger audience. Second, the assets of cities—densely packed and with a great mix of industrial and commercial infrastructure—make them rich targets. Third, cities have become nodes for a vast international network of communications. This is a reflection of their power, but it is also a vulnerability. A well-placed explosion can produce enormous reverberations, paralyze a city, and spread fear and economic dislocation. Finally, word gets around more quickly and socialization proceeds more rapidly in densely packed environments. This kind of environment provides an abundant source of recruitment for potential terrorists.

Heterogeneous urban settings, while providing rich synergies, can be a nesting ground for terrorist organizations under certain conditions. A sense of relative deprivation often sharpens as those struggling to get by come into closer proximity with other struggling groups and with the more affluent. Beirut provides a ready example of how different groups living under conditions of hopelessness and in proximity to one another turn on one another. Similar ecologies of terror pervade Belfast (Northern Ireland), Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Hyderabad (India), Karachi (Pakistan), and Baghdad (Iraq). Rather than directed from lower classes upward toward elites, conflict occurs between groups operating at the same level—Hindus fighting Muslims in Mumbai (India) or rival narco-gangs in Bogotá (Colombia).

Statistically, the cities with the greatest incidence of terrorist incidents in the eight-year period between 1993 and 2000 were Srinagar (India), Athens (Greece), Sanaa (Yemen), Paris (France), Istanbul (Turkey) and Lima (Peru), followed closely by Jerusalem (Israel), Algiers (Algeria) and Dushanbe (Tajikistan). The largest number of fatalities occurred in Nairobi, Kenya (291 killed in 1 incident); Colombo, Sri Lanka (108 killed in 3 incidents); and Jerusalem (77 killed in 9 incidents). Altogether, more than 250 cities around the world experienced one or more terrorist acts in that period.

Based on extracts from H. V. Savitch and Grigoriy Ardashev, "Does Terror Have an Urban Future?" *Urban Studies*, 2525–2533, 2001.