

# Tactics and Technology Use: Conclusion

So, to sum up, what have we learned from terrorist tactics and weaponry and their use of technology? In the main, the vast majority of terrorists do not deviate from established patterns. And this is dictated on the one hand by their operational conservatism. As I said earlier, as politically radical or as religiously fanatical as they might be, paradoxically they are operationally very conservative.

And this is because of their fundamental desire to succeed. Because they know if they don't succeed in an attack they're not going to terrorize anyone. They're not going to appear formidable and threatening but rather inept and incompetent. For that reason, most terrorists seek to remain just in front of the counterterrorism technology curve.

So, the changes we see are more and clever adaptations, or clever fixes, or adjustments to existing technologies rather than the embrace of any new exotic or truly novel weapons or technologies. Terrorists will always seek to exploit new vulnerabilities in their targets, and consequently will always adjust and adapt attack plans and tactical preferences to enable them to get in and reach those targets. They don't have to be terribly sophisticated, they just have to be sophisticated or clever enough to still access those targets and either destroy them or inflict death and destruction amongst their victims.

What we've seen, too, in this lecture, and what continues to be a pattern of terrorism, even in the 21st century, as technologically savvy and advanced as it is, is that the sophistication of terrorist devices is in their simplicity. Terrorists continue to rely on what they know will work, what they're familiar with, technologies that they've already mastered. The appeal of materials that are commercially available, that are readily obtainable, fuels terrorism today much as it did terrorism 150 years ago.

For the terrorists there are a number of advantages of these commercially available materials. They're more difficult to trace, often. They're less incriminating. But from the terrorists' point of view they're just as destructive and just as effective. But we cannot rule out that there are aberrations, that there will not be some terrorists and some terrorist groups that will persist, as we've seen in the case of Al-Qaeda, to attempt to use various forms of weapons of mass destruction, that despite all odds will seek to develop a nuclear capability, or obtain a nuclear weapon, or, indeed, to develop and deploy chemical and biological weapons.