

Chapter 15: Terrorism and the politics of fear

Following the events of September the 11th public concerns surrounding the threat of terrorism have inevitably deepened, with these fears perhaps not always being justifiable or even rationale. This chapter provides a general introduction to the subject and poses a series of crucial questions that rarely feature in mainstream criminological textbooks. Central to the analysis are the problems surrounding the definition of terrorism. Ultimately, however, the principle aim of the chapter is to examine the *actual* risk posed by international terrorism, in particular focusing on the psychological threat posed by terrorism, arguing that the demonisation of terrorist actors is counterproductive in that it may help transform them into an omnipotent and unstoppable force. Such an approach exacerbates the risks posed by terrorists turning them into a far more frightening and dangerous threat than is warranted by their capabilities. Inevitably, one of the possible consequences of this approach is to inflate public anxieties and thereby indirectly empower these terrorists.