Introduction

In one of his brilliant aphorisms, Nietzsche astutely observes that "only that which has no history is definable."[1] Since terrorism definitely has a long history, this may be the best response to the inconclusive scholarly debate over its precise definition. For the purposes of this book it will include bombings, assassinations, and attempted bombings and assassinations (*attentats*) carried out by anarchists, or those widely alleged to be anarchists, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. It is very little exaggeration to claim that anarchism *was* the terrorism of the era between the years 1878 and 1934. In the public mind, however erroneously, anarchism and anarchist became synonymous with terrorism and terrorist. The press identified "Anarchists with bombs."[2] An editorial that appeared in 1909 in the English language *Buenos Aires Herald* and was devoted to the shocking anarchist assassination of the police chief of Buenos Aires and his secretary provides an example. The editorial, "Rampant Anarchism," demonstrates this equivalency by the repeated usage of the same adjective in its title and in its content, referring to the fact that "rampant anarchy has established itself here" and that "rampant terrorism is in our midst."[3]

The equivalency was also emphasized by developments in international law that defined anarchist acts of violence as "social crimes" outside the protection provided political crimes in extradition treaties, as the Institute of International Law did in 1892. In 1898, the Rome Anti-Anarchist Conference of European diplomats and policemen defined the "anarchist act" as aimed at the violent destruction of "all social organization," suggesting a level of violence with breathtaking dimensions. At least in theory, this definition fundamentally

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[1] *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, [1887] 1967), II: 13.
[2] L. S. Bevington, "Anarchism and Violence" (Chiswick: James Tochatti, 1896), 3.
[3] *Buenos Aires Herald*, 15 November 1909.

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differentiated anarchist terrorism from other forms of political violence
perpetrated by nationalists and Russian revolutionaries (although the
"nihilists" were often confused with the anarchists) who aimed at nar-
rower political goals. The equivalence between anarchist acts, or social
crimes, and terrorism was definitively made explicit in 1934 by the
International Conference for the Unification of Penal Law (ironically
just at the moment that anarchist terrorism was about to be superseded
by other forms of terror).[4]

I have three specific aims in writing this book: First, and foremost, I
want to narrate and analyze the history of the *international* and especially
the *multilateral* diplomatic and police responses to anarchist terrorism,
1878–1914, with an epilogue covering the period 1914–1934. Beginning
in the 1890s growing bilateral anti-anarchist police cooperation was fol-
lowed by major efforts at multilateral cooperation in 1898 at the Rome
Conference and in 1904 with the St. Petersburg Protocol. Regional
anti-anarchist agreements were signed in the Americas. Paralleling these
efforts was the creation by individual states of extensive international
police networks to monitor the anarchists.

I argue that in the pre-war era careful police intelligence work and
international police cooperation, together with a more rigorously pro-
fessional system of protection for monarchs and heads of state, aided in
curbing anarchist terrorism, while heavy-handed repression only wors-
ened it. Britain provided the best example of anti-anarchist policing
and Spain the worst. After 1900, Italy followed in Britain's footsteps: it
revamped and professionalized its police force and the king's corps of
bodyguards, and expanded and improved its intelligence-gathering ser-
vice abroad.

The book's second major aim is to provide greater understanding of
the phenomenon of anarchist terrorism, particularly as it was depicted
by the print media. Anarchist terrorism was a worldwide phenomenon
and my book places it in the context of the first great era of economic
and social globalization at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the
twentieth centuries. The book includes information on the problem of
anarchist violence and its repression in such regions and countries as the
Middle East, Morocco, India, China, and Japan. My major focus, how-
ever, will be on Europe and the Americas, especially the United States
and Argentina, which were the sites of the most important acts of anarch-
ist terrorism in the Western Hemisphere.

Of some significance is that anarchist suicide bombings and assassi-
nations took place during this period, a phenomenon that was not to

[4] See Chapter 10.

reoccur until the present era of terrorism.[5] Although I have reservations about the claim, it should be mentioned that several authors have pointed out many similarities, or even the equivalency, between nineteenth century anarchism and al-Qaeda.[6] While most general texts on terrorism end their discussion of anarchist "propaganda by the deed" in 1914, if not earlier, this book carries it through to the mid-1930s. Anarchist violence had been on the decline since the mid-1920s, but it was only in the next decade that the phenomenon was clearly replaced by a new form of terrorism.

During its heyday, sensationalistic newspapers, together with their fearful readers and the anarchists (and would-be anarchists) themselves, took the violent deeds of anarchists and others and created the myth of anarchist terrorism as a powerful conspiratorial force moving throughout the world. This myth was as important in the history of the development of anarchist terrorism – and its containment – as were the heterogeneous acts of violence themselves. In a sense, my book aims to "shatter" the fearsome myth of anarchist terrorism by showing the wide gap that existed between what the media, the public, and governments perceived and what actually took place. The anarchists organized very few conspiracies and many acts of "anarchist" terrorism were not committed by the anarchists at all, but by nationalists, radicals, socialists, police spies, and the mentally unbalanced.

Third, I want to explore the reasons why certain nations were more successful than others in dealing with anarchist terrorism. By comparing and contrasting the experience of countries – Spain par excellence – that experienced severe problems with anarchist terrorism during the key period 1878–1914 with those nations (Britain, Germany, and Austria) in which anarchist violence was not a significant domestic issue after the 1880s, or after 1900 (France and Italy), the book will seek to identify which factors caused some societies to evolve in ways inimical to terrorist bomb-throwing and assassination attempts.

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[5] I owe this information to David C. Rapoport, whose four wave theory of the evolution of terrorism is the most persuasive historical analysis of this phenomenon currently available. David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," 46–73.

[6] James Gelvin, "Al-Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian's Reply to Terrorology," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:4 (2008), 563–581. Gelvin cites eight other commentators, ranging from *The Economist* to the historian Niall Ferguson, who briefly allude to these alleged similarities. For a critique of Gelvin's views, see Richard Bach Jensen, "Nineteenth Century Anarchist Terrorism: How Comparable to the Terrorism of al-Qaeda?", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:4 (2008): 589–596; George Esenwein, "Comments on James L. Gelvin's 'Al-Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian's Repy to Terrorology'," 597–600, and the other contributions in this issue.

4   Introduction

A fundamental nineteenth-century debate in Italy and other European
countries was over whether law and order should be maintained through
"prevention" or "repression," and these terms can also serve to frame
a discussion of how governments dealt with anarchist terrorism.
Preventative methods called for actions to forestall illegalities and out-
breaks of violence, but at the risk of violating people's legal and con-
stitutional rights. They might involve prohibiting meetings and carrying
out arrests, even mass arrests, of people suspected of involvement in
crime or social upheavals although they had not carried out any ille-
gal activities. Censorship and violating the freedom of the mails would
also fall under the category of "prevention." "Prevention, not repression"
smacked of the despotic policies of the Old Regime. Tsarist Russia was
infamous for such prevention and it often involved the use of *agents pro-
vocateurs*. Liberals and progressives therefore championed "repression,
not prevention" since it left individuals unmolested by the police until
they had actually committed crimes. In practice, such clear-cut distinc-
tions between conservative and liberal approaches to maintaining order
were rarely if ever uniformly applied. Moreover, they became particularly
problematical when applied to terrorism. No political entity, no matter
how progressive, could or can complacently allow its leaders to be assas-
sinated, or crowded cafés and opera houses to be bombed, or symboli-
cally important buildings to be blown up on the simple assurance that
after the deed the perpetrators would soon be brought to justice. These
murders and bombings were usually too shocking and potentially desta-
bilizing to society to allow such laissez-faire responses.

When examining anti-anarchist policies during the late nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries, it is possible to trace an evolution and refine-
ment of both policies of "prevention" and of "repression." Initially in the
1890s acts of anarchist terrorism were not prevented because govern-
ments had relatively little knowledge about who the bomb-throwers and
assassins were or what groups they belonged to. France, Italy, Portugal,
Spain, Russia, Argentina (after 1900), and other countries responded
with brutal and widespread repression, including in some cases tor-
ture, as well as attempts to legislate prevention through the prohibition
of anarchist meetings, associations, and publications. On the whole,
the attempt to prevent terrorism through legislation produced meager
results and, together with brutal police repression, produced a backlash
against these assaults on civil liberties and on the persons of the anar-
chists themselves.

More successful were preventative measures that involved careful and
secret intelligence work to monitor (rather than smash) the anarchists
to find out what they were doing and possibly stop the odd terrorist

plot. Such precisely focused prevention required a good deal of money, skillful organization, careful selection of personnel, and international cooperation. It included the creation or improvement of security forces to protect the head of state and other government officials. In the new century, Italy and France combined this refined and restricted prevention with what might be described as wider, "socially preventive" policies. Social and political reforms could drain off or diminish the discontent that formed the source of so many anarchist *attentats*. These "micro" and "macro" preventative approaches made it possible to avoid the iron-fisted policies of repression and prevention during the 1890s that had embittered the atmosphere in so many countries and that often provoked violent anarchist acts of revenge.

Two final points are worth making about the significance of the subject of international cooperation against anarchist terrorism. Because of its secrecy, it has been omitted from history books on politics and foreign relations. The battle against anarchist terrorism deserves a much more prominent place in such works. In part this is because it shows how nations were secretly bound together in previously unknown ways and how, in the end, anti-terrorism proved insufficiently strong to counter the centrifugal pull of national rivalries and divergent political goals. National perspectives colored views of who should be considered a terrorist: a dangerous "anarchist" terrorist in Russia might simply be a political dissident in Britain, Switzerland, or Italy.

Second, my book argues – providing a new, or at least little known, chapter in police history – that the challenge of anarchist terrorism led to a fundamental modernization of the police in many countries. This modernization included the institution of new or better identification systems, better police education, and more centralized policing. For example, the Rome Conference called for the universal adoption of Bertillon's *portrait parlé*, at the time the most advanced system of criminal identification, leading to its adoption by many European states. The professionalization of protective measures for heads of state during this era was also important, and even critical, for preventing further assassinations.

Crucial to understanding anarchist violence and how governments and societies reacted to it is understanding its complex origins. This is the subject of the next two chapters.

1 The origins of anarchist terrorism

Alfred Nobel's invention of dynamite in 1866 transformed the world.[1] Not only did it make possible spectacular construction projects such as blasting railroad tunnels through the Alps and digging the Panama Canal, but it also put into the hands of terrorists a source of power almost unimaginable in its dimensions. A popular Spanish periodical of 1908 captured this image when it described the attributes and allegorized the power of dynamite:

> Its irresistible force, its formidable power. It seems that the spirit of Shiva, the god of destruction, eternal destroyer of life, resides in the depths of its strange composition. All the great phenomena of Nature resemble it in their effects … it creates and it destroys, it annihilates and it gives life; it is chained Prometheus and angry Jupiter; it illuminates and darkens. From civilization's necessity, it becomes its chastiser … it has changed into a social anathema, into the dissident sects' weapon of terrorism.[2]

Nobel's Promethean invention that so troubled his times produced a "super-explosion" twenty times more violent than black powder, which for more than 800 years had been virtually the world's only known explosive. In a fraction of the time and with a much smaller amount of explosive than was needed in the case of black powder, dynamite could shatter granite and other rocks of adamantine hardness into tiny bits. Earlier, in 1846, the powerful explosives nitroglycerin and guncotton had been invented. Because of their highly unstable composition, however, they were liable to explode at any time, or not at all in the case of nitroglycerin, which, after being ignited by a fuse, might simply burn but not explode. For most practical purposes these high explosives were unusable until Nobel devised the blasting cap and employed

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[1] Much of this chapter originally appeared as "Daggers, Rifles and Dynamite: Anarchist Terrorism in Nineteenth Century Europe," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16:1 (2004): 116–153.

[2] Jose Pérez Guerrero, "Prologo," *Regicidios y crimenes politicos* (Madrid: Los sucessos, c. 1908–1909): 2.

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the stabilizing element kieselguhr, a spongy, absorbent clay abundant in northern Germany.[3]

The wave of terrorism brought forth by this immense new physical power,[4] as well as by economic, social, and political discontent, began in the late 1870s, reached a climax in the 1890s, and, after a few years' pause, resurfaced in the early twentieth century. The Russian Revolution of 1905 and World War I unleashed new, if less well-known, waves of terrorism. These were usually identified with the anarchist movement. Because of anarchism's potentially fearsome physical power and explosive ideas, one Italian author described it as "the most important ethical deviation that may ever have disturbed the world." In 1893, an American historian judged it "the most dangerous theory which civilization has ever had to encounter." After the assassinations of the Empress Elisabeth and President McKinley, German newspapers noted that "society … dances on a volcano" and that "a very small number of unscrupulous fanatics terrorize the entire human race … The danger for all countries is very great and urgent."[5] While in popular imagination the terrorist bomber and the anarchist became the same thing, in retrospect we know this was not true. Few anarchists became bomb-throwers or carried out violent acts. Moreover, not all the alleged "anarchist" terrorists were anarchists, the label "anarchist" simply becoming the easiest means for many journalists and some politicians and police to identify the myriad, often obscure malcontents who carried out violent deeds during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

But if there was never a perfect fit between "anarchist" and "terrorist," there was a history of theoretical and practical involvement by anarchists in carrying out violent deeds to achieve their aims. In this chapter and the following we will look at the growth of the anarchist movement, the development of political and social terrorism, and the persistent gap between historical reality and public perception.

[3] The technical term for the violent force of dynamite is its "brisance," which is the shattering or crushing effect of an explosive (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*). William S. Dutton, *One Thousand Years of Explosives: From Wildfire to the H-Bomb* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1960): 5–6, 109–110, 128, 134, 136.

[4] On September 27, 1893, *The New York Times*, 4, declared: "It is plain that the strength of the modern Anarchical movements is in the faith that high explosives have been invented which are useless for every innocent purpose to which gunpowder is applied, but are of great efficacy in the work of demolition. In other words, dynamite is the main support of Anarchism."

[5] Ettore Zoccoli, *L'anarchia* (Rome: Fratelli Bocca 1907): vii, cited by Saverio Cilibrizzi, *Storia parlamentare politica e diplomatica d'Italia da Novara a Vittorio Veneto* (Milan: Società editrice Dante Alighieri, 1925–1943): 3: 131. Richard T. Ely, "Anarchy," *Harper's Weekly*, 37 (1893), 1226; *Staatsburger Zeitung*, 13 September 1898; *Die Post* (Berlin), September 16, 1901.

The development of the anarchist movement in nineteenth-century Europe

Ever since anarchism was born in the nineteenth century as an ideology and a political and social movement, it has meant many different things, both to its supporters and to its opponents. In general it has signified chaos and destruction to its enemies, while to its exponents it has promised hope of a better life built on juster foundations than those to be found in the status quo. A good way to begin to understand it, at least from the anarchists' point of view, is to turn to the definition developed by one of its most famous practitioners, the Russian anarchist and former prince, Peter Kropotkin. Invited by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to define anarchism for its eleventh edition (1910), he wrote at the beginning of his lengthy entry on the subject that anarchism was:

The name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government (from Gr[eek] αν- and αρχη, without authority) – harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being.[6]

Although it had precursors in such thinkers as William Godwin, for the most part the European anarchist movement grew out of an amalgam of the ideas and practices of the Frenchman Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Russian Mikhail Bakunin. Proudhon was a thinker and writer, Bakunin was a man of action, a theorist, and Proudhon's self-declared disciple (although he did not agree with all of Proudhon's ideas) – both men advocated a non-authoritarian form of socialism.[7] They sought to bring about a revolution of workers and peasants against the established order of property-owners, the church, and the government. Proudhon, the first person to proudly proclaim himself an anarchist, wrote in his 1840 work *What is Property?* that "property is theft" and called for "scientific socialism," "equality," and "justice." He praised: "Anarchy, that is the absence of a ruler or sovereign. This is the form of government we are moving closer to every day."[8] The two pillars of Proudhon's thought, his vehicles for achieving "Anarchy, or the government of each man by himself," were

[6] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Anarchism."
[7] Bakunin rejected Proudhon's utopian scheme for a mutual bank and his ideas on property and possession. George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: World Publishing 1962): 152, 164.
[8] *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, ed. Steward Edwards, trans. Elizabeth Fraser (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969): 88–89; Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 11–12.

federalism and mutualism.[9] Federalism aimed to replace centralized gov-
ernments by federations of local communities or communes. Mutualism
sought to base society on small, mutually supporting economic groups
and, by eliminating the capitalist middleman through the creation of new
forms of contract and a People's Bank, to secure for the worker the full
value of the goods he had produced.[10] By the mid-1860s followers of
Proudhon dominated the French working-class movement.

Bakunin, the son of a prominent Russian landowner, became a
heavily-bearded, wildman revolutionary during the European revolts of
1848–1849. Arrested, he spent a decade in prison. After his escape in 1860,
he increasingly embraced Proudhon's vision as the necessary framework
for the coming social revolution. Bakunin's charm and eloquence helped
bring Proudhonist ideas, together with Bakunin's own beliefs in collective
action, to the watchmakers of the Jura in western Switzerland, to the people
of Italy, and – most momentously of all, in 1868 through an intermediary
named Giuseppe Fanelli – to the peasants and workers of Spain.

In the 1860s few clear-cut distinctions existed between the vari-
ous socialist groups that were sprouting up all over Europe. In 1869
Bakunin and his followers affiliated with the International Workingmen's
Association (the First International), which Karl Marx and others had
founded in London in 1864. Marx exercised considerable influence over
the anarchists' economic thinking, but Bakunin completely rejected his
authoritarianism and his desire that the party of the workers should par-
ticipate in bourgeois politics. Even after the First International expelled
Bakunin in 1872 and moved its headquarters to New York City (and
later Philadelphia) in order to elude the grasp of the charismatic Russian,
socialists of the Marxist and anarchist persuasions continued to mix at
the local and national levels.

To evaluate the threat that anarchism and its terrorist offshoot posed
for established society during the nineteenth-century, it would be help-
ful to know the size of the movement. This is a question open to much
dispute, particularly since the police, journalists, various authors, and the
anarchists themselves often greatly exaggerated anarchist numbers. One
authoritative source calculated that in Spain alone – where, ostensibly as
part of the First International, anarchism had taken root and come to
dominate the working-class movement – the International had attracted
300,000 supporters.[11] This is clearly wrong, and although an exact count
is impossible, a more plausible estimate for the size of Spanish anarchism

[9] *The Federal Principal* (1863), in *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, 91.
[10] *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, 56–63, 75–79.
[11] The *Encyclopedia universada illustrada europeo-Americana*, 'Anarquismo', 357, cites the
figure of 300,000.

at a highpoint in the early 1880s is almost 60,000 adherents.[12] Bakuninism also found many followers in Italy, where in 1874 a report confiscated by the Italian police estimated membership to be 32,000.[13] In 1882 an interior ministry report claimed that the number of anarchists had shrunk to 5,617, but this oddly precise figure may well be unreliable.[14] In 1894, the Italian anarchist Pietro Gori, who should have been in a position to know, claimed that the police greatly underestimated the number of anarchists and that no less than 5,000–6,000 anarchists lived in Milan alone.[15] For France, the historian Jean Maitron estimates that in 1894 anarchism attracted 1,000 militant followers, 4,500 sympathizers who purchased anarchist journals and 100,000 others who were faintly supportive.[16] Anarchist groups also sprang up in Switzerland, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and in the Americas, especially in the United States and Argentina, where growing immigrant populations brought anarchist ideas with them. Here too the estimates vary greatly. In 1889, a contemporary historian thought that not more than 10,000 anarchists resided in the United States.[17] Of these, at least according to the Haymarket grand jury, not more than 100 and probably not more than 40 or 50 could be considered dangerous.[18] Paul Avrich, one of the foremost historians of anarchism, thinks these figures are underestimates, and that there were tens of thousands at the peak of the movement between 1880 and 1920, "with 3,000 in Chicago alone during the last decades of the nineteenth century and comparable numbers in Paterson and New York."[19] For Argentina, several sources give an estimate of 10,000 anarchists residing in Buenos Aires in the early twentieth century.[20]

[12] George Richard Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 83 and 229n9.

[13] Report of the Italian Federation of the anti-authoritarian, or Bakuninist, International to the International Commission, Brussels. Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892* (Princeton University Press, 1993): 75–76. Pernicone believes the report's figures were exaggerated and estimates that, at the movement's height, some 25,000 Bakuninists and many more sympathizers resided in Italy (4).

[14] Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 238.

[15] "Le idee dell'anarchico avv. Gori," *La Sera* (Milan), March 12–13, 1894.

[16] The police compiled a list giving a total of 4,489 anarchists living in France and North Africa. Jean Maitron, *Histoire du Mouvement Anarchiste en France (1880–1914)*, 2nd editon (Paris: Société universitaire d'éditions de libraire, 1955): 124.

[17] Herbert Osgood, "Scientific Anarchism," *Political Science Quarterly* 4 (1889) 30, cited by Sidney Fine, "Anarchism and the Assassination of McKinley," *American Historical Review* 60 (1955): 777.

[18] Fine, "Anarchism and the Assassination of McKinley," 777.

[19] Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (Princeton University Press, 1978), xvii–xviii.

[20] Macchi di Cellere, Italian Legation, Buenos Aires to Foreign Minister Giulio Prinetti, Rome, August 9, 1901. PI, file 28, Italian foreign ministry archive (hereafter cited as IFM); *The Times* (London), November 17, 1909, 5.