

# Social Science for Counterterrorism:

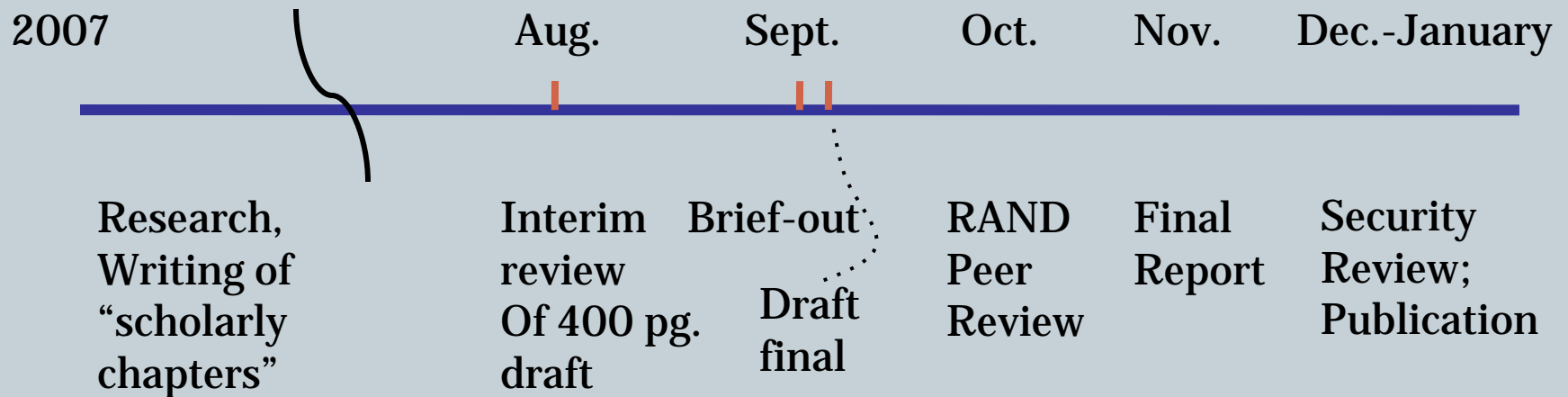
What Do We Know that Can Be Used in Analysis?

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# Background and Schedule

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- DoD's request:
  - Review what social science tells us about terrorism
  - Take multidisciplinary approach
- Drawing on scholarly literature, what do we know about relationships between terrorism and, e.g.:
  - Political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological factors



# Research Approach: Five Organizing Questions

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## Organizing Questions

- **How does terrorism arise?**
- **How do individuals become terrorists?**
- **How do terrorists gain and maintain support?**
- **What determines terrorists' decisions and behavior?**
- **How does terrorism end?**

# Research Approach: Multidisciplinary Team, Interdisciplinary Work

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Draft Chapters	Lead Author(s)	
Summary	Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin	
1. Introduction	Paul K. Davis	
2. Root Causes	Darcy Noricks	<u>Original Disciplines</u> Cultural History Economics Physics and Chemistry Political Science Policy Analysis Psychology Sociology
3. Economics of Terrorism	Claude Berrebi	
4. Becoming a Terrorist	Todd Helmus	
5. Popular Support	Christopher Paul	
6. Terrorist Decisionmaking	Brian Jackson	
7. How Terrorism Ends	Gaga Gvineria	
8. Disengagement and Deradicalization	Darcy Noricks	
9. Strategic Communications	Michael Egner	
10. Knowledge Representation & Analysis	Paul K. Davis	
11. Cross-Cutting Insights	Kim Cragin	Interim review by expert panel of scholars, Aug, 1008
Appendix on Measures	Benjamin Bahney	

# Research Approach: Structured Analysis

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**From each review: many, many factors**

A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z

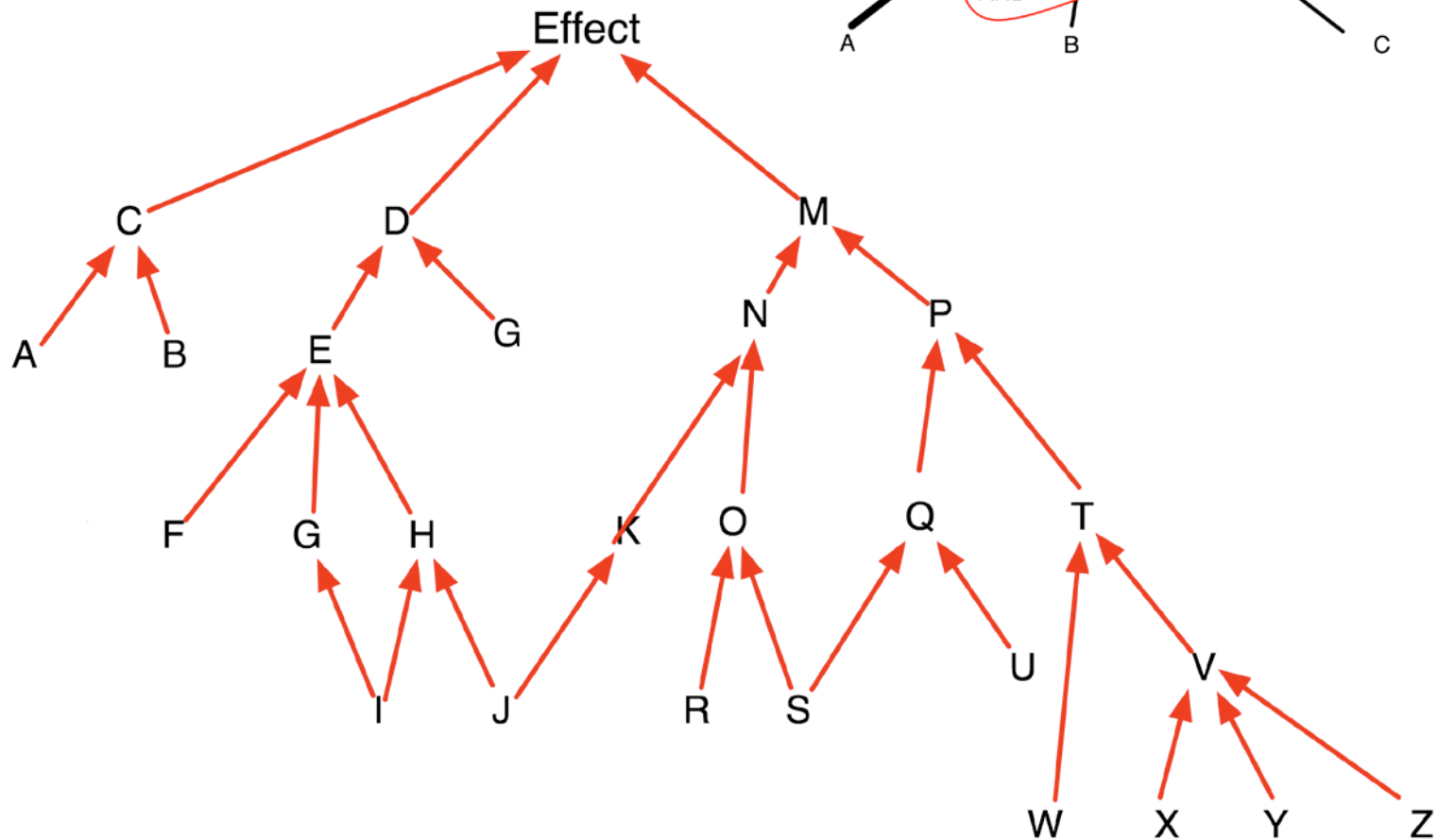
**Different factors from different disciplines and studies**

**All said to be important**

**How do we make sense of the morass?**

# Structuring: Order out of Chaos using Hierarchical Factor Trees

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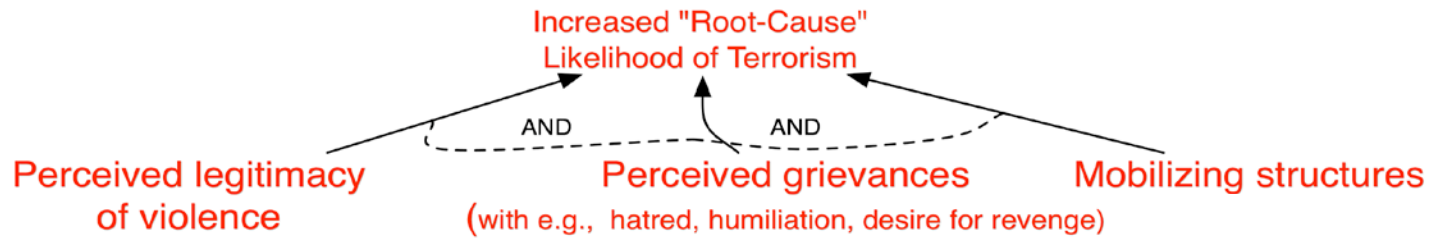
# Briefing Agenda

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- Findings from the social science literature on terrorism
- Cross-cutting observations
- Recommended next steps

# Factor Tree #1: How Does Terrorism Arise?

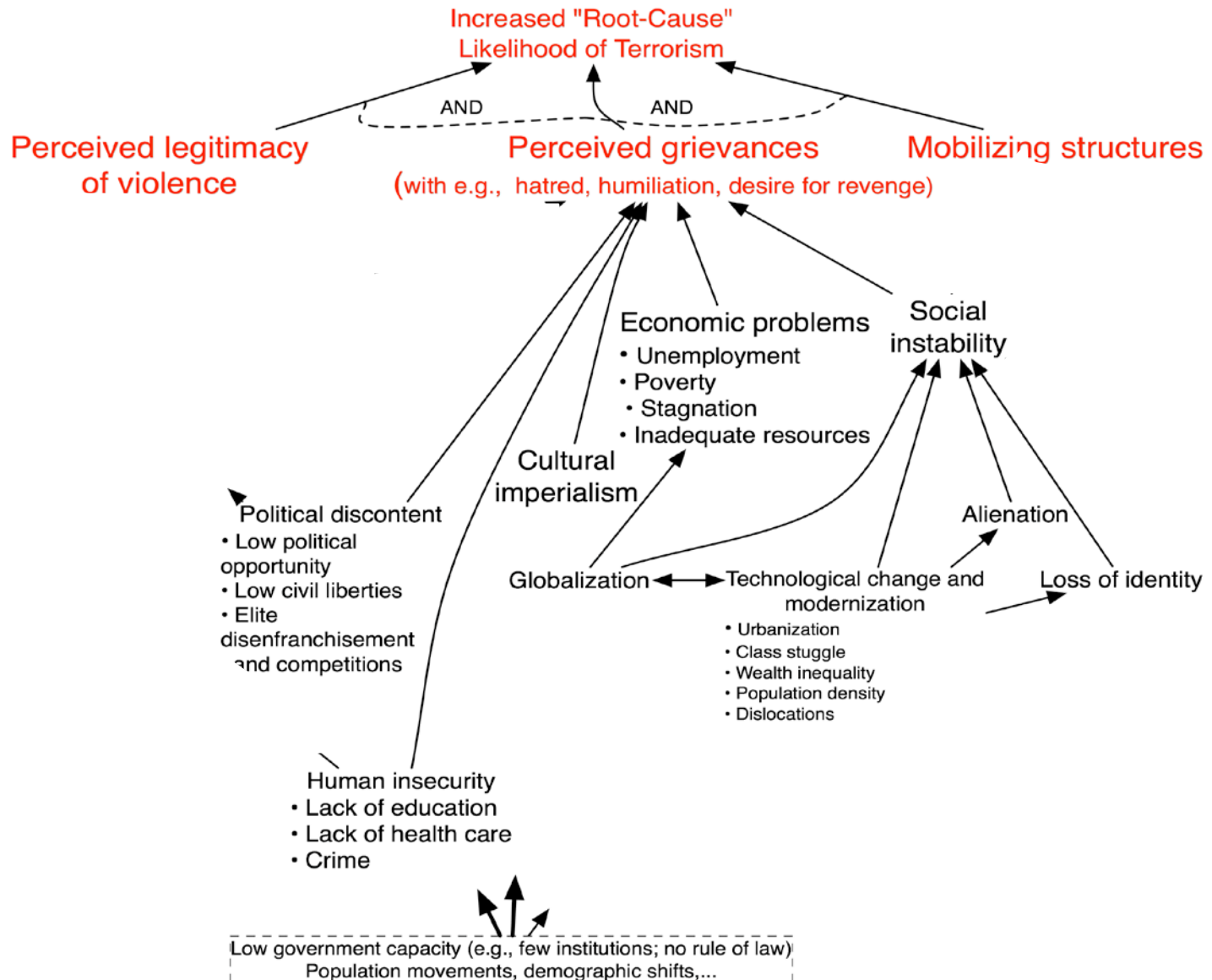
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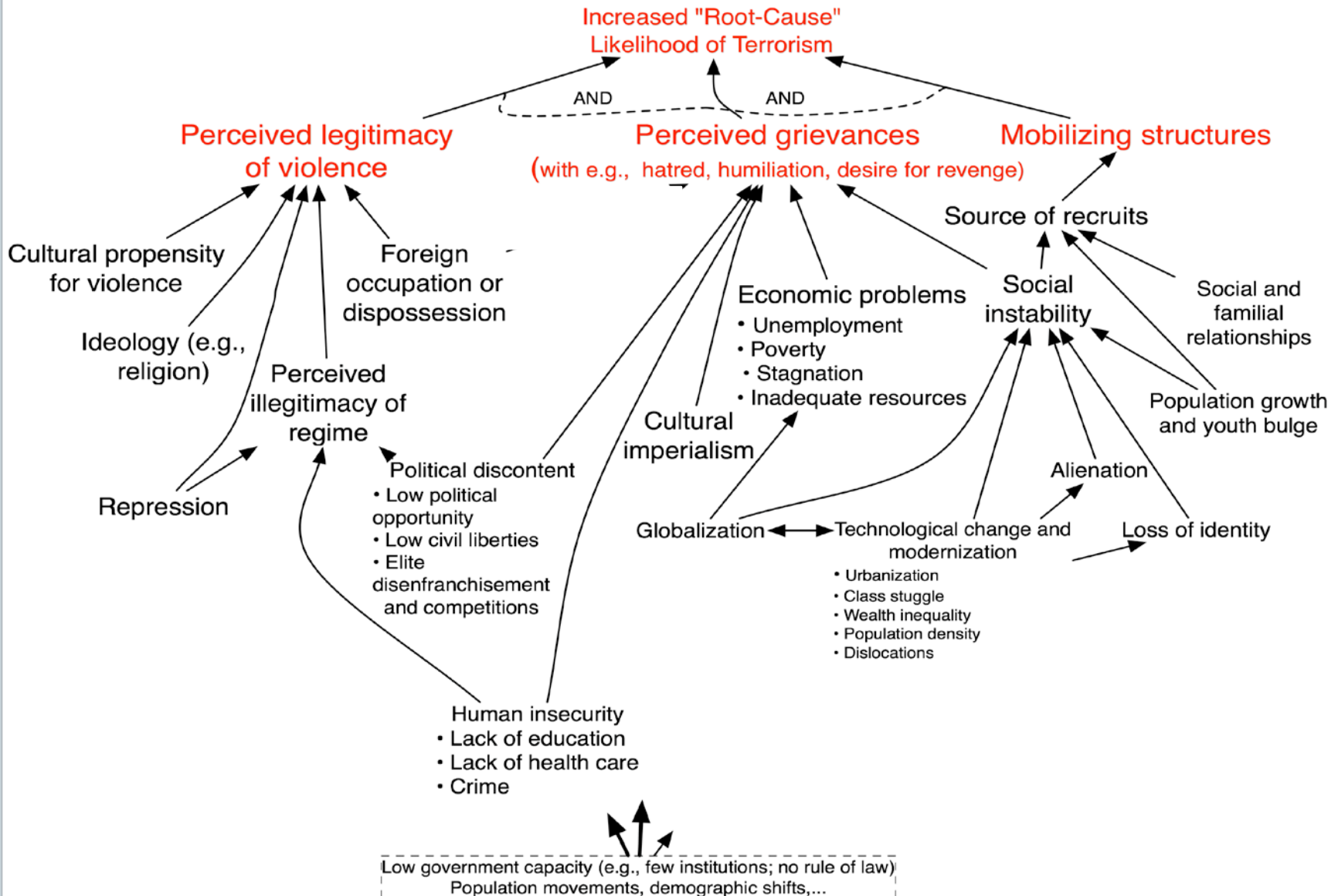
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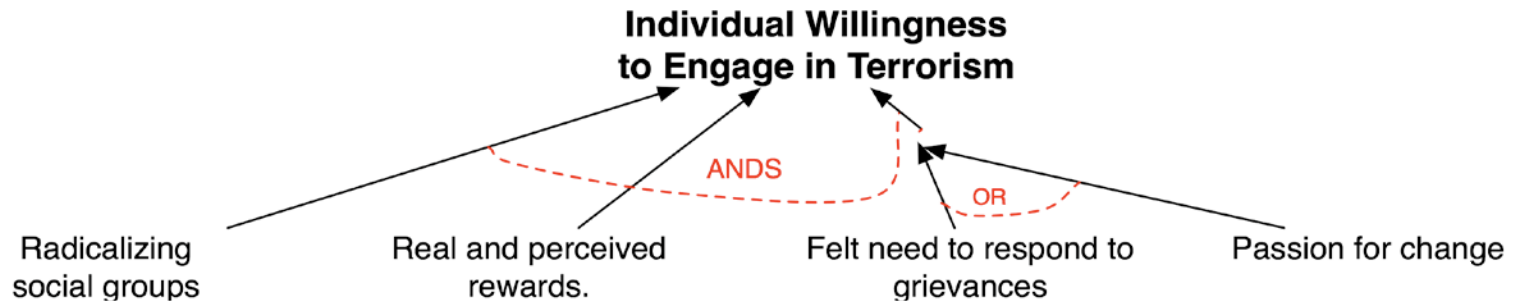
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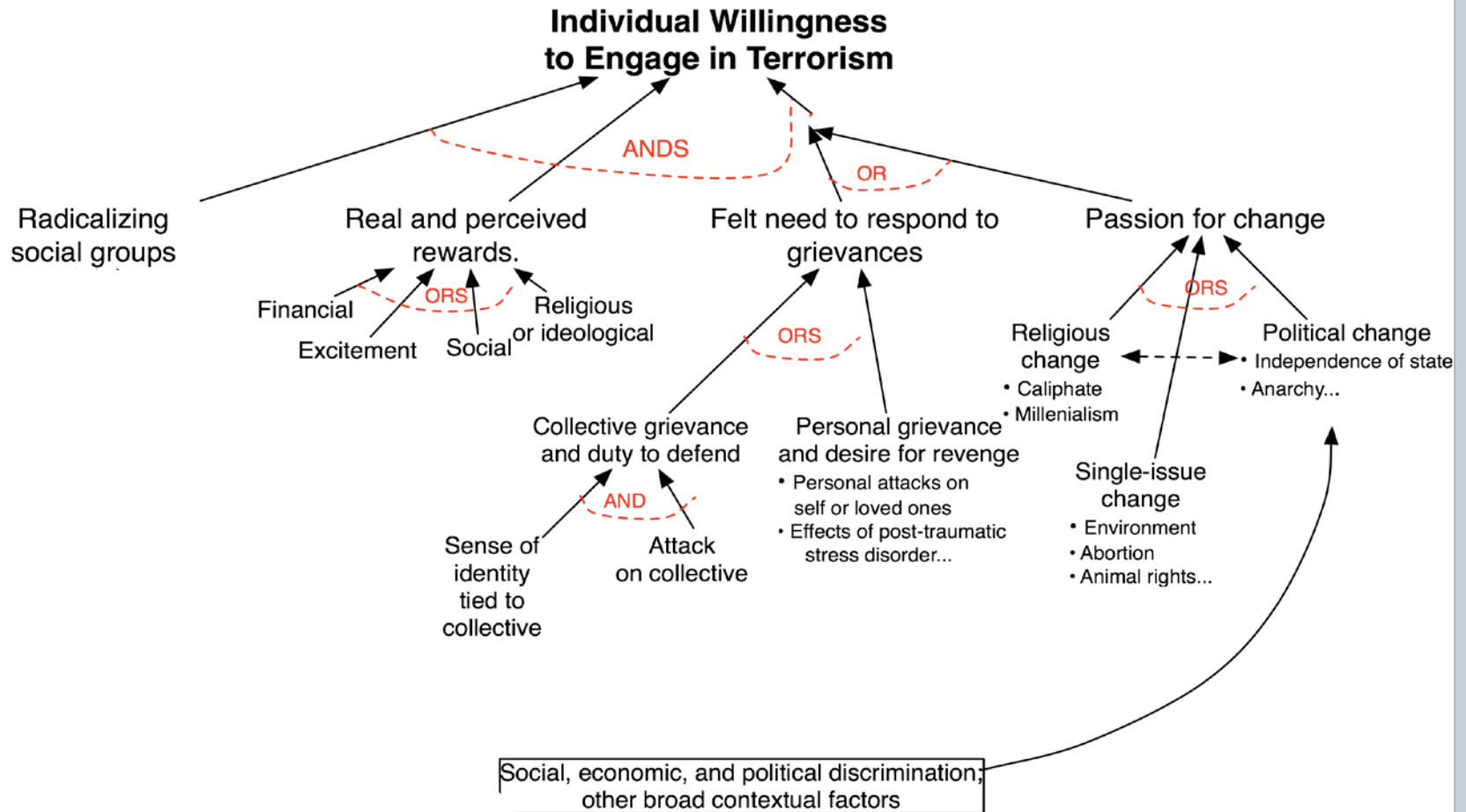
# Factor Tree #2: How do Individuals Become Terrorists?

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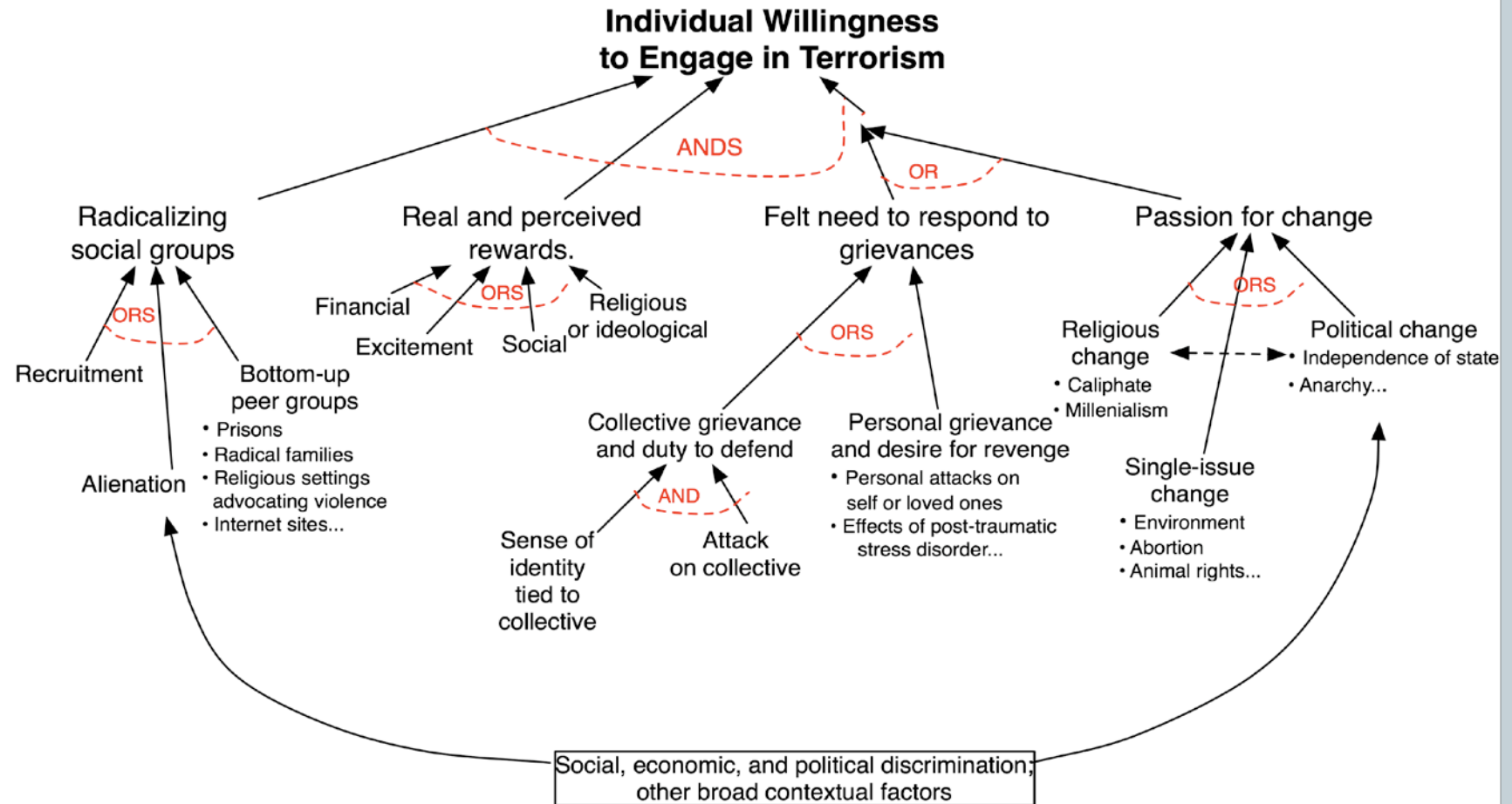
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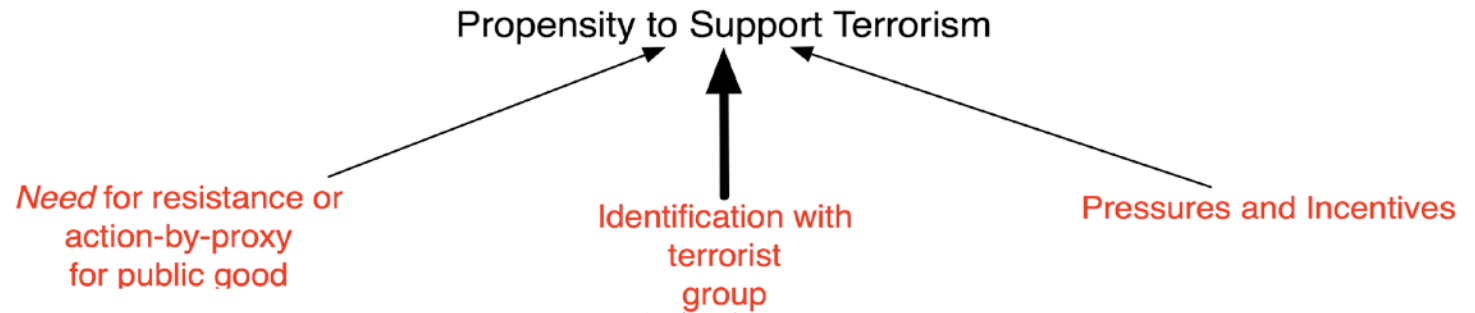
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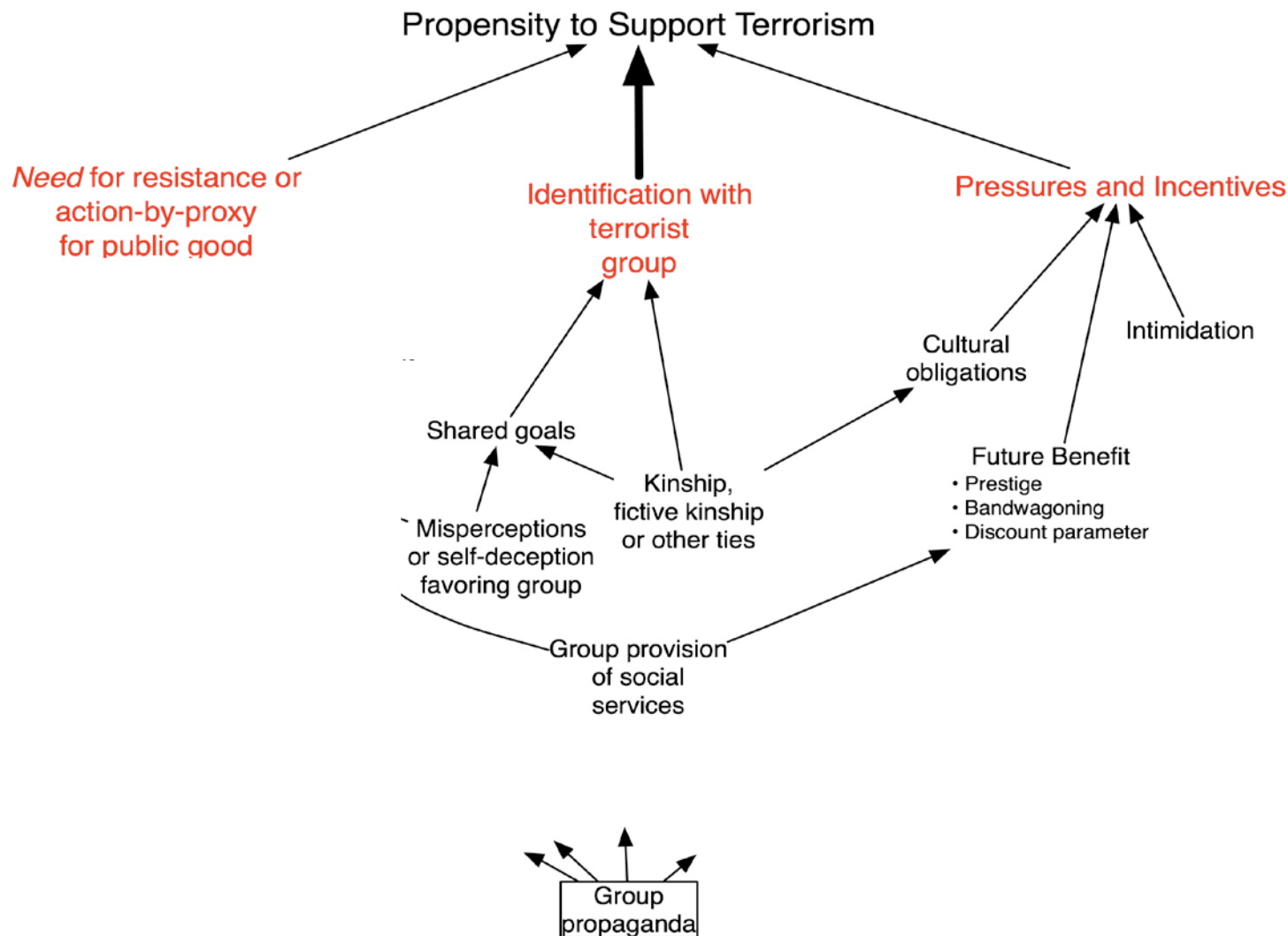
# Factor Tree #3: How Do Terrorists Gain Support?

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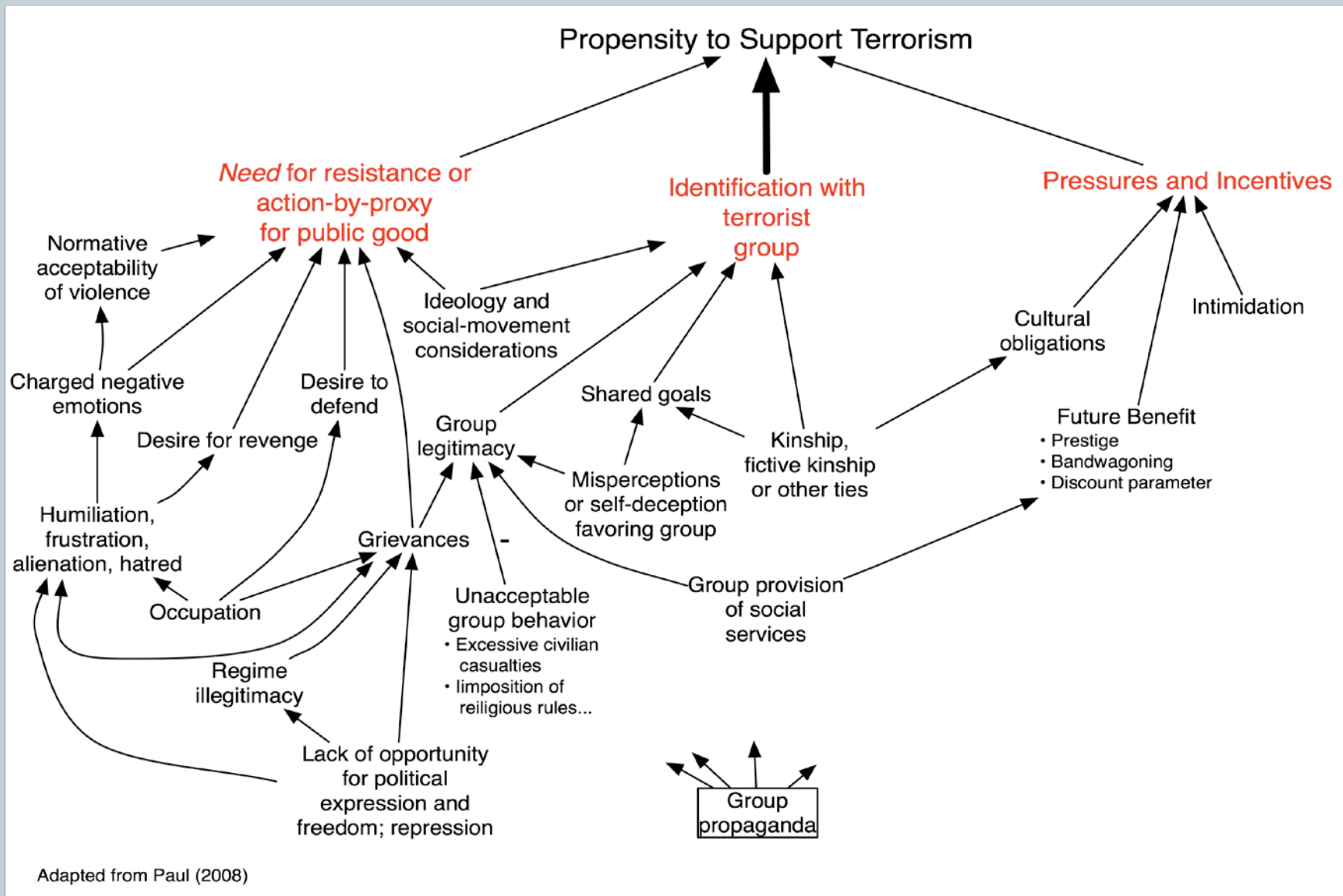
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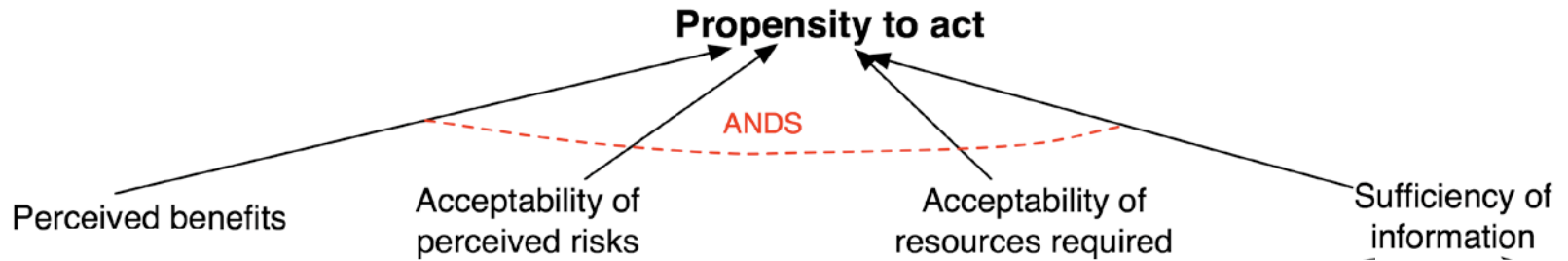


Adapted from Paul (2008)



# Decision Tree #4: What Determines Terrorist Behavior?

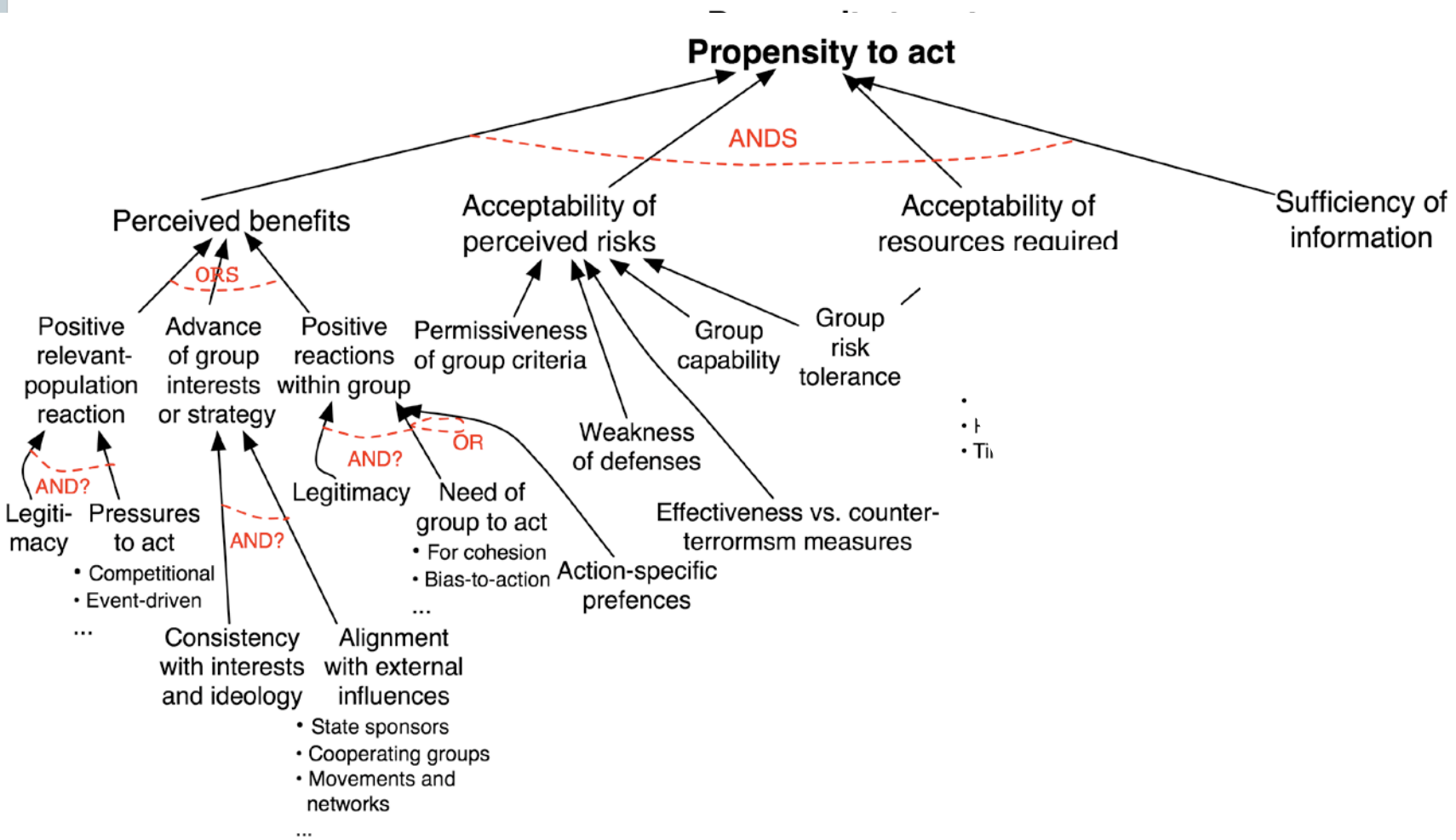
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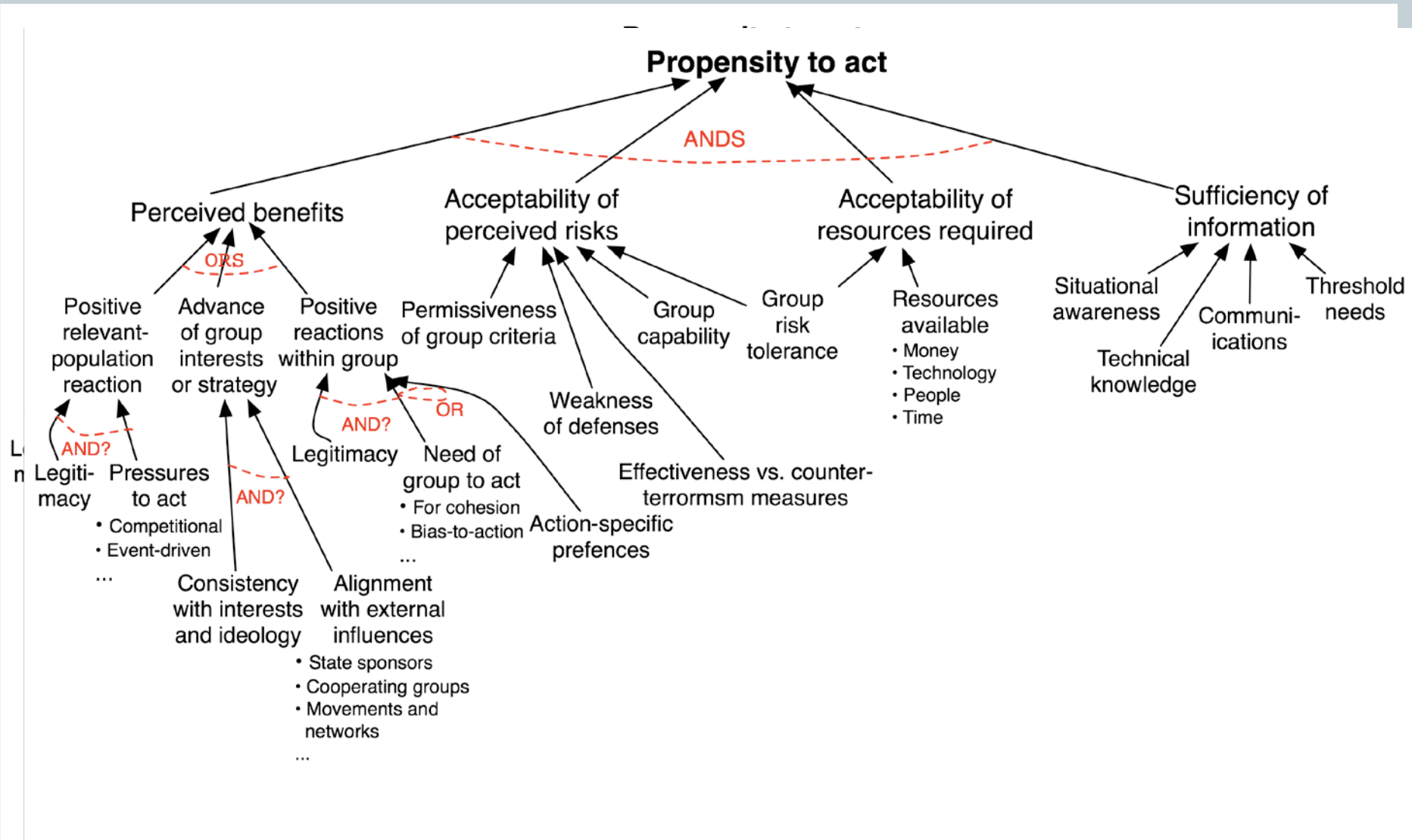
# Decision Tree #4: What Determines Terrorist Behavior?

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# Cross-Cutting Observations

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## Key Points of Tension

1. Terrorist recruitment: supply or demand-limited?
2. Religious extremism: significant or marginal?
3. Al-Qa'ida: centralized or grassroots organization?

## Key Points of Agreement

4. Context matters
5. Root causes do not sustain terrorism
6. The descent of terrorism does not mirror its ascent
7. Public support matters, but it is not the only thing

# Terrorist Recruitment: Supply or Demand-limited?

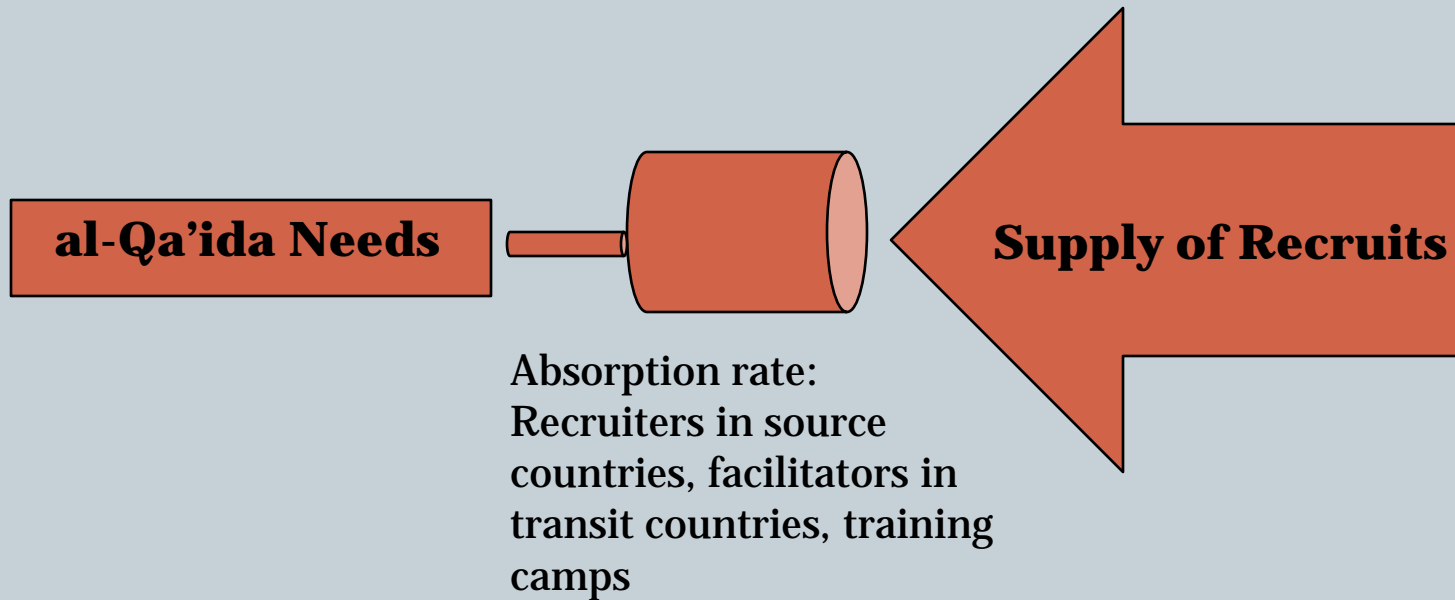
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- Consensus has emerged that targeting al-Qa'ida leaders and operatives is not enough
- Countering individual motivations of recruits has become important thrust
- But, an apparent tension on the validity of this approach exists in the academic literature
  - Some studies suggest that terrorist groups are demand-limited: volunteers are more numerous, even for suicide attacks
  - Other studies suggest that quality and specialized skills are in shorter supply; counter radicalization programs are sometimes effective
- How should policymakers account for this tension?

# Accounting for the Supply vs Demand Tension

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- Focus on reducing *flow* of recruits rather than individual motivations



- Objective is global-scale disruption to slow absorption vs. draining swamp
- Disruption is notoriously difficult to measure, but important—as those in field argue

# Religious Extremism: Significant or Marginal?

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- **Potential role of violent Salafi jihadism is uncomfortable subject within academia**
  - Intellectually, issue is ideology, with religion as subset
  - Religion can be positive or negative factor
  - Even “fundamentalists” are very seldom extremists
- **Empirical evidence is confusing**
  - Some studies on the Palestinian conflict have concluded that religion correlates poorly with terrorist violence... but other studies suggest that “it depends”...
  - Root causes: it matters if terrorists successfully imbue external threats (e.g. occupation) with sacred meaning
  - Popular support: Religion matters as a *tool* of validation in communities
- **But countering ideological support for terrorism (CIST) is central to US counterterrorism, so how can tension be resolved?**

# Resolving the “Religion Extremism” Tension

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- **Preliminary findings suggest:**
  - Effects of religious extremism may be “original” to conflict or may emerge over time
  - Level of analysis matters (e.g., terrorist leaders vs. sympathizers)
- **Issue has policy implications, warranting further research**
  - How much do we care about, e.g., Muslim Brotherhood or Hizb ut-Tahrir?
  - What audiences are most likely influenced by CIST programs? Sympathizers or hardcore al-Qa’ida supporters?
  - Should US and allies continue to support deradicalization programs or do better alternatives exist?
  - Can US do anything to reduce “duty to defend” for a particular conflict? If so, would it reduce the flow of foreign fighters? Money?



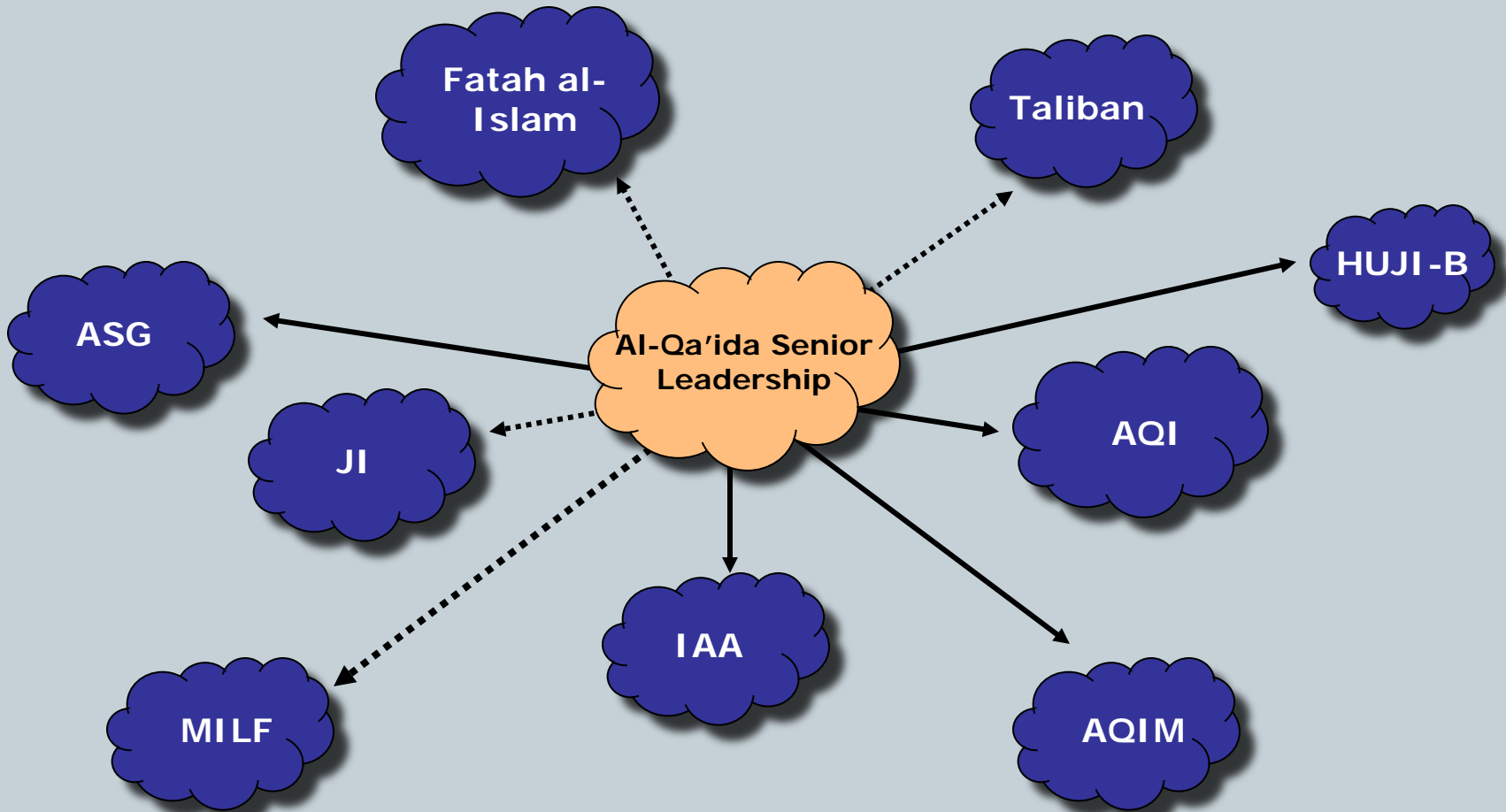
# Al-Qa'ida: Centralized or Grassroots?

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- **First, there was al-Qa'ida the centralized organization...**
  - And calls for decapitation as a means to destroy it...
- **Then, grassroots cells were recognized as threatening...**
  - Distributed, organic... with autonomous cells
- **This tension in views of al-Qa'ida as a centralized group versus a scattered number of autonomous cells also exists in our trees**
- **This issue also has significant policy implications**
  - What is the nature and degree of threat posed by al-Qa'ida?
  - How important is Afghanistan to the United States?
  - How important is Western Europe to al-Qa'ida?
  - What are al-Qa'ida's greatest vulnerabilities?

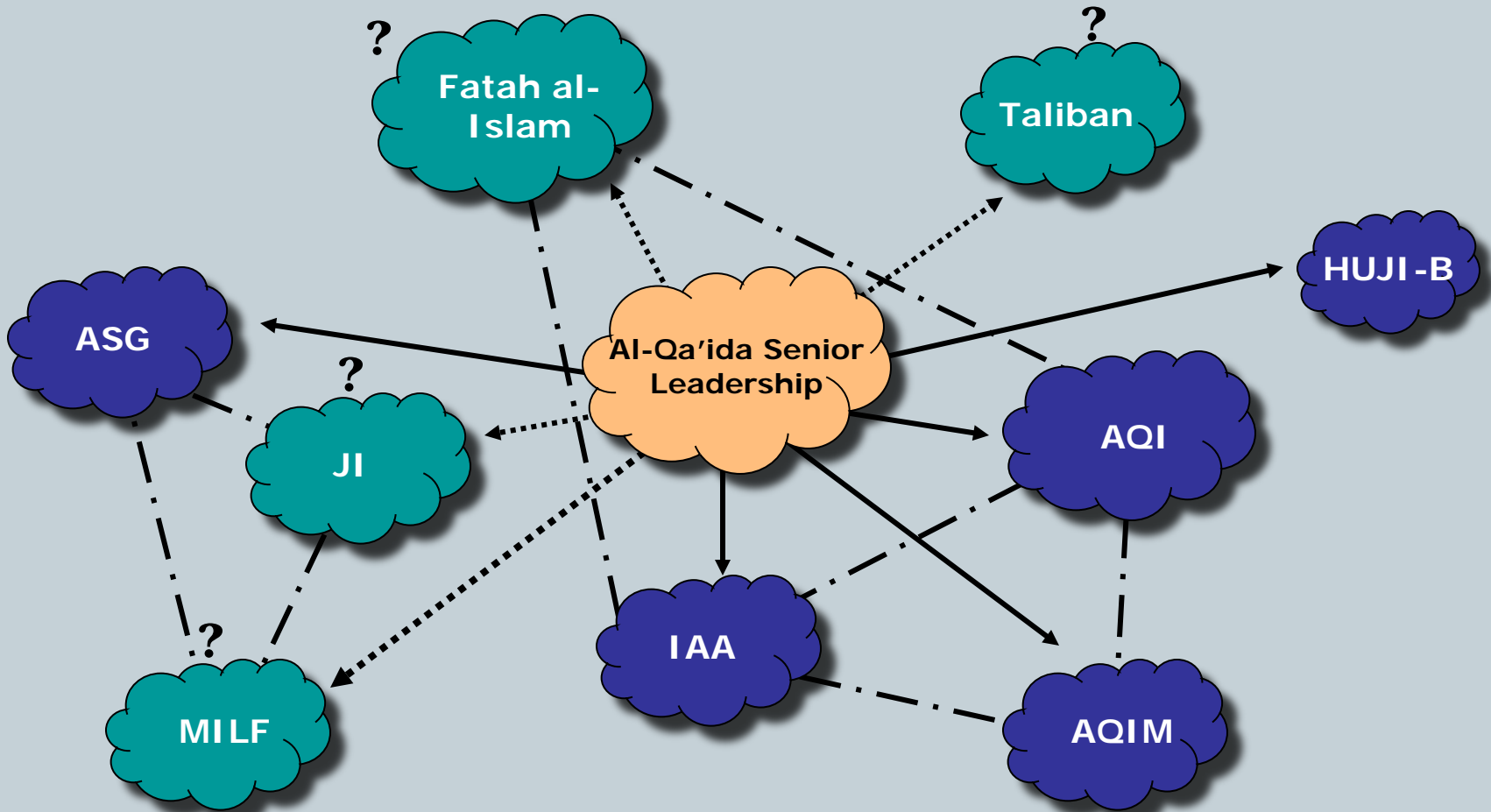
# Depicting the Tension...

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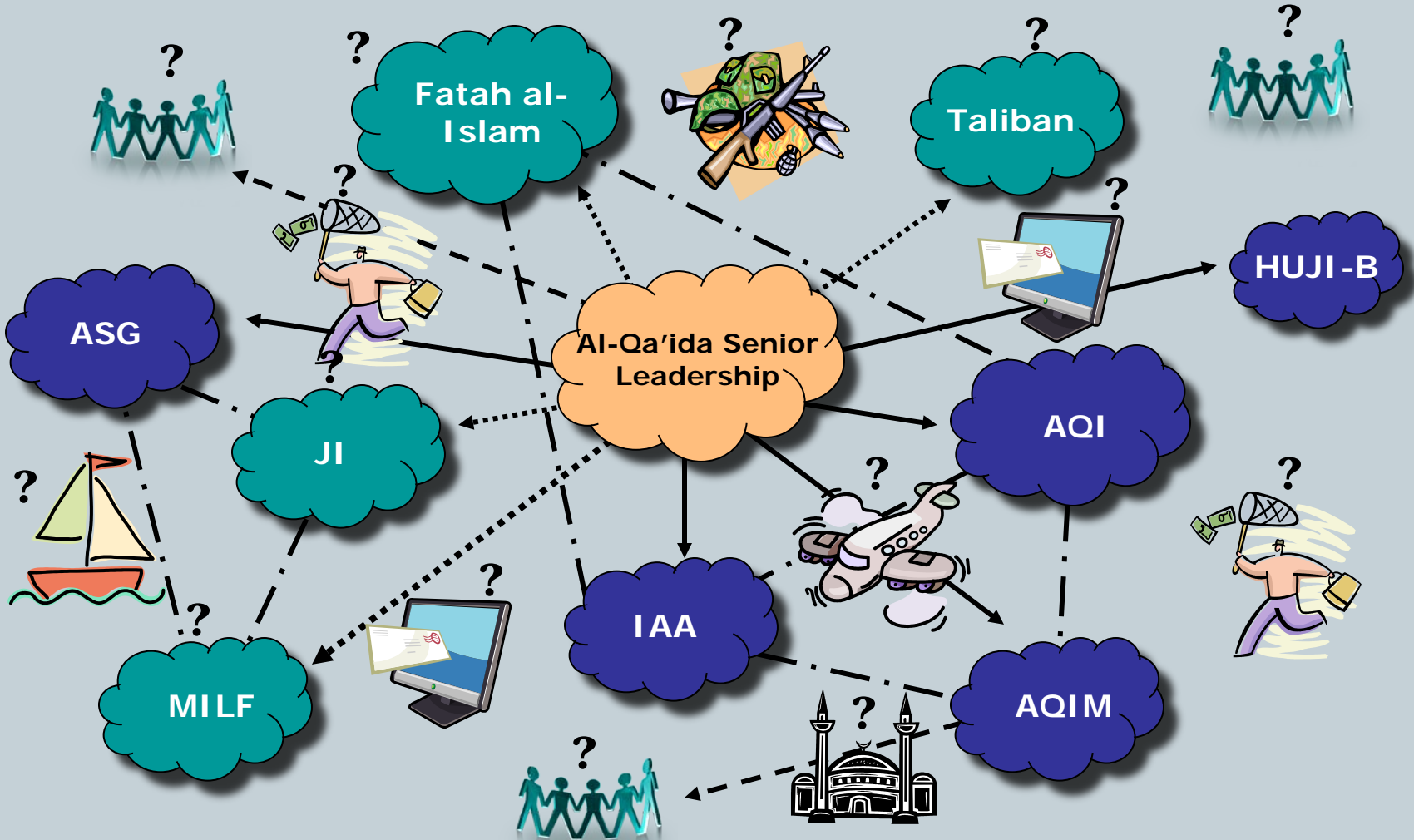
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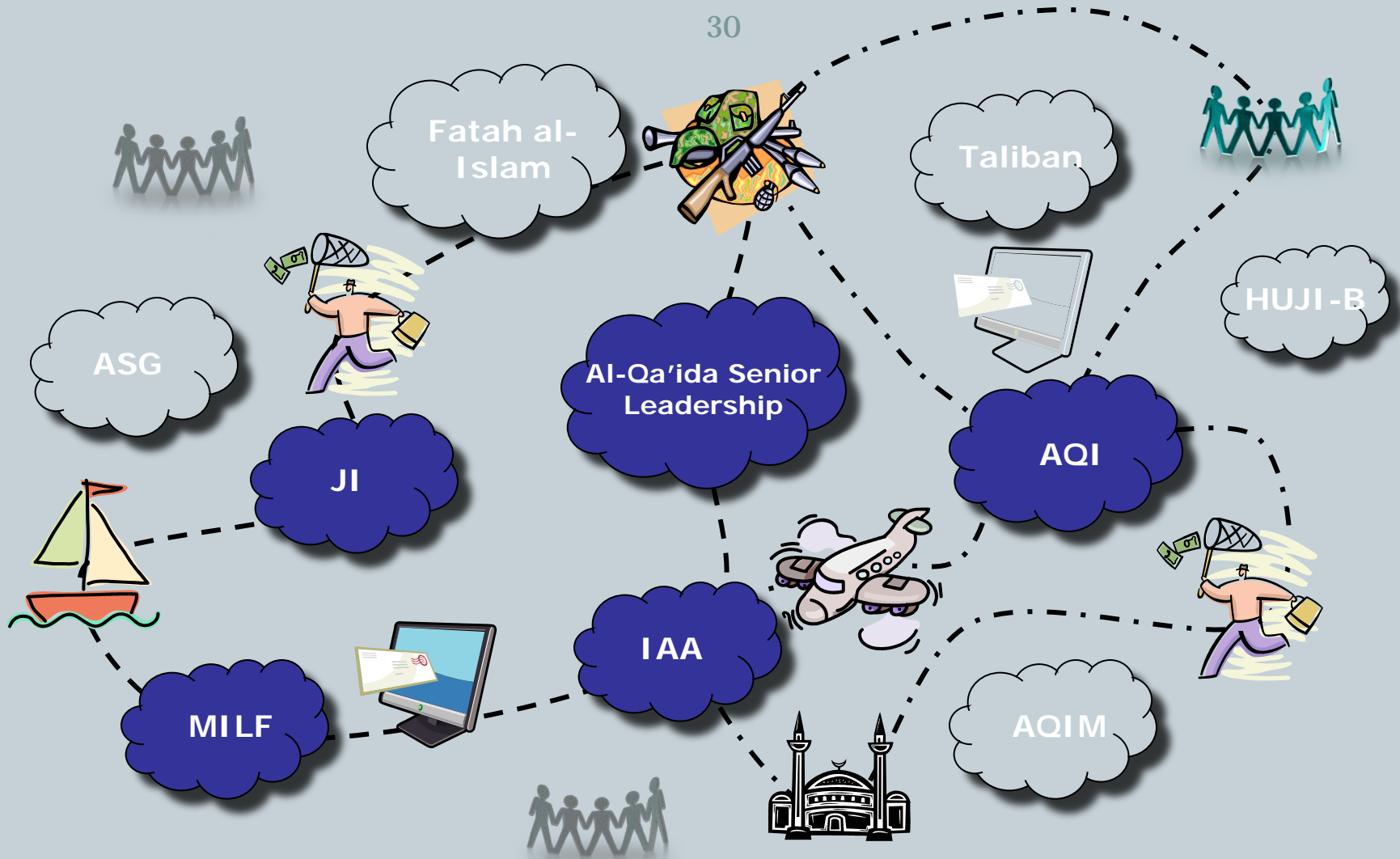
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# Resolving the Tension: Focus on Key Functions rather than Structure

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**Al-Qa'ida weapons and financing**

# Cross-Cutting Observations

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## Key Points of Tension

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# Context Matters: Examples

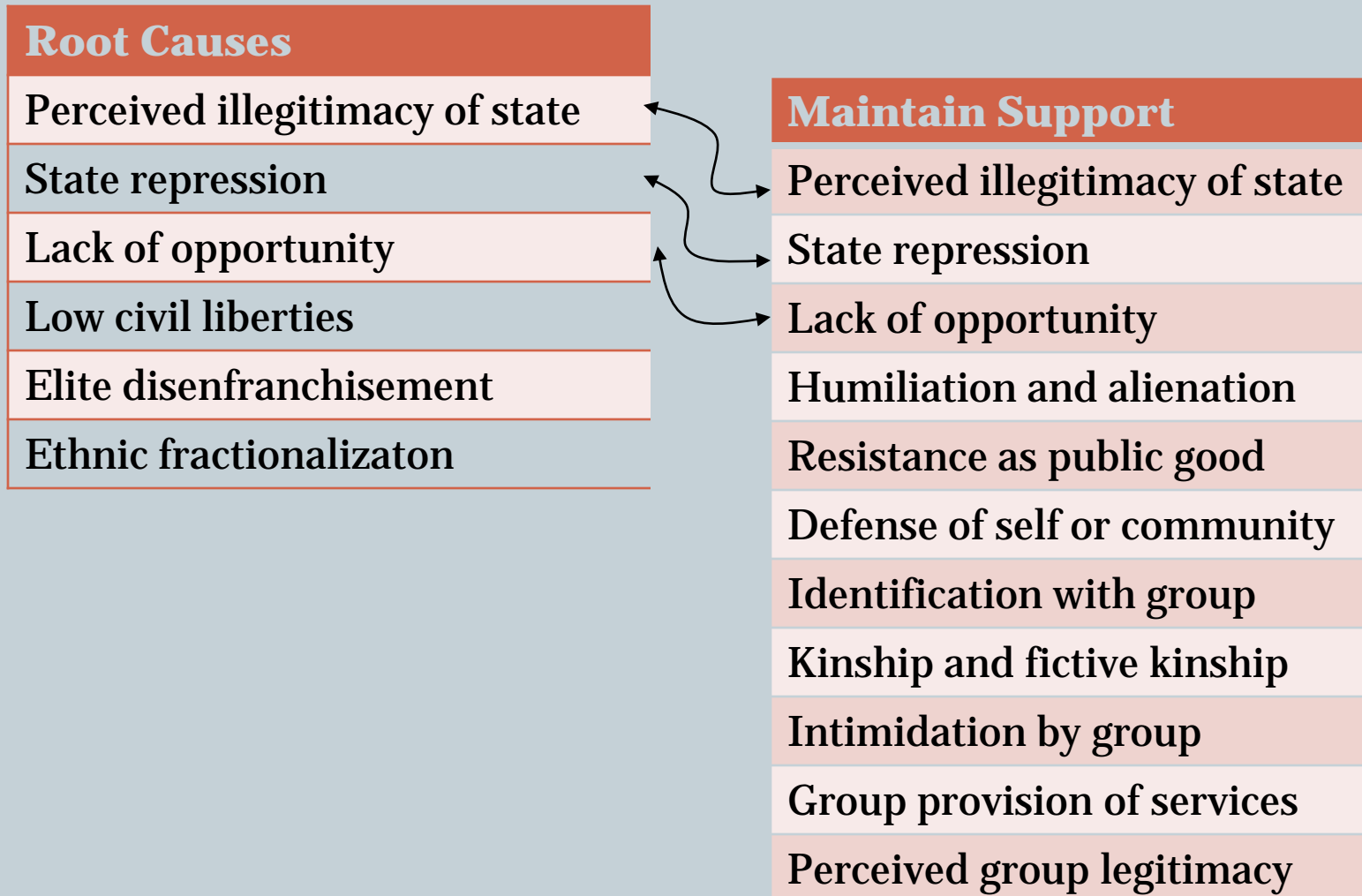
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<b>Issue</b>	<b>Contextual Difference That Likely Matters</b>
Strength of tolerance for terrorism	Societies with and without culture of violence
Strength of religious, political and economic motivations	Leaders vs foot soldiers, rural vs urban, occupation vs freedom
Utility of democratic reform	Less for societies with minority Muslim populations (e.g. Philippines) than majority (e.g. Saudi Arabia)
Utility of deradicalization and disengagement programs	Immediately after events traumatic to subject vs. other times, presence of reinforcing peer groups
Utility of strategic communications programs	One subgroup vs. another within same general culture



# Root Causes Are Not Always Key in Later Support for Terrorism

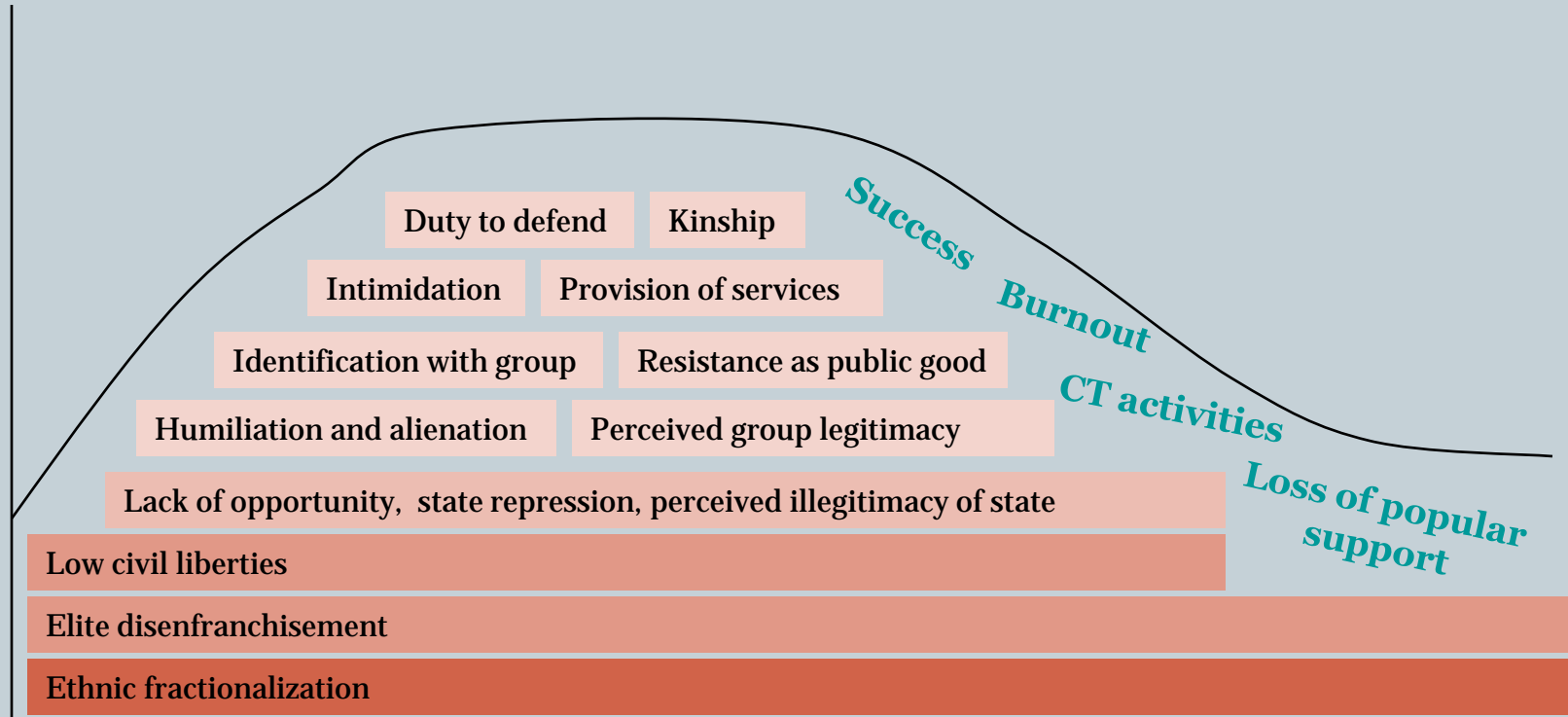
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# Descent Does Not Mirror Ascent

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**Terrorism Arises** → **Sustains** → **Terrorism Descends**



# Terrorists weigh popular support against other factors in their decision-making

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- **Social-science consensus, based on history: popular support matters greatly**
  - Popular support can provide terrorist groups with recruits, money, materiel, intelligence, safe haven...
  - Losing popular support often hastens groups' decline
- **But, terrorists also take other factors into consideration**
  - Advance of organization's strategy or cause?
  - Effect on morale, cohesion within organization?
  - Acceptability of risks?

# Summary of Cross-Cutting Observations

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- Many factors matter, so attempting to isolate the single most important factor is counter-productive
- Social science does well in identifying factors, but structuring is needed to bring order from chaos
  - Some factors – e.g. ideology – emerge in many of the trees; the trees allow us to see how the impacts of these factors change, depending on the question
  - The factor trees also allow social scientists from myriad backgrounds to communicate with each other more effectively
- We can go beyond “it depends,” distinguishing classes of cases
- But social science is not up to strong predictions:
  - Unknown, changing factor values
  - Random factors
- We need special style of analysis and strategy-laying
  - Seek to improve odds of success with flexible, adaptive, robust strategies
  - Expect rapid adaptation to be crucial