Chapter 3

Debates on International Terrorism
Chapter 3

Debates on International Terrorism

The purpose and scope of this chapter is to study various debates that have spanned the discourse on terrorism and the concurrent definitional problem that has afflicted the study of terrorism. Given the manifold dimension of international terrorism, varying perceptions of this issue has led to a large range of deliberations and discussions. An attempt has been made to understand the salient trends and important characteristics of terrorism. This chapter is divided into three sections and begins with problems of defining terrorism and then it deals with various debates surrounding terrorism and other forms of political violence. Incorporating the major trajectories on the terrorism debate, the final section examines the characteristic of terrorism.

Defining Terrorism

If the definition of security regime is confronted by difficulties, elusiveness has been the hallmark of a similar exercise concerning terrorism. Prolonged individual and institutional efforts have not led to a precise and comprehensive definition acceptable to concerned parties. At the functional level, terrorism is the end product of a number of components and the multiplicity of the components has been major impediment in defining terrorism. Since certain components should exist concurrently, the absence of one or more components would make an act another form of violence but not terrorism. Some of the elements of terrorism are not tangible and are subjected to differing
interpretations. Terrorism has a perpetrator and a victim and hence each side tends to perceive, define and defend terrorism according to its own interests and calculations.

Terrorism is different from other forms of crimes. A person commits a crime when he/she violates, breaks or subverts certain established laws and in so doing, becomes a criminal under a particular law. In other words, the person's action is judged in accordance to a reference point and he/she is declared a criminal when he breaches it. Terrorism, on the other hand, is yet to have a reference point that would automatically place the perpetrator a terrorist. Most importantly political motivation ingrained in terrorism differentiates this from other forms of violence. This debate was acute during the Cold War period and has continued since then. Technological advancements not only enhanced the lethality of terrorism but also made it necessary to redefine the parameters.

The problem of definition, therefore, has been the most difficult aspect of understanding terrorism.

Problems of Definition

Though acts of terror are traced to ancient times,¹ terrorism emerged as a political concept only during the French revolution. The etymology can be traced to regime de la terreur, "an instrument of governance" employed by the newly formed revolutionary state to suppress its opponents.² The politically motivated actions by the state against non-state actors were "closely associated with the ideals of virtue and democracy."³ In other words, at that period terrorism was not seen as an inherently evil phenomenon. The

---

² Bruce Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, (London: Indigo, 1999), p.15
³ Ibid., p.15
two characteristics that marked terrorism as it prevailed then are still valid and debated in the modern era; one, terrorism was not indiscriminate but was 'organised, deliberate and systematic' and two, its objective was to replace a corrupt society by a better one.4

This benevolent approach to terrorism, however, was short-lived. In the post-revolution era, terrorism came to be associated with criminal implications. The upsurge of anti-colonialism in the Third World at the end of the World War-II once again restored the erstwhile image. Terrorism became popular and acceptable norm for the struggle for freedom and national liberation. “Countries as diverse as Israel, Kenya, Cyprus and Algeria”, observed Bruce Hoffman, “owe their independence at least in part to nationalist political movements that employed terrorism.”5

As a result, in the 1960s and 70s the process of decolonisation dominated the debate over terrorism. Various revolutionary and ethno-national movements in the Third World viewed, justified and practiced terrorism as a legitimate means of nationalist struggle and terrorism became an integral part of the prevailing revolutionary fervour. The Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat epitomised the linkage between the ends and means. Speaking at the UN General Assembly in November 1974, he observed:

The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which he fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders, the settlers and the colonialist cannot possibly be called a terrorist.6

4 Ibid., p.16
5 Ibid., p.26
So long as the ultimate object was justifiable, national liberation in most cases, terrorism became acceptable as well as respectable.

The success of the decolonisation process, however, did not end terrorism. By 1980s, much of the erstwhile colonies gained independence and theoretically, continuation of terrorism cannot be justified as a means to a noble cause. This situation called for a fresh understanding of the phenomenon that threatened various parts of the world. Many in the West perceived terrorism to be 'a global conspiracy' against their interests. Terrorism "became associated with a type of covert or surrogate warfare whereby weaker states could confront larger, more powerful rivals without the risk of retribution." 7

The 1990s terrorism assumed a new character whereby the terrorist groups began enjoying greater freedom vis-à-vis their patrons or sponsoring states. Terrorist groups, which in the past received ideological support, political endorsement, military training, economic aid, arms supplies or safe haven, found themselves orphaned following the collapse of the Soviet Union and American disengagement from Afghanistan. The absence or withdrawal of support from the patron did not result in the disappearance or weakening of a terrorist group. By the time the patron rolled back its material support for a terrorist group, the latter often has acquired a life of its own. In other words, "the evil genie that was terrorism was out of the bottle, and there was no getting back inside." 8

Non-state actors assumed a dynamics of their own in pursuing political objects, which at

---

7 Hoffman, n.2, p.27
times were at variance with the states, which had created, funded and supported them in the past.

Any attempt to define terrorism is entangled into an ideological debate over its political objectives. During the decolonisation phase, terrorism became an acceptable tool, especially in the Third World, in the struggle for national liberation. Subsequently, terrorism became engrossed into the East-West ideological debate. The end of the Cold War, however, did not end the ideological divide and has been presented within the context of a civilisational conflict between East and West or between Islam and Christianity.

At one time, terrorism was considered within the domain of individuals, groups or non-state actors. Hence, Juliet Lodge, saw terrorism “as the resort to violence for political ends by unauthorised, non-governmental actors in breach of accepted codes of behaviour.”9 The exclusion of the state from the purview of terrorism however was short sighted. Realising its utility and cost-effectiveness, a number of states began employing terrorism in pursuance of their national interests. Unlike the non-state groups, the states have been more successful in employing terrorism when they perceive it to be a useful, economical and efficient instrument. The ability of the state to conceal its involvement increases the political dividends and advantages. A number of states, primarily in the Middle East, have often been accused of sponsoring terrorism and countries such Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Syria have been placed in the US terrorism watch list. Even though such classification is guided by political compulsions and calculations, the

---

complicity and involvement of these countries in various acts of terror have been a public knowledge.\textsuperscript{10}

Similarly, national interests inhibit or facilitate a state to describe a violent act as terrorism. Since national interests are not static, perceptions also vary. Until the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, for example, India looked to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a body championing the political grievances of the Sri Lankan Tamils and even provided political support, military training and logistical assistance to the group. The same can be said about the benign attitude Israel had adopted when Hamas was formed in 1988 or the American position vis-à-vis Osama Bin Laden and other Afghan Arabs during the Cold War.

The pejorative usage of the term further complicates the problem of definition. Various violent and at times even non-violent acts are called terrorism, thereby confusing the entire debate.\textsuperscript{11} The introduction of prefixes such as ‘political’\textsuperscript{12} ‘narco’\textsuperscript{13} ‘bio’\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Among others see, Daniel Pipes, “Why Asad’s terror works and Qadhdhafi’s does not”, \textit{Orbis}, vol. no, Fall 1989, pp.501-8; Bruce Hoffman, “Recent trends and future prospects of Iranian sponsored international terrorism”, in Yonah Alexander (ed), \textit{Middle Eastern Terrorism: Current Threats and Future Prospects}, (New York: GK Hall, 194), pp.41-82

\textsuperscript{11} For example, the destruction of the Somnath Temple in the 12\textsuperscript{th} and demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1991 are often presented as terrorism.


\textsuperscript{13} See, R.C Dixit and Giriray Shah, \textit{Narco Terrorism} (New Delhi: Cosmo, 1996)

\textsuperscript{14} A senior Indian scientist, for example, portrayed the introduction of genetically modified cotton in Gujarat, as “an act of bio-terrorism, threatening the farmers and the country’s rich biodiversity.” \textit{The Hindu}, 7 November 2001.
While terrorism has remained an enduring phenomenon, present day terrorist groups are clearly dissimilar to their Cold War counterparts. Earlier because of the East-West rivalry, the Soviet Union supported a number of national liberation movements and this position was partly responsible for the absence of an international consensus against terrorism. The Soviet Union and its allies interpreted terrorism within the context of the prevailing ideological debate over anti-colonialism. At the height of the Cold War Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow functioned as the primary training base for Palestinian guerrillas as well as other groups such as the IRA, Red Army Faction and Basque Nation and Freedom (ETA). For its part, the US viewed the state-sponsored terrorism in the Latin America and elsewhere as an effective deterrence against the 'evil empire.'

Caught in this ideological crossfire, definition and demarcation of terrorist acts became a function of superpower rivalry. This trend changed following the hijacking of a Soviet domestic airliner in October 1970 and despite the Arab opposition Moscow

15 See, Misa Khan Jalazi, Sectarianism and Politico-religious Terrorism in Pakistan, (Lahore: Institute of International Affairs, 1993)
18 Ibid, pp.226-282
21 Kushner, n.8, pp.4-5
endorsed UN General Assembly resolution condemning hijacking. Moreover, according to some observers the rethinking in the Soviet attitude was also brought about by the actions of more radical elements involved in Middle Eastern terrorism.

If the ideological divide characterised the debate on terrorism during the Cold War, the 1990s witnessed the upsurge of religiously motivated terrorism in various parts of the world. Legitimate nationalist claims came to be perceived and presented through a non-negotiable and absolutist religious prism.

**Definitions of Terrorism**

Because of these inherent difficulties discussed above, terrorism eludes a universal definition. While its violent nature and political motives are widely recognised, other elements are not and hence the plethora of definitions on terrorism. It is therefore, essential to examine some of the better-known and relatively comprehensive definitions.

According to Bowyer J. Bell, “terrorism is a weapon of the weak, but it is a very powerful weapon.” He treated terrorism as an effective instrument for whom full-scale military conflict is impractical. As war, especially full-fledged or total war becomes politically costlier and economically prohibitive, terrorism serves as the intermediary instrument for the pursuant of defined political objectives. Hence, weaker states tend to

---


23 Kushner, n.8, p.5

24 For example, Thackrah provides as many as sixty-eight definitions. n.9, pp.58-63. Likewise, a Dutch study provides as many thirty-five definitions for terrorism. See, Alex P Schmid and Albert J Jongman et al, *Political Terrorism: A New guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature*, (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1988), pp.32-38

support or sponsor terrorist groups in furtherance of their objectives; for example, Syrian support for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Adopting a similar approach David Fromklin argued that while the military action is aimed at physical destruction, terrorism aims at psychological consequences and creating fear is the ultimate purpose of terrorism. While Brian Michael Jenkins viewed terrorism as a new form of warfare, Antal Deutsch perceived it as a low cost type of warfare between major powers.\(^{26}\)

For Mallin, terrorism is a military tactic, a type of psychological warfare used when full-scale military action is not possible. Hence, terrorism can be employed as a military weapon under three conditions: as a substitute for normal war, as an addition to normal war, or as chosen weapon of conflict by one group against another. Consequently, terrorism has three functions: psychological consequence, material damage and economic destruction.\(^{27}\)

Paust viewed terrorism as “a form of violent strategy, a form of coercion utilized to alter the freedom of choice of others.”\(^ {28}\) He saw terrorism as a tactic in which one segment of society can use it to constrain the behaviour of another. It involves the use or threat of violence against a secondary target to communicate a threat to the primary target for purpose of coercing the primary target into granting a particular political outcome. Altering the behaviour of the primary targets is the key element of terrorism and under

\(^{26}\) Ibid.

\(^{27}\) Ibid. pp.5-6.

\(^{28}\) Ibid. p.6
this situation, the victims serve as a symbol to attract attention and gain political concessions from the primary target.  

Brain Jenkins pointed out that the terrorism is often used loosely to cover a variety of violent acts and is intended to garner publicity for a political end. Unlike ordinary criminals, terrorist desire to take credit for their action. Of late, however, a number of terrorist incidents lack credible claimants; for example, 11 September suicide attacks in New York and Washington.

Since democracies are more vulnerable than other forms of governments, creating instability often becomes the primary or secondary motives for terrorism. For Jeffrey Ross this means:

- the greater the degree of democracy the higher the toleration for terrorism;
- the greater the level of democracy the higher the other forms of unrest;
- the greater the amount of democracy the higher the probability of counter terrorist organisational failure;
- the greater the level of democracy the higher the availability of weapons and explosives.

According to Pontara, terrorism should fulfil three pre-conditions, "the involvement of the extreme use of violence against innocent people, and is not a legitimate method of struggle." "By terrorism", Hess maintained, "one means a series of intentional acts of direct, psychological violence, which at indeterminable points but nevertheless systematically, with the aim of psychic effect, are conducted within the framework of a

---

29 Ibid
30 Ibid., p. 8
32 Quoted in Thackrah, n.9, p.63
political strategy." Asaf Hussain defined three types of terrorism: political terrorism, which can be secular or religious; terrorism that revolves around individual leaders seeking to eliminate their opponents; and criminal terrorism devoid of any political objective.

The CIA added a new dimension to this debate and categorised it into 'transnational' and 'international' terrorism. While both inflict damages on a wider target, the former is the function of non-state actors who may or may not enjoy the backing of a state. The latter are carried out by groups or individuals who are controlled by a sovereign state. "Transnational terrorism", Milbank argued, "is carried out by autonomous non-state actors, whether or not they enjoy some degree of support from sympathetic states. International terrorism is carried out by individuals or groups controlled by a sovereign state." As such, unlike the transnational terrorism, international terrorism is rather difficult to identify.

Appalled at the welcome accorded by the United Nations to Arafat in 1974, Johnson wrote: "Step by Step, almost imperceptibly without any one being aware that a fatal watershed has been crossed, mankind has descended into age of terror." With hindsight, one can argue that the recognition of Arafat as the leader of the Palestinians did mark a significant departure in the Western attitudes towards terrorism, especially those emanating out of a demand for national self-determination.

---

33 Quoted in ibid., p.59
34 Hussain, n.12, p.22
36 Quoted in Thackrah, n.9, p.60
37 David Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism", Foreign Affairs p.692
Despite the changing nature of terrorism, the self-portrayal of the terrorist has not changed significantly. A terrorist continues to see and present himself/herself as one who pursues a noble cause through violent means. Irrespective of the magnitude of the damages, he/she not only seeks to justify his/her actions but also presents oneself as the real victim. Correspondingly, while terrorists are demonised by the victims, their popular perceptions among those whose cause the terrorist espouse are different. They enjoy support and admiration among the masses. Irish leader Michael Collins, Hamas bomb maker Yahya Ayyash, or Saudi dissident Osama bin-Laden, are venerated as national heroes and their activities are romanticised.

**Ideological Debate**

A number of factors such as religion, ideology, exercise of right of self-determination and ethno-nationalism have primarily contributed to use of terrorism. Terrorism is politically motivated coercion, fear or intimidation brought about by a group, revolutionary movement, regime or even individuals. "What fundamentally distinguishes terrorism from other forms of organised violence" observed Paul Wilkinson, "is not simply its severity but its features of amorality and antinomaism."\(^{38}\) He further differentiates political terror from political terrorism; the former is an 'isolated act' similar to outbursts that took place during the French Revolution while political terrorism is a sustained policy that involves the waging of a organised terror either on the part of the state, group or individual.\(^{39}\)

---


\(^{39}\) Ibid.,
Considerable disagreement about the characteristics of terrorism had not inhibited scholars to adopt a *negative consensus* vis-à-vis terrorism. While it has been difficult to agree to what it exactly connotes, whatever terrorism stands for has not enjoyed widespread support. Terrorism thus "is distinguished from acts of such as guerrilla warfare assassination motivated by revenge or non political motive and police repression."\(^{40}\)

This however, is not universal. Crozier defined terrorism merely as "the threat or use of violence for political ends."\(^{41}\) Because of the presence of numerous forms of political violence, one has to differentiate them from terrorism. This difference, unfortunately, "has not been clearly delineated and explored."\(^{42}\) How does terrorism differ from insurgency, guerrilla warfare, low-intensity warfare or violence emanating religious fundamentalism? This becomes essential since these violent acts are also politically motivated.

While some have argued that political terrorism is indeed, "a tactic of the overall strategies of guerrilla warfare"\(^{43}\) and others have suggested, "borderline between guerrilla warfare tactics and terrorism is ... a fuzzy one."\(^{44}\) Silverman and Jackson perceived terrorism as

\[
\text{a complementary tactic to both guerrilla and conventional warfare.}
\]

Terrorism differs from guerrilla warfare in as much as its purpose is to influence the opponent and any third parties rather than annihilate them.

\(^{40}\) Mehdi Mozzafari, "The New era of Terrorism :Approaches and typologies", *Cooperation and Conflict* vol. 23, no.4 1988 pp 181-2

\(^{41}\) Quoted in Thackrah, n.9, p.58

\(^{42}\) Mozzafari, n.38, pp.180-1

\(^{43}\) Hussain, n.56, p.22

\(^{44}\) Schmid and Jongman, n.68, p.18.
The purpose of the act, not the nature of the act itself is the essential characteristic, which distinguishes terrorism.\textsuperscript{45}

In similar vein, Mallin presented terrorism as a “form of guerrilla war” and highlighted that while guerrillas operate in mountains or rural areas, the terrorist are prevalent “in urban areas as well.”\textsuperscript{46} Even though guerrilla movements invariably resort to terrorism, Francis argues that the West distinguishes terrorism from guerrilla warfare “in that the latter term refers to paramilitary combat carried out against regular military forces.”\textsuperscript{47}

On number of occasions, killing of individuals in a violent actions do not automatically constitute terrorism. Most of these killings if carried out with a political motive come under a category of assassination; for example Julius Caesar (44 BC), Abraham Lincoln (1865), Mahatma Gandhi (1948), King Abdullah I (1951), John F Kennedy (1963) Martin Luther King (1968), Olaf Palme (1986) and Yitzhak Rabin (1995). At the same time, political leaders have been killed during times of national upheavals, revolution or military coups; for example Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1975). In some cases, the regime resorted to political murder to throttle any challenges to its existence (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto 1978).

There are also grey areas, which defy definite characterisation. While the murder of Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her security guards is assassination, the killing of Rajiv

\textsuperscript{45} Silverman and Jackson, quoted in Thackrah, n.9, p.59.
\textsuperscript{46} Quoted in ibid.,p.61
\textsuperscript{47} Quoted in Ibid., p.59
Gandhi in 1991 by the Tamil militants comes under the category of terrorism.\textsuperscript{48} In both the cases, the perpetrator acted on behalf of a group that had a political grievance vis-à-vis the victim. Unlike Indira Gandhi who was killed by individuals without any organisational support, Rajiv Gandhi’s killing was a well-planned and executed operation carried out by the Tamil Tigers. Hence, the presence of an organised effort becomes essential in differentiating assassination from terrorism.

Having survived the “atrophication of communism and the end of the Cold War”, terrorism has transformed itself into a component of insurgency and revolutionary war.\textsuperscript{49} According to Stanley Hoffman, five characteristics distinguish terrorism from other forms crimes\textsuperscript{50}:

- Ineluctably political aims and motives;
- Violent- or, equally important, threatens violence;
- Designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussion behind the immediate victim or target;
- Conducted by an organisation with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose member wear no uniform or identifying insignia); and
- Perpetrated by a sub national group or non-state entity.

However, because terrorism is primarily the usage of violence for political ends, confusion arises as to its differences from other forms of political violence such as

\textsuperscript{48} However, in the absence of legal provisions defining terrorism, the Supreme Court, which handed down death sentences to the accomplices, ruled it as a murder and not terrorism.

\textsuperscript{49} Christopher C Harmon, \textit{Terrorism Today}, (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p.139

\textsuperscript{50} Hoffman, n.2, p.43
guerrilla warfare, revolutionary warfare, liberation struggle and organised crimes. Any understanding of the term terrorism is incomplete without differentiating from other forms of political violence, such as insurgency, militancy etc., Even though in 1987 the United Nations had defined ‘all criminal acts as terrorism’, it still fails to capture the reality and hence the need to examine some of the salient features, which characterise terrorism.

**Terrorism vs. Guerrilla Warfare**

Wilkinson argued that Urban Guerrilla warfare as well as terrorism have been combined and used in the most of the revolutionary struggles as well as in most of the national liberation movements. Since ‘terrorism potential’ is more of a component of the urban guerrilla warfare method than in any other violent activities, terrorism is often confused with the other. Both of them share many of the long-term strategies and aims of a terrorist urban guerrilla warfare are an inadequate method to bring about its political objectives.\(^5\) Terrorism plays a limited role in Che Guevara’s (the most famous exponent of this type of warfare) guerrilla warfare framework.

A theorist on Guerrilla warfare Regis Debray, and a former associate of Che suggested that that terrorism is a useful diversion to coerce anti-guerrillas into submitting or supporting the ways of the revolutionaries.\(^5\) Others like Begin and Marighela have advocated the usage of terrorism as an element in a successful revolutionary movement. In his two major works *For the Liberation of Brazil* and *The Mini-manual of the Urban Guerrilla*, Margihella discussed the practical guides for terrorism. For the revolutionary,

---


\(^5\) Ibid., p.108
the short and long term damages that a terrorist inflict upon the state or regime is undoubtedly very rewarding.\textsuperscript{53}

At the same time, there is a difference between guerrilla warfare whether urban or rural and terrorism. In his Political Terrorism Wilkinson argued that the major distinction between the two is that guerrillas use the methods of conventional war as opposed to the terrorists who wage a ‘general war.’ Terrorists place no limits on the means or targets employed and have no inhibition in targeting not only the local population but also those not even remotely connected with the cause.\textsuperscript{54} For Wilkinson, terrorism is not a ‘pejorative’ for urban guerrilla warfare. The latter, according to him, can be defined as ‘a form of unconventional war waged in urban or suburban areas for political objectives’ and differs from political terrorism through being more discriminate and predictable in its uses of violence. Its frequent equation with terrorism is facilitated by the fact that urban guerrillas seldom reject terrorism as one of the several forms of action, and indeed tend to use it extensively when they are politically weak and isolated.\textsuperscript{55}

Writing elsewhere he elaborated this by saying, various forms of political terrorism are independent of guerrilla warfare. Indeed,

Historically rural guerrilla war largely waged without resort to terrorist tactics although today urban and rural guerrilla movement in Africa and Latin America do employ terrorism. Che Guevara believed terrorism to be ‘a measure that is generally indiscriminate and ineffective in its results,
since it often makes victims of innocent people and destroys a large number of lives that would be valuable to the revolution.' He also claimed it could turn a people against revolutionary movement and may provoke police repression hindering the revolutionary movement and its communications with the masses. On the other hand, Regis Debray French theorist of guerrilla war argued that city terrorism has a strategic value provided it is properly subordinated to the needs of the struggle in the countryside. 'it immobilises thousands of enemy soldiers in unrewarding task of protection'... 56

Moreover, despite employing terrorism, the guerrillas “respect the rights of combatants and fight according to the conventions of war, while terrorist have no restriction on their choice of victims and tend to create a general terror.”57

Likewise, Walter Lacquer dismissed any attempt to portray terrorism as another form of guerrilla warfare. Though urban, terrorism is not ‘guerrilla.’ According to Lacquer:

A guerrilla leader aims at building up ever-growing military units and eventually an army in order to establish liberated zones in which propaganda can be openly conducted and eventually to set up an alternative government. All this is impossible in cities. In many instances, guerrilla movements and other insurrectional groups do have foothold in cities but they are usually not of much of consequences because in the urban milieu there is no opportunities for guerrilla warfare.58

Robert Moss, on the other hand, felt that “terrorism is also characteristic both of the early and declining phases of an insurgency: when rebel movement has gathered strength or

57 Wilkinson, n.49, p.52.
when it has suffered heavy reverses." For Anthony James Joes, "Guerrilla war is not the hallmark of any particular ideology, century or culture. What defines guerrillas is not why they fight nor when nor where but how. Guerrillas war is a set of tactics."60

Guerrilla warfare appears an attractive option, when those fighting the government face certain operational and logistical deficiencies. Hence,

 guerrilla are insurgents who seek to fight against superior forces by waging a hit and run war of lightning attacks against vulnerable targets, a war sustained by good intelligence, high morale secure bases, and outside assistance. If it is done well guerrilla warfare is a cheap form of war. .....

The favourite operation of guerrillas is to ambush convoys and in modern times mine highways and railroads especially those leading into guerrilla dominated territory. Guerrillas attack the rear of the enemy army in effect its psyche, inflicting causalities, making nighttime movement too dangerous.61

Terrorism on the other hand, seeks to terrorize the state into submission by the targeting the civilian population that is not a direct party to the conflict/dispute. It primarily seeks high-value targets that give wider publicity and attention to the groups conducting such campaigns.

---

58 Walter Laquer, "Reflections on Terrorism", Foreign Affairs, Fall 1986, p.90
59 Butler, n.29, p.51
61 Ibid., pp.5 and 6
**Terrorism vs. Revolutionary Warfare**

Historically revolutionary terrorism ushered in by the French revolution is regarded as the source of modern terrorism. Revolutionary terrorism, according to Mehdi Mozaffari, appears

when the *ancient regime* has fallen and the state sited by the revolution is yet to be born. It is in such a period of total uncertainty and confusion, generally due to acute antagonism among the revolution arrives themselves that terror is instigated provisionally and relatively briefly.

For him, however, “revolutionary terrorism properly ranks as terrorism only in metaphorical sense.”^{62}

The rationale, strategic aims and tactical objectives of revolutionary terrorists are far from certain. When they lose the will to pursue their stated long-term political objectives, they ceased to be political, the principal characteristics of terrorism. They then degenerate and resort to terrorist methods either to seek personal gains or to silence their opponents. As a result,

the revolutionary terrorist frequently claim to be ‘executioners’ administering ‘revolutionary justice’ and their decision to resort to these methods is often rationalized as being the only effective means of struggle open to them. They claim that their methods are the only sure way to break the will of the government and that terror is bound to win in the end.

At the same time, such terror tactics are by not ‘dictated’ by the needs of a revolutionary situation but by the absence of it.^{63} Terrorism that was necessitated by the exigencies of

---

^{62} Mehdi Mozaffari *The New Era of Terrorism Approaches and Typologies in Cooperation and Conflict* vol. 23, no. 4 1988 p188.
situation was subsequently rationalized as ideological moorings of the revolution and in so doing they seek "to explain events which they themselves did not bring about."\(^{64}\)

While terrorism occupied a prominent position among the 19th century revolutionaries, according to the then prevailing notion, "revolution, revolution was made for the people, it could not be made by them." As David Rappoport pointed out:

Terror was seen as a method to keep the masses from engaging in revolutionary activity for mass revolutionary action was bound to produce titanic blood baths. This view seems quite ironic, even paradoxical because terror today is justified to the world outside the organization either as the last resort of the powerless or as the only way to provoke mass rebellion.\(^{65}\)

As David George reminded: "Between the French and the Russian revolutions, terrorism ceased to be the concern of regimes and became the business of insurgents instead."\(^{66}\)

Two pamphlets published in Geneva in 1880, namely Nicholas Morozov's *Terrorist Struggle* and V. Tarnovski's *Terrorism and Routine*, delineated terrorism as an art of modern, scientific and revolutionary warfare that "provided any answer to the supremacy of the reigning political and military establishment."\(^{67}\)

Tarnovski, the author of the pamphlet *Terrorism and Routine*, followed the Machiavellian model and dismissed the relevance of moral debates while discussing the

---


\(^{66}\) David George, "Distinguishing Classical Tyrannicide from Modern terrorism", *The Review of Politics*, vol.50, 1988 p.390
need to use terrorism. "From the point of view of supreme justice every revolution designed to liberate the people is unqualifiedly moral" because the revolution endows the people with the possibility of leading a normal life. Furthermore, he argued, "it is unconceivable to think of any morality beyond liberty... Socially speaking the only morality is that which helps in the establishment of liberty and the development of society and its material advancement." Lenin was forthright and forceful: "No dictatorship of the proletariat is to be thought of without terror and violence." However in the words of Martin Luther King,

So I have tried to make it clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it just as wrong or even more so to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.........TS Eliot has said that there is no greater treason than to do the right deed for the wrong reason.

Nicholas Morozov was one of the earliest advocates of terror to promote revolution. Writing in the Bulletin of the Land and Liberty in March 1879, he saw political assassination "as a systematic means of attack, then these men become truly terrifying to their enemies. From this point of onward, the enemy will have no choice but to go always in fear of his life never knowing whence and when the avenging hand will strike. Political assassination is the carrying out of revolution in the present."

---

67 Zeev Ivianski 'The terrorist Revolution: Roots of Modern Terrorism' in Rapoport, n.63, p.134
68 Cited in Ibid., p.140
69 Robert B Asprey, War in the Shadows, (London: Macdonald and James, 1975), p.329
71 Asprey, n.67, p.289
Terrorism did not appear to occupy a prominent position in the initial stages of revolution and according to Wilkinson, only a small faction specializes terrorism and not all terrorist acts committed in the name of the revolution have the knowledge let alone approval of the organisation or movement.\(^{72}\) Marxist-Leninist and Maoist parties have rejected the notion of revolutionary terrorism being an official policy. The socio-economic conditions and not terrorist acts, they argue would bring about the revolution. Indeed none of the Cuban revolutionaries advocated terrorist acts.\(^{73}\)

**Terrorism vs. Liberation Struggle**

The end of the World War II and the process of decolonisation brought about a new sets of arguments vis-à-vis terrorism. If the end of colonialism, national liberation and self-determination are the political objectives, all means arguably including the use of terrorism are to be considered legitimate and justified. Hence, any debate on defining terrorism invariably brought in the question of national struggle that “must be protected and supported.” Legitimate national liberation struggle, under this ambit, cannot be portrayed as terrorism. While terrorism has to be condemned, efforts have to be made to strengthen and consolidate liberation struggle from colonial and semi-colonial occupation. As the Syrian delegate told the UN General Assembly in 1987, the formation of any international commission to define terrorism must also “draw the demarcation line separating it from the struggle of peoples for their causes and liberation of territories.”\(^{74}\)

Hence, there is a widespread in the UN, particularly among the Third World countries,

---

\(^{72}\) Wilkinson, n.49, p.54.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., pp.96-100

\(^{74}\) Allan Gerson ‘Legitimating International Terrorism’ in Barry Rubin ed *Terrorism and Politics* (Baltimore: Macmillan 1991)p.60
that terrorist acts are justified and excused if they are part of the “war of national liberation.” The erstwhile “image of a professional terrorist motivated by ideology or the desire for ‘national liberation’ operating according to a specific political agenda, armed with guns and bombs and backed by overt state sponsors, has not quite disappeared.”

Scrutiny of various national liberation movements would indicate that revolutionary terrorism has been the exception rather than the rule during the anti-colonial struggle. Most of colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America were liberated by means other than terrorism or other forms of violence. This objective reality has not eliminated terrorism from national liberation.

Much of the Third World debates on terrorism have been dominated by the Palestinian question. In the 1960s, the Palestinians resorted to armed struggle as a means of highlighting their political grievances of statelessness. The sustained terror campaign during 1971-73 brought the plight of the Palestinians to international attention. The support for ‘all means’ resurfaced following the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000 when militant Islamic groups intensified their suicide campaigns against Israel.

---


76 Ibid.,

Terrorism and Crime

Is terrorism a crime or a mode of warfare? If terrorism is seen as a crime, the focus would be on those who perpetuated the actual act of terrorism. If it were seen as a form of warfare, then the focus would shift from the accused individuals to those who sent the accused to commit such terrorist acts by providing ideological indoctrination, political motives, military and arms training and the logistical support.78

Terrorism has characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of social and political violence.

It is indiscriminate in its effect in that nobody is sacrosanct and this helps to create an atmosphere of fear and helplessness. Terrorist frequently claim to select the victims of their macabre lust for punishment and revenge: no one is innocent all are potentially guilty, if only by alleged association with the 'class enemies' 'imperialist' and 'enemies of the revolution'. Terrorist do not recognize any rules of convention of wars for combatants non-combatants or the treatment of prisoners. They use particularly ruthless weapons and methods to attack civilians including foreigners who are not remotely involved... Political terrorism is therefore unpredictable and arbitrary and can bee seen as an attempt to exercise a peculiar kind of tyranny.79

German radical Karl Heinzen was the architect of a full-fledged doctrine of modern terrorism and most elements of terrorism can be found in his writings. While arguing against killing, he maintains that murder might "well be a 'physical necessity' that the atmosphere or soil needed a certain quantity of soil."80

78 Lesser, n.73, p.xii
79 Wilkinson, n.61,p.4
Characteristics of Terrorism

The difficulties surrounding definition of terrorism and the distinctions between terrorism and other forms of political violence, lead to the question of specificities of terrorism. What constitutes terrorism? Based on the preceding discussion, it is possible to delineate a number of primary characteristics of terrorism.

Violence

By its very nature, terrorism is a violent act and therefore, violence or the intention to commit violence is an essential condition for terrorism. It is “the planned use of violence or threat of violence against an individual or social group.”

Political objective

Terrorism is defined as the use or threat of use of violence “to influence the political behaviour of the state, often seeking to destabilize, overthrow or radically change it.” The politically motivated violence, Crozier argued, “distinguishes terrorism from both vandalism and non-political crime.” By extension, it is apparent that irrespective of the immediate victims, state is the ultimate target of the terrorism. Whether perpetrator is a state, state-backed non-state actor or non-state actor acting independently, terrorism is always directed at the rival or opponent state. The immediate victims, whether individuals, groups or communities, are no more than messengers.

---

82 Taylor and Horgan, n.12, p.83
83 Quoted in Thackrah, n.9, pp. 59
**Innocent victims**

Innocent civilian being the victims differentiates terrorism from other forms of violence. The civilian killing is not accidental but purposeful. As Ramdane Abane, a commander of the anti-French Algerian forces observed: “One corpse in a [suit] jacket is always worth more than twenty in uniform.”

While guerrillas target military or security agencies, terrorist always look for the soft target, namely innocent civilians. This characteristic differentiates terrorism from other forms of political violence. While civilian casualty can be accident in the rest, under terrorism he is the prime target. In recent years, however, the civilian-military distinction has been blurred, especially when the militant groups refuse to make such a distinction. For example, militant Palestinian group Hamas considers every Israeli settler in the occupied territories of West Bank and the Gaza Strip as legitimate target for its terror campaign. Likewise, Osama Bin Ladin does not distinguish American soldiers and civilians present in Saudi Arabia.

**Rational violence**

The brutal and barbaric nature of terrorism and mayhem it causes, do not diminish its rationality. By its very nature, terrorism seeks to influence an audience much larger than its immediate target and affect a population significantly larger than the immediate target. Hence, it is necessary to “differentiate between terrorist violence and other forms of strife” and differentiate hostage taking from other forms of criminal violence.

---

84 Cited in Harmon, n.88, p.193
85 Thackrah, n.9, p.30
Fear Creation

The Chinese proverb ‘kill one, frighten ten thousand’ epitomizes the immediate objective and methodology of terrorism. Alternatively, as Aron suggested a violent act becomes terrorist “when its psychological effects are out of proportion to its purely physical result.”\(^{86}\) This inbuilt desire compels the terrorist to opt for daring, unconventional and spectacular missions resulting in multitude of casualties and damages.\(^{87}\) The appetite for high-visible targets compels the terrorist to look to soft targets in third countries rather than against the intended victim; for example, striking an American target in the name of Palestinian cause would garner greater publicity than a similar attack in an Israeli township.

Weapon of the Weak

Given of the psychological effect, terrorism becomes the effective instrument for the weak, whether a group or a state. Since it is a “coercively intimidatory weapon”\(^{88}\), terrorism, seen within the context of the psychological effect, becomes a tool in the hands of the weak to intimidate a wider and more powerful opponent. It is “the recourse of a minority or even of a single dissident frustrated by the inability to make society shift in a desired direction by what that society regards as ‘legitimate’ means.”\(^{89}\)

\(^{86}\) Quoted in Ibid., p.59

\(^{87}\) Indeed, statistically speaking more people are killed in traffic accidents than by terrorism in Israel but the latter draws widespread attention international attention while the former is often buried in the back pages of the local media.

\(^{88}\) Clutterbuch, quoted in Thackrah, n.9, p.61

\(^{89}\) Quoted in ibid. p.59.
Support System

The prevalence of other forms of violent or non-violent social unrest acts as a catalyst for terrorism. Terrorism breeds from a huge support network that exists in the form of finances, training, intelligence, donations, falsifying documents, supply of weapons and explosives, provisions of sanctuary or safe housing, logistics and propaganda. Very often, such assistance is made available without the terrorists disclosing their intentions or identity. The presence of a sympathetic mass is a prerequisite not only for successful terrorist operations but also for the recruitment of potential terrorists.

Transnational

Modern day terrorism no longer recognises international boundaries. State sponsorship, multiplicity of players, increasing linkages among the intended targets and growing influence of the international media have globalised terrorism. The need of international finance and support systems and nexus between different terrorist groups has made the national borders artificial and ineffective. In short, "elaborate international networks have developed, organised criminals, drug traffickers, arms dealers, and money launderers, creating an infra structure for catastrophic terrorism around the world."\(^9\) Such a kind of co-operation and nexus or at least ideological affinity exists between various terrorist groups and organisations.

---

\(^9\) Carter, n.19, p.81
Conclusion

Terrorism, thus, is distinct from other forms of politically motivated violence that dominates humanity. As a result, universal definition eluded the debate on terrorism. Despite widespread disapproval, many have viewed and continue to view terrorism favourably. Endorsement of the political motives has added an aura of approval around terrorism perpetrated by certain groups. Hence, terrorism means different things to different people. At the same, it is possible to delineate a number of characteristics that are unique to terrorism and distinguish it form other forms of political violence such as guerrilla warfare, revolution and assassination.