



## FRAMEWORKS FOR CONCEPTUALISING TERRORISM

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## FRAMEWORKS FOR CONCEPTUALISING TERRORISM

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Terrorism has been situated—and thereby implicitly also defined—in various contexts such as crime, politics, war, propaganda and religion. Depending on which framework one chooses, certain aspects of terrorism get exposed while others are placed ‘outside the picture’ if only one framework is utilised. In this article five conceptual lenses are utilised: 1. terrorism as/and crime; 2. terrorism as/and politics; 3. terrorism as/and warfare; 4. terrorism as/and communication; and 5. terrorism as/and religious fundamentalism.

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### TERRORISM AS/AND CRIME<sup>1</sup>

Most, if not all activities commonly perpetrated by terrorists, are considered illegal if not always illegitimate by the international community. Typical expressions of terrorist violence such as indiscriminate bombings, armed assaults on civilians, focused assassinations, kidnappings, hostage-taking and hijacking are considered criminal offences in national or international laws. While the criminal nature of acts of terrorism is widely accepted, most observers acknowledge the presence of political motives underlying certain terrorist activities. The two categories—crime and politics—do not exclude each other, as is exemplified by the concept of ‘political crime’, which exists in some legal frameworks. The motive or intent of a crime might be ‘political’, but the act itself is considered ‘criminal’.

It is worthwhile to recall what exactly a ‘crime’ is. Crime has been defined as ‘the intentional commission of an act usually deemed

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socially harmful or dangerous and specifically defined, prohibited and punishable under the criminal law".<sup>2</sup> Other definitions also mention punishable 'conduct' that is deemed by statute or by the common law to be a public wrong. The conceptualisation of crime varies considerably across time and cultural space, as the laws vary and as what is considered (im-)moral varies. An act of omission (or inaction), which results in preventable harm, (like the failure to help someone in a life-threatening situation), can constitute a crime in some jurisdictions while others do not make it punishable by law. The state has the prerogative to proscribe an act, which is deemed harmful, and can declare it to be a crime. The state also assumes the right to punish the offender.<sup>3</sup>

Since the state defines crime, the question arises whether states can commit crimes,<sup>4</sup> and, by implication, engage in terrorism. There is broad consensus that states can commit international crimes, like in the case of interstate aggression, or that the armed forces of a state can, even when engaging in legitimate self-defence, commit war crimes if there is a violation of the laws, customs or established rules of warfare. The situation is less clear when it comes to national law. In the Roman legal tradition, a distinction between 'mala prohibita' ('wrong merely because it is prohibited by statute') and 'mala per se' ('wrong or evil in itself') exists. The first refers to acts that are to be considered 'bad' because they are outlawed. The second refers to grave offences, which are bad by their very nature, independent of the political system of a particular state.<sup>5</sup> Some offences are so serious that they are considered morally wrong in all civilised societies. In particular, this applies to murder—the premeditated, unprovoked killing of a human being.

When it comes to terrorist crimes, a narrow definition of terrorism that would focus on *mala per se* crimes appears desirable, since there is widespread international consensus about the latter as constituting a gross violation of accepted rules. This is the approach followed in the 12 existing Conventions and Protocols related to the prevention and suppression of international terrorism. They outlaw specific 'criminal acts' such as those endangering aviation security, in particular hijackings, attacks on sea transport and maritime platforms, attacks on diplomatically protected persons and acts of hostage-taking, bombings, acts endangering nuclear materials and the financing of terrorism. The UN Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism, in its informal text of article 2 of the draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, defined terrorism in the following way:

Any person commits an offence within the meaning of this Convention if that person, by any means, unlawfully and intentionally, causes:

- (a) death or serious bodily injury to any person; or
- (b) serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a state or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or the environment; or
- (c) damage to property, places, facilities, or systems referred to in paragraph 1 (b) of this article, resulting or likely to result in major economic loss, when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.<sup>6</sup>

This definition, focusing on the 'offence' character of terrorism, clearly uses a crime perspective.

## TERRORISM AND POLITICS<sup>7</sup>

Politics is about 'public competition for the acquisition, maintenance and expansion of state power, understood as the capacity to allocate values or to take decisions and act upon them'.<sup>8</sup> The line between competition and conflict, between peaceful and fair fights for votes by persuasive means, and hostile antagonism which resorts to disruptive or destructive and even violent means is often crossed. Acts of terrorism usually, but not exclusively, take place in the context of political conflict.<sup>9</sup> Conflict itself is not illegitimate but part of the human existence and can be a positive mechanism of social and political change. As Wolf-Dieter Eberwein and Sven Chojnacki put it:

Conflict is crucial for the integration within and between societies as long as violence is absent, thus a major productive force in the evolution of the relations within and between societies. If, however, violence is used, conflict is disruptive if not destructive.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that political parties sometimes act as a front for a terrorist group or, alternatively, that political parties organise for themselves such groups, is a testimony on how much party politics and terrorist activities can be linked in some countries.<sup>11</sup> Often terrorism takes place in a context of heightened political tensions, for instance, around election times. Where control of the state is crucial for group survival in society, because there are few or no other stepping stones to power and resources, the struggle to obtain, or maintain, state power is fierce.<sup>12</sup>

Terrorism is sometimes the only and sometimes one of several instruments of a political strategy. While there are nonpolitical forms of terrorism (such as criminal or psychopathological terrorism), the political motivation of terrorism is one that is often present and stressed by analysts<sup>13</sup> and even more so by terrorists themselves. Since terrorists generally challenge the monopoly of violence of the state and its ability to protect its citizens, terrorist acts obtain political significance even when the motivation for them is not primarily political but religious, criminal or psychopathological.

In a political conflict, the use of terrorism might be confined to one side, which gives the conflict a marked asymmetry. If the terrorist side manages to 'pull' the other side into using similar tactics, the moral distinction between attacker and defender tends to erode quickly—something which has very serious consequences for society.

Three levels of political conflict waging can be distinguished (see Table 1).

The classification in Table 1 lists state and opposition politics as mirror images. Often the opposition is not in a position to 'play in the same league' as those holding state power. The power asymmetry can 'force' it to respond on a different level. Violence by the state can be countered by nonviolent campaigns for pragmatic reasons (no weapons are available), as well as for principal reasons (the desire to hold the moral high ground in a conflict in order to attract international support). On the other hand, there are situations where the state holds the moral high ground and the terrorists use provocations from the repertoire of violent politics to upset a democratic government. The fact that terrorism is more frequent in democracies than in non-democracies is a testimony to the wide use of this strategy.<sup>14</sup>

Acts of political terrorism occur next to a multitude of other political acts, some violent, some not, some conventional, some not, some by the terrorist themselves, some by like-minded, but less violent people, who share their goals without approving of their methods.

Special cases are the presence of 'bad neighbours' and imported conflicts. Terrorism might not be home-grown but imported by other state- or non-state actors. International terrorism is either an externalisation of domestic terrorism of another state or is linked to state terrorism or state-sponsored terrorism. There are several causal factors e.g., the support of a foreign government for a repressive regime may motivate members of the armed opposition to victimise members of the public of the foreign backer of the local regime. Alternatively, support for local terrorist groups has been utilised as a war-by-proxy device by states unwilling or unable to engage directly in armed conflict with another state. Due to this interrelatedness of domestic

Table 1. The Spectrum of Political Action

State of peace	
State actor Conventional Politics	Non-state actor
I. Rule of law (routinized rule, legitimated by tradition, customs, constitutional procedures)	I. Opposition politics (lobbying among power holders, formation of opposition press and parties, rallies, electoral contest, litigation [use of courts for political struggle])
Unconventional Politics	
II. Oppression (manipulation of competitive electoral process, censorship, surveillance, harassment, discrimination, infiltration of opposition, misuse of emergency legislation)	II. Non-violent action (social protest for political persuasion of rulers and masses; demonstrations to show strength of public support; non-cooperation, civil disobedience, and other forms of non-violent action)
Violent Politics	
III. Violent repression for control of state power	III. Use of violence for contestation challenging state power
III.1. (political justice. political imprisonment)	III. 1. Material destruction
III. 2. Assassination	III. 2. Assassination. (individuated political murder)
III. 3. State-terrorism (torture, death squads, disappearances, concentration camps)	III. 3. Terrorism (de-individuated political murder)
III. 4. Massacres	III. 4. Massacres
III. 5. Internal war	III. 5. Guerrilla warfare
III. 6. Ethnocide/politicide/genocide	III. 6. Insurgency, revolution (if successful) State of war

Source: Alex P. Schmid. *Political Terrorism* (Amsterdam, North-Holland 1988) pp. 58–59.

and international political conflict and terrorism, a study of the second without a study of the first is methodologically flawed.<sup>15</sup>

Due to globalisation, the permeability of borders and state interdependence, the internationalisation of terrorism and other forms of political violence is a fact. Terrorism needs to be studied in the broader contexts of political conflict, taking into account both governing state and opposition parties and their allies in society. Since neighbouring and other states and societies often also have an interest

and involvement in local politics, a really comprehensive approach must also include their activities, especially if they amount to state-sponsorship or state support of terrorist organisations.

War has been defined as a continuation of politics<sup>16</sup> by other means, and terrorism, too, is sometimes seen as a continuation of politics.

## TERRORISM AND WARFARE

When acts of terrorism occur, the state usually fits them in a criminal justice model or a war model, depending on context.

Acts of terrorism are not confined to peace times. The relationship between terrorism and warfare is a complex one.<sup>17</sup> Terrorist acts have been perpetrated before, during and after wars. Both terrorism and the waging of war are part of conflict behaviour and wars and terrorist campaigns are fought for some of the same goals. Since ancient times there has been terrorism in war. One only has to recall some horrors of the Second World War:

Apart from the battlefield war crimes, and to a certain extent even there (denial of quarter and shooting of recently captured prisoners of war and wounded soldiers), many categories of war crimes committed by the Nazis during World War II were intended to establish a reign of terror among various elements of the enemy. The inmates of the concentration camps were terrorised (for example, by gruesome, drawn-out hangings in the presence of individuals who could look forward to that same end); the civilian inhabitants of occupied territories were terrorised (for example, by the execution of innocent hostages chosen at random...; members of resistance movements were terrorised (for example, by the summary executions of persons merely suspected of being parties having knowledge of such organisations or of being relatives of such parties); attempts were made to terrorise Allied flyers by encouraging the German public to lynch the members of crews of downed aircraft (the "Terror Flyer Order"); attempts were made to terrorise merchant seamen by a program of slaughtering the members of shipwrecked crews in order to discourage experienced personnel from agreeing to make the Atlantic crossing; etc. In his final report, Colonel Clio E. Straight, the Deputy Judge Advocate for War Crimes in Europe, stated that the cases his organisation had prosecuted involved, among other things, 'the execution of a common design contemplating the application of terrorism in warfare'.<sup>18</sup>

While warfare can be—as the passage quoted indicates—very unchivalrous and downright 'inhuman', terrorists, rather than seeing

themselves as criminals, generally prefer to view themselves as 'warriors'. While wars<sup>19</sup> can also be criminal (like wars of aggression) and serious crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity, grave breaches) are not infrequently committed in even legitimate wars, wars are often portrayed as heroic—people risk their lives for something beyond their immediate self-interest. If fought for the right reasons and in a manner commensurate with the laws of war, lethal violence is legitimised and killing by soldiers is considered not to amount to homicide or murder. The terrorist, however, is not a soldier although he does, at times, risk his life like a soldier, and although his motives might not be selfish. Yet that alone does not make him a soldier. He must also obey the rules of warfare, which require that civilians and noncombatants are not deliberately targeted. Yet that is exactly what terrorists do. Many acts of violence committed by terrorists would fall under the category of war crimes if they were committed in war—rather than in peacetime.<sup>20</sup>

Acts of terrorism, then, can be understood as a special kind of violence; *the peacetime equivalent of war crimes*. Terrorist acts terrorise, because we cannot, by adhering to the rules of war, protect ourselves. Terrorism distinguishes itself from combat through disregards for principles of chivalry and humanity contained in the Hague Regulations and Geneva Conventions. These two bodies of international law cover categories of combatants, which are broader than 'members of the armed forces' of a party in conflict; it also includes 'militia and volunteer corps'. However, these 'irregular fighters' (guerrillas, partisans, resistance groups) must fulfil four conditions in order to fall under the Hague Regulations and the Geneva Conventions:

- 1 Irregulars must be 'commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates';
- 2 They must have a 'fixed distinctive sign recognisable at a distance';
- 3 They must carry their arms 'openly';
- 4 They must conduct their operations 'in accordance with the laws and customs of war'.

The Laws of War, are not contingent upon whether the war itself is lawful or the cause of war is just [This problem is treated in the theory of Just Wars (*jus ad bellum*)]. Included among the acts prohibited by the laws of war (*jus in bello*) are attacks on persons taking no active part in the hostilities. This also includes members of the armed forces who have laid down their arms. Members of resistance movements and other irregulars who do not fulfil these conditions cannot be considered as privileged combatants. In case of capture, they are to be



treated as common criminals and not as prisoners of war.<sup>21</sup> The protection of the noncombatant and the innocent stand at the core of international humanitarian law as codified in the Hague Regulations and Geneva Conventions. The rules of war prohibits both hostage-taking and the use of violence against captives as well as most of the other atrocities committed by terrorists.<sup>22</sup>

Whether such violence is used by a state or a non-state actor does not matter. Certain forms of dealing with opponents, in particular:

- massacres of noncombatants, and taking of hostages for extortionist blackmail and intimidation;
- assassination of unarmed people;
- torture of prisoners;
- disappearances

are prohibited.

It is sometimes argued that innocents are killed in war as well and that therefore both war and terrorism are morally equally repulsive. However, there is a profound difference between collateral but unintentional war damage to civilians and intentional attacks on civilians. When the latter are committed in war they are justly labelled war crimes. These are excesses of war. Terrorism, on the other hand, 'elevates' such excesses to its specific tactic.

Most of contemporary terrorism is not a fight against the armed forces of an opponent; rather it is 'designed' chiefly against civilian targets who ordinarily, according to the rules of land warfare, enjoy immunity from deliberate attack. In this sense, terrorism is a counter-value, rather than a counter-force tactic, since civilians not involved in combat are the prime target. They are attacked by terrorists precisely because they are valued! The attack on the defenceless and the innocent is not an unsought side effect but is rather a deliberate strategy of political persuasion, dissuasion and coercion aimed at others rather than the direct victims themselves.<sup>22</sup> It is in this sense that equating terrorism with war is misleading. Equating terrorism with war crimes is more appropriate since the laws regulating warfare are violated as a matter of principle.<sup>23</sup>

If terrorism is conceptually isolated from other, less repulsive modes of conflict behaviour, condemnation by the international community is more likely. A narrow(er) and precise definition of terrorism, in terms of *means rather than ends*, is likely to find broader support exactly because it excludes more than it includes so that fewer people can find grounds for objection. Such a conceptualisation can build on the work of leading scholars in the field of terrorism.

David Rapoport, in particular, made the following attempt at distinguishing military activity, guerrilla war and terrorism:

1. *Military activity* was bound by conventions entailing *moral* distinctions between belligerents and neutrals, combatants and non-combatants, appropriate and inappropriate targets, legitimate and illegitimate methods.
2. *Guerrilla war* was a special kind of military activity, in which hit-and-disappear tactics to disperse the enemy's *military* forces were employed to wear down and gradually defeat the enemy.
3. The traditional distinguishing characteristics of the *terrorist* were his explicit refusal to accept the conventional moral limits that defined military and guerrilla action. Because a terrorist knew that others did think that violence should be limited, he exploited the enemy's various responses to his outrages. The terrorist perpetrated atrocities and manipulated reactions to them.<sup>24</sup>

In a more systematic vein, Ariel Merari has expanded on this approach (see Table 2).

In conclusion, when terrorists see themselves as soldiers they are mistaken. If they want to be soldiers, they have to respect the rules of warfare. Once a terrorist, is not always a terrorist. Yet the opposite is also true: once a soldier, is not always a soldier. To the extent that some wars have become more terroristic—targeting predominantly civilians than military opponents—the moral difference between the conduct of soldiers and terrorists has grown smaller.

## TERRORISM AS/AND COMMUNICATION

When nonstate terrorism in its modern form was invented in the second half of the nineteenth century it was known as 'propaganda by the deed'.<sup>25</sup> The invention of dynamite (1867) and the perfection of the rotating press (1881) which gave rise to mass media were both utilised by nineteenth century terrorists for revolutionary and anarchist propaganda. Peter Kropotkin, one of the anarchist theorists, admitted that a few kilos of dynamite could not demolish the historical structures created over thousands of years. Yet, *as propaganda*, terrorism could be effective. 'By actions which compel general attention', Kropotkin held, 'the new idea seeps into people's minds and wins converts. One such act may, in a few days, make more propaganda than thousand pamphlets. Above all, it awakens the spirit of revolt. . .'<sup>26</sup>

Terrorism cannot be understood only in terms of violence. It has to be understood primarily in terms of propaganda. Violence and

**Table 2. Characteristics of Terrorism, Guerrilla, and Conventional War as Modes of Violent Struggle**

	Conventional war	Guerrilla	Terrorism
Unit size in battle	Large (armies, corps, division)	Medium (platoons, companies, battalions)	Small (usually less than 10 persons)
Weapons	Full range of military hardware (air force, armour, artillery, etc.)	Mostly infantry-type light weapons but sometimes artillery pieces as well	Hand guns, hand grenades, assault rifles, and specialised weapons, e.g., car bombs, remote-control bombs, barometric pressure bombs
Tactics	Usually joint operation involving several military branches	Commando-type tactics	Specialised tactics: kidnapping, assassinations, carbombing, hijacking, barricade-hostage, etc.
Targets	Mostly military units, industrial and transportation infrastructure	Mostly military, police, and administration staff, as well as political opponents	State symbols, political opponents, and the public at large
Intended impact	Physical destruction	Mainly physical attrition of the enemy	Psychological coercion
Control of territory	Yes	Yes	No
Uniform	Wear uniform	Often wear uniform	Do not wear uniform
Recognition of war zones	War limited to recognised, geographical zones	War limited to the country in strife	No recognised war zones. Operations carried out world-wide
International legality	Yes, if conducted by rules	Yes, if conducted by rules	No
Domestic legality	Yes	No	No

Source: A. Merari. In: V.S. Ramachandran (ed), *Encyclopedia of Human Behaviour, Volume 4* (San Diego: Academic Press 1994) p.401.

propaganda, however, have much in common. Violence aims at behaviour modification by coercion. Propaganda aims at the same by persuasion. Terrorism can be seen as a combination of the two.

Terrorism, by using violence against one victim, seeks to coerce and persuade others. The immediate victim is merely instrumental, the skin on a drum beaten to achieve a calculated impact on a wider audience.<sup>27</sup>

With the advent of mass media, the emerging news value system of the commercial media, as expressed in the adage 'bad news is good news, good news is bad news, and no news is bad news'<sup>28</sup> played into the hands of those who were willing to create bad news and thereby obtain publicity for themselves and their cause. The arrival of the mass media created popular heroes and villains which most of the public had never seen directly. Deeds performed by such 'characters' led to identifications. If the deed was violent and the victim of violence an unpopular autocrat, chances that sizable sectors of the public sided with the perpetrator rather than the victim were high. 'Exemplary deeds' against alleged or real 'enemies of the people' could provoke arousals of sympathy and revolutionary enthusiasm, or so it was hoped by some nineteenth century terrorists. If the identification of the target group of the terrorist performance was with the victim of a terrorist attack, it created, especially if performed repeatedly in the form of a campaign of political murders, a sense of terror in those who had reason to fear that they might be next on the target list.

While a political assassination juxtaposes the murderer (or the one who has been ordered to do it) with the victim, the terrorist act is based on an indirect strategy: a randomly chosen or representative victim is killed in public but the ultimate addressees of the victimisation are one or several target audiences: others from the group of the victim, the public at large, or, more narrowly, members of the constituency of the terrorist. In other words, terrorist violence is mainly perpetrated for its effects on others rather than the immediate victims (who might be dead).<sup>29</sup>

Staging an act of terrorism is often meant as a form of provocation—the monopoly of violence of the state is challenged. The terrorist rarely confronts the state directly but prefers to demonstrate to the citizens the state's impotence of protecting them all the time. Acting from a clandestine underground at a moment of his own choosing, the terrorist manages to establish, for a few minutes—longer in the case of kidnappings and hostage taking—a superiority over the mighty state. This temporary presence of the terrorist then perpetuates itself through media coverage, rumours and speculation and gains a longevity it could not generate by itself. Unlike the guerilla, the terrorist does not occupy territory on the ground. However, if engaging in a well-orchestrated campaign, he might succeed in occupying our minds by creating a climate of fear, thereby

manipulating target audiences at the emotional level. To the extent that these audiences are not direct witnesses of the terrorist deed, '[t]he success of a terrorist operation depends almost entirely on the amount of publicity it receives', as Walter Laqueur put it.<sup>30</sup> If audiences are the target, the terrorists are the star performers and the public space where they create a violent reality becomes the stage of their theatre from which they amaze and shock the public.<sup>31</sup>

The media and the terrorists interact in a peculiar way. While it is true that everybody tries to use the media, the terrorists do so by spilling people's blood, mostly the blood of innocents. The purposeful creation of bad events by means of terroristic violence can assure them free access to the news system. Expressed somewhat cynically: Some people have to perish at the hands of terrorists so that editors will publicise the existence, demands, and goals of terrorists. Where terrorism is predominantly media-oriented—and a great deal of it is—editors can become accessories (often unwitting accessories) to murder. So far, the division of labour between the terrorist as fear generator and the unwitting editor as fear amplifier and transmitter has not been fully perceived and absorbed by all those responsible for the media.<sup>32</sup>

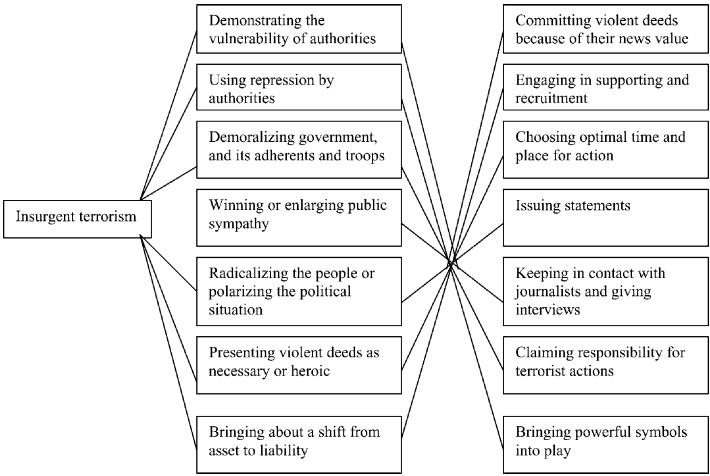
Some terrorist writings are quite explicit about the symbiotic relationship with the media. A chief theorist of terrorism, the Brazilian 'urban guerrilla' Carlos Marighela, formulated five principles:

1. Terrorist acts should be aimed at the audience, the general public;
2. Victims should be chosen for their symbolic meaning;
3. The media are eager to cover terrorist violence;
4. The media can be activated, directed, and manipulated for propagandistic effect; and
5. Governments are at a disadvantage because their only choice is between censorship and letting terrorists make use of their media.<sup>33</sup>

Robin Gerrits has identified seven psychological strategies underlying the provocative acts of violence of insurgent terrorists (see Figure 1).

With the ubiquity of mass media in our lives, we live not in one but in three realms of reality:

1. *real* objective world (whatever is happening 'out there');
2. the *symbolic* world (mainly the world portrayed and presented in the media);
3. the *subjective* world (the world as people interpret it in their minds, what they believe based on a combination of unmediated



**Figure 1. The terrorist’s psychological strategies tactics of publicity.<sup>34</sup>**

experiences with the real ‘things’ and ‘events’ as well as with their portrayal on television and in other media).<sup>35</sup>

The proportion of impressions reaching us from the world of the media is, in many cases, surpassing the input many of us receive from the real world. Those who control the media and those who perform for the media mould our minds. Among them are terrorist performers who play to the media and through them to their audiences. Mark Juergensmeyer has perceptively noted:

Without being noticed, in fact, terrorism would not exist. The sheer act of killing does not create a terrorist act: murders and willful assaults occur with such frequency in most societies that they are scarcely reported in the news media. What makes an act terrorism is that it terrifies. The acts to which we assign that label are deliberate events, bombings and attacks performed at such places and times that they are calculated to be observed. Terrorism without its horrified witnesses would be as pointless as a play without an audience.<sup>36</sup>

Terrorist violence is, in an important sense, symbolic violence, although real enough in its consequences. As a public display of power over life and death it is, in fact, addressing in a dramatic statement, a higher level. This is especially true when it comes to religious terrorism which appears to be on the rise (see Table 3).

Table 3. The Rise of Nonsecular International Terrorist Groups<sup>37</sup>

1968	No international terrorist group could be classified as nonsecular
1980	2 out of 64 groups could be classified as nonsecular
1992	11 out of 48 terrorist groups were religious
1994	16 out of 49 terrorist groups were religious
1995	25 out of 58 active groups in international terrorist organizations were predominantly religious in character or motivation

Some observers hold that ‘religious-oriented terrorism is ... supplanting the earlier ethnic and ideological forms of terrorism’.<sup>38</sup> It is therefore necessary to utilize this conceptual lens as well.

TERRORISM AS/AND RELIGION

While terrorism is often perceived as a modern phenomenon, it has roots that predate modernity and link it to religion.<sup>39</sup> The Hindu Thugs in South Asia were probably already active 2,500 years ago, the Jewish Zealot-Sicarii more than 1,900 years ago, and the medieval Islamic Assassins 900 years ago. All of them are arguably precursors of some contemporary fundamentalist terrorists.

A key feature of religious practices is the ritual of making ‘sacrifices’, whereby a living creature (preferably pure and innocent) is to be offered to the gods.<sup>40</sup> The terrorist victimisation is often perceived by the terrorist as a ‘sacrifice’. The sacrifice can consist of attaching innocent people from the adversary’s camp or of a terrorist blowing himself or herself up in the midst of a group of ‘guilty’ enemies. In that case, he sees himself as a martyr.<sup>41</sup> This dimension of martyrdom links it to the activity that some scholars see as the most fundamental form of religiosity: sacrifice. It is a rite of destruction that is found, remarkably, in virtually every religious tradition in the world. The term suggests that the very process of destroying is spiritual since the word comes from the Latin, *sacrificium* ‘to make holy’. What makes sacrifice so riveting is not just that it involves killing, but also that it is, in an ironic way, considered ennobling. The destruction is performed within a religious context that transforms the killing into something considered positive. Thus, like all religious images of sacrifice, martyrdom provides symbols of a violence conquered—or at least put in its place—by the larger framework of order that religious language provides. There is some evidence that ancient religious rites of sacrifice, like the destruction involved in

modern-day terrorism, were performances involving the murder of living beings.<sup>42</sup> Today groups of 'innocent' human beings from the enemy camp (e.g., schoolchildren) are offered to the sacred cause, with or without the terrorist risking his or her life. Sacrifices are usually made to please god and favour his cause. Yet sometimes the ardent believer also expects to be rewarded. An Islamic suicide bomber might expect as reward for his 'martyrdom' to wake up in paradise with 72 black-eyed virgins waiting to be married to him.<sup>43</sup>

The religious rationalisation of terrorist acts appears to be effective for the 'true believer'. Human rights violations are 'justified' in the name of an invoked 'divine law' which supersedes man-made laws and which can give brutal violence a 'sacred' character and elevate the slaughter of infidels to a 'holy war'. Such a reframing of inhuman acts in the terrorist's mind to heroic deeds constitutes a 'defence-' or 'neutralisation-mechanism', which turns an actual murder into a perceived sacrifice.<sup>44</sup> The French philosopher Blaise Pascal already noted in the 16th century: 'Men never do evil so openly and contentedly as when they do it from religious conviction'.<sup>45</sup>

Karl Marx once called terrorists 'dangerous dreamers of the absolute'. Religious groups often claim to be in possession of absolute truth, while those outside the group have not yet seen the 'light' or are part of the forces of 'darkness'. Many acts of violence which we consider 'immoral' as a means to achieve an end, are, in the view of the religious or ideologically motivated terrorist, justified by the absolute end for which the terrorist purports to fight.<sup>46</sup>

Yigal Amir, the assassin of Yitzhak Rabin, claimed that he acted 'on orders of God'.<sup>47</sup> This, a 'crime of obedience', the unspoken implication being that it is not a crime at all when the will of God is executed. With individual culpability removed by religious justifications, killing is no longer murder but sacrifice. With such a transformation of human values, the terrorist believes that he has acquired the moral high ground he needs to defend the indefensible—nonprovoked attacks on noncombatants, the taking of hostages and the killing of prisoners—the main types of terrorist victimisations. Neither religion, nor any other lofty cause, can be accepted as a licence to kill with impunity and a good conscience.

Many, perhaps most, religious sects and cult movements utilise nonviolent, conventional methods to proselytise and spread their influence. At times, however, some members of marginal groups opt for tactics of terrorism, especially when other avenues to reach their goal appear to be blocked. What are the causes of religious terrorism? First of all, it must be kept in mind that much, probably most, religious practices are peaceful. Historically, religion has often



been a mechanism to control certain potentially harmful human impulses, notably those referring to sexuality and violence. Unfortunately, this has often been confined to the 'in-group'—not to inter-group violence.

Additional factors need to exist in order to fuse religion with political violence. Poverty of the people (not necessarily of the terrorist who identifies with them), social injustice and state repression are often listed as prime causes of insurgent terrorism. They can drive people to migration, revolt, crime, suicide or religious fervour. The terrorist temptation is often a combination of some or all of these. The migration is to paradise, the revolt is against the status quo, the method used is normally considered criminal, suicide preceded by murder is one of the means and religion offers a justification.

Recently, Mark Juergensmeyer has developed a stage theory that can help us to understand how religious impulse can turn into terrorist violence. A characteristic of terrorists is that they tend to see the world in a polarised way—either you are part of the solution or you are part of the problem and there is no grey area in-between. The 'us vs. them', dichotomy also characteristic of others involved in escalating conflict, turns into a 'cosmic war' between the 'forces of evil' and the 'forces of good', between the profane and the sacred. In the four stages in the construction of ideas of cosmic war as part of an effort of ennoblement, empowerment and dehumiliation, terrorism appears, according to Juergensmeyer, only in later stages of a pattern that begins with a feeling of helplessness (see Table 4).

From this perspective, Juergensmeyer observes, 'perpetrating acts of terrorism is one of several ways to symbolically express power over oppressive forces and regain some nobility in the perpetrator's personal life.'<sup>48</sup>

This brings us back to the secular formula of terrorism being 'a weapon of the weak'. In view that some terrorists are attempting to obtain weapons of mass destruction, and keeping in mind the historical record of state terrorism under authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, we must again be aware that this religious framework—like the other ones discussed here—provides only a partial truth about the nature of terrorism.

## CONCLUSION

I have presented five conceptual lenses through which we can look at terrorism. I think that all of these 'frames' are useful to understand some aspects of some forms of terrorism. I do not say

**Table 4. Stages of Symbolic Empowerment (M. Juergensmeyer)**

1. *A world gone awry.* The process begins with real problems: the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the corruption of secular governments in Egypt and India, the discrediting of traditional values, and the dehumanisation of modern societies in Japan and the United States. Most people are able to cope with such situations. Others rebel against them politically and culturally. A few take these situations with ultimate gravity and perceive them as symptoms of a world gone badly awry. These few are part of emerging cultures of violence.
2. *The foreclosure of ordinary options.* Most people who feel so strongly about such desperate conditions to want to change them join in political or social campaigns that sometimes are successful, sometimes not. But they persist with the expectation that eventually changes can be made through ordinary means: electing new leaders, advocating changes in public policy, and rallying public support. The few who are part of cultures of violence, however, see no possibility of improvement through normal channels. Their sense of frustration about the world around them is experienced as the potential for personal failure and a meaningless existence.
3. *Satanisation and cosmic war.* For those in cultures of violence who experience both despair and defiance over what they perceive to be hopeless situations, religion provides a solution: cosmic war. As opponents become satanised and regarded as ‘forces of evil’ or ‘black-coated bachelors from hell’, the world begins to make sense. Those who felt oppressed now understand why they have been humiliated and who is behind their dismal situation. Perhaps most important, they feel the exhilaration of hope, that in a struggle with divine dimensions God will be with them and, despite all evidence to the contrary, somehow they can win.
4. *Symbolic acts of power.* The final stage is the performance of acts that display symbolically the depth of the struggle and the power that those in cultures of violence feel they possess. These performances include holding private rallies and public demonstrations, publishing newsletters and books and staging media events that humiliate the cosmic foe, flaunting weapons in an effort to show military might, developing communications systems and organisations, and creating alternative governments with courts and cabinet ministers and social services. In moments of dramatic intensity those within cultures of violence who want to express power symbolically may also choose an explosive act—terrorism—either as an isolated incident or as a part of a protracted state of guerrilla war.

*Source:* M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000) pp.184–185.

that any single one of these frameworks is the ‘right’ one. They are not excluding each other either. An act of violence can be criminal and political at the same time, making it a political crime or a criminal offence with political repercussions. An act of terrorism can be committed in the context of warfare or can be a peacetime equivalent of war crimes. An act of terrorism can be primarily an act of

propagandistic communication to impress one audience or to reach another audience which otherwise would not 'listen' to a protest. An act of terrorist violence can also be interpreted as a sacrifice with religious connotations, born from humiliation in the face of overwhelming power.

I am not claiming that these five frameworks are exhausting. There might be other conceptual lenses. For instance, I have not directly explored here the use of terrorism as revolutionary instrument<sup>49</sup> or the psychology of terrorism. Since terror, as extreme fear, is a feeling that shakes body and soul, it would also be worthwhile to look deeper into that dimension. The Policy Working Group on the UN and Terrorism has, in its report to the secretary general, acknowledged various dimensions of terrorism when writing:

Terrorism is, in most cases, essentially a political act. It is meant to inflict dramatic and deadly injury on civilians and to create an atmosphere of fear, generally for a political or ideological (whether secular or religious) purpose. Terrorism is a criminal act, but it is more than mere criminality. To overcome the problem of terrorism, it is necessary to understand its political nature as well as its basic criminality and psychology.<sup>50</sup>

The psychological dimension—that overlaps with the communication dimension I discussed as well as with the religious fundamentalist dimension I also raised—should not be lost, since it might bring us closer to some of the root causes of terrorism. If we confine ourselves to a single framework—for instance, a military war framework—we might misunderstand the full nature and scope of the terrorist motivations and modes of operation. All relevant aspects need to be properly considered to understand terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

## NOTES

1. For a more in-depth discussion of the nexus between terrorism and organized crime, see: Alex P. Schmid, 'The Links Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorist Crimes', *Transnational Organized Crime* 2/4 (Winter 1996) pp.40–82.
2. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, CD-ROM 97 ed.
3. Alex P. Schmid, 'Common Causes of Violent Crime and Conflicts', in Alex P. Schmid and Irene Melup (eds), *Violent Crime & Conflict. Proceedings of the International Conference on 'Violent Crime and Conflicts. Towards Early Warning and Prevention Mechanisms'*. Courmayeur, 4–6 October 1997. Milan, ISPAC, 1998, p.23.

4. Luis F. Molina writes: 'In a strict sense, the term *state crime* is almost, but not quite, an oxymoron, a legal absurdity. A crime is, tautologically, a wrongful act only insofar as it is a violation of criminal law that is punishable by a state...'. 'Can States Commit Crimes? The Limits of Formal International Law', in Jeffrey Ian Ross (ed), *Controlling State Crime: Toward an Integrated Structural Model* (New York: Garland 1995), p.349.
5. Jeffrey Ian Ross, 'Controlling State Crime: Toward an Integrated Structural Model', in J.I. Ross (ed), *Controlling State Crime. An Introduction* (New York, Garland 1995), p.5.
6. Reproduced from document A/C.6/56/L.9, annex I.B.A/57/37 Annex II. The text represents the current state of discussions of the Working Group of the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly.
7. Since the majority of analysts define terrorism as 'political violence', this section is, in view of this consensus, kept short.
8. E.O. Czempiel, *International Politik*, Ein Koufeihuodeu, Padesborn, 1981, p.209; cit. A.P. Schmid, *Thesaurus and Glossary of Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Terms* (London: FEWER 2000) p.66.
9. The definition of conflict has also given rise to conflict; many competing definitions exist. A. Schmid, for instance, has defined it as follows: 'Conflict is an antagonistic situation or adversarial process between at least two individual or collective actors over means or ends such as resources, power, status, values, goals, relations or interests. The range of outcomes includes victory, defeat domination, surrender, neutralisation, conversion, coercion, injury, or destruction and elimination of the opposite party or, alternatively, the solution, settlement or transformation of the conflict issue'. Alex P. Schmid, *Thesaurus and Glossary of Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Terms* (London: FEWER 1999) p.12.
10. Wolf-Dieter Eberwein and Sven Chojnacki. Scientific Necessity and Political Utility. Data on Violent Conflicts. Berlin, Science Centre Berlin for Social Research, June 2001 conference paper, p.4.
11. See on this link Leonard Weinberg (ed), 'Political Parties and Terrorist Groups,' Special Issue of *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4/2 (Summer 1992).
12. Nanette J. Davis, 'The Politics of Violence: A Reassessment', *Violence, Aggression and Terrorism* 1/2 (1987) p.92.
13. Cf., for instance, Boaz Ganor. 'Defining Terrorism. Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?' Herzliya, The International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism, August 1998, where the author defines terrorism as 'the intentional use of, or threat of use, violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims' (p.12).
14. David C. Rapoport and Leonard Weinberg (eds), 'The Democratic Experience and Political Violence', Special Issue of *Terrorism and Political Violence* 12/3-4 (Autumn/Winter 2000) (372 pp.). In the introduction, the editors note: 'Everyone expects "new democracies" to be peculiarly vulnerable to civil wars and serious rebellions. But most will be startled by a Weinberg-Eubank study showing that terrorist groups appear more frequently in *all* democratic forms (new and old, stable and unstable) than in nondemocratic ones.' [T]he likelihood

of terrorist groups occurring in democracies is three and a half times greater than...in non-democracies. Even more surprising is their claim that with respect to terrorism 'no substantial difference...between various types of democracy exist'. (p.4).

15. Wolf-Dieter Eberwein & Sven Chojnacki, 'Scientific Necessity and Political Utility. Data on Violent Conflicts'. Berlin: Science Centre Berlin for Social Research, conference paper, June 2001 (p.7).
16. 'War is nothing but a continuation of political affairs with the admixture of other means', is the literal translation of Karl von Clausewitz's dictum in his *Vom Kriege*, I (1985).
17. Cf. Howard S. Levie, 'Terrorism in War – The Law of War Crimes'. A volume in *Terrorism: Documents of International and Local Control*. Third Volume, Second Series. Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. Oceana Publications, Inc. 1993.
18. Howard S. Levie. *Terrorism in War – The Law of War Crimes*. Oceana Publications, Inc. 1993 (pp.i–ii).
19. War has been defined in many ways. J.V.D. Dennen, for instance, defines war as 'collective, direct, manifest, personal, intentional, organised, institutionalised, instrumental, sanctioned, and sometimes ritualised and regulated, violence'. Cit. Alex P. Schmid, *Thesaurus and Glossary of Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Terms* (London: FEWER 2000), pp.80–81.
20. Cf. Alex P. Schmid, 'Force or Conciliation? An Overview of Some Problems Associated With Current Anti-Terrorist Response Strategies', *Violence, Aggression and Terrorism*, 2/2 (1988) pp.153.
21. S.D. Bailey. *Prohibitions and Restraints in War* (London: Oxford University Press 1972), pp.82–83, 87.
22. L.P. Bremer, III. 'Terrorism and the Rule of War. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs', *Current Policy* 947 (text of an address, 23 April, 1987), p.3.
23. D.J.C. Carmichael, 'Of Beasts, Gods and Civilized Men : The Justification of Terrorism and of Counterterrorist Measures', *Terrorism* 6/1 (1982) p.14.
24. David Rapoport, 'The Politics of Atrocity', in Y. Alexander and S.M. Finger (eds), *Terrorism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: John Jay Press 1977), p.47 (emphasis added, AS).
25. Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf, *Violence as Communication* (London: Sage 1982), p.5.
26. Peter Kropotkin, 'The Spirit of Revolt. Cit. Ze'ev Iviansky Individual Terror: Concept and Typology', *Journal of Contemporary History* 12 (1977) p.45.
27. Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf, 'Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media', (Leiden: Centrum Onderzoek Meatschappelijke Tegenstellingen, 1980) p.7.
28. The logic behind this is as follows: Terrorists produce negative events. Bad news has good news value. The media's news value system puts a premium on anything that is different, new, change-inducing, unexpected, disruptive, dramatic, surprising and full of what is termed 'human interest'. If violent and terrorist events qualify to a significant extent for these criteria, they have a chance of being reported. However, since these are all exceptional qualities,

people who want to get access to newsmaking by way of these criteria can, as a rule, only get access to newsmaking by exception. While ordinary events by the socially powerful are news, ordinary things done by ordinary people are not news. Extraordinary things done by extraordinary people is big news. Due to this moral value indifference, the news value system does not distinguish between pro- and anti-social content of extraordinary news. And since it is so much easier to produce an extraordinary bad event than an extraordinary good event, the temptation to win access to newsmaking the easy way is real enough. Next to sex, violence is the most widespread manner of engaging the attention of the media the easy way.

29. Alex P. Schmid and J.F.A. de Graaf, *Violence as Communication. Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (London: Sage 1982) p.2.
30. Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1977) p.135.
31. Brian Jenkins first used the theatre metaphor: 'Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not the actual victims. Terrorism is theatre'. cit. Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism & the Media. From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the Oklahoma City Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press 1994) p.5.
32. Alex P. Schmid, 'Editors' Perspectives', in David L. Paletz and Alex P. Schmid (eds), *Terrorism and the Media. How Researchers, Terrorists, Government Press, Public, Victims View and Use the Media* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications 1992) pp.116, 118.
33. The wording of these principles, derived from 'Marighela's Minimanual of the Urban Guerrillas', is from Gabriel Weinman and Conrad Winn, *The Theatre of Terror. Mass Media and International Terrorism* (New York: Longman 1994) p.57.
34. Source: David L. Paletz and Alex P. Schmid, *Terrorism and the Media. How Researchers, Terrorists, Government, Press, Public, Victims View and Use the Media* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications 1992) p.33.
35. A.A. Cohen, H. Adoni and C.R. Bantz, *Social Conflict and Television News* (London: Sage 1990) p.10.
36. M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000) p.139.
37. Source: Bruce Hoffman, 'Terrorism and WMD: Some Preliminary Hypotheses', *The Nonproliferation Review* 4/3 (Spring/Summer 1997) p.48.
38. M.K. Narayanan, former Director of India's Intelligence Bureau, in address to symposium 'Combating International Terrorism: The contribution of the United Nations', Vienna, 3–4 June 2002. In the same address, he held, 'Terrorism is an ideology in itself. It conquers and colonises the mind through terror'.
39. Religion is defined here as '... a cultural institution, a complex of symbols, articles of faith, and practices adhered to by a group of believers that are related to, and commonly evoke the aid of, superhuman powers and provide answers to questions of ultimate meaning'. - G. Lewy, 'Religion and Revolution', p.4; cit. D.C. Rapoport and Y. Alexander (eds), *The Morality of Terrorism. Religious and Secular Justifications*. 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press 1989) p.354.
40. Dudley Young defines sacrifice as 'the attempt to make divinity come into our presence (or leave us) through an act of mutilation (actual or symbolic)'.

- D. Young, *Origins of the Sacred. The Ecstasies of Love and War* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1999) p.208.
41. Mark Juergensmeyer introduces, in this context, also the related concept of martyr: 'The idea of martyrdom is an interesting one. It has a long history within various religious traditions, including early Christianity. Christ himself was a martyr, as was the founder of the Shi'i Muslim tradition, Husain. The word *martyr* comes from a Greek term for 'witness', such as a witness to one's faith. In most cases, martyrdom is regarded not only as a testimony to the degree of one's commitment, but also as a performance of a religious act, specifically an act of self-sacrifice.' - M. Juergensmeyer, op. cit. p.167.
  42. M. Juergensmeyer. op. cit., p.147.
  43. Boaz Ganor, 'Suicide Attacks in Israel', in *Countering Suicide Terrorism, An International Conference*. Herzliya, 20–23 February 2000, p.140; David C. Rapoport, 'Sacred Terror: A Contemporary Example from Islam', in Walter Reich (ed), *Origins of Terrorism. Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press 1998) p.118. Incidentally, suicide is prohibited in Islam.
  44. Such a link between violence and religion has also been stressed by René Girard who, in his book on scapegoating writes: 'Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred'. R. Girard, 'Violence and the Sacred', p.31; cit. Richard C. Martin, 'The Study of Religion and Violence', in D.C. Rapoport and Y. Alexander, op. cit., p.363.
  45. Cit. Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, *Political Paranoia. The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven, Yale University Press 1997) p.144.
  46. The different value system of religious terrorists as contrasted to secular terrorists has also been stressed by other researchers. It has perhaps also been overstressed as in the case of Bruce Hoffman (Rand Corporation), who claimed: 'For the religious terrorist, violence is a divine duty. Whereas secular terrorists generally regard indiscriminate violence as immoral and counterproductive, religious terrorists view such violence as both morally justified and necessary'. Hoffman also noted that whereas secular terrorists attempt to appeal to a constituency composed of sympathisers and the aggrieved people they claim to speak for, religious terrorists act for no audience but themselves. This absence of a constituency, combined with an extreme sense of alienation, means that such terrorists can justify almost limitless violence against virtually any target, i.e. anyone who is not a member of their own religious sect. B. Hoffman, *On the Agenda. Rand Newsletter* (Winter 1994 issue) as quoted on <<http://www.rand.org/hot/oldfiles/terrorism.html>> p.1.
  47. Cit. B. Hoffman, 'Religious Extremism' in M. Crenshaw and J. Pimlott (eds), *Encyclopaedia of World Terrorism. Vol. I* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1997) p.210.
  48. M. Juergensmeyer, op. cit., p.186.
  49. For the latter, see Alex Schmid. Lemma, 'Terrorism', in Jack A. Goldstone (ed), *The Encyclopaedia of Political Revolutions* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc. 1998) pp.477–9.

50. Final report of the high level Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism (A/57/273 S/2002/875 Annex), para. 13.

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