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CAN TERRORISM BE POLITICALLY (ETHICALLY) JUSTIFIED?

Unlike past guerrilla campaigns that attempted to follow a Maoist tradition of armed struggle in the sense of fighting a clearly identified adversary, post-modern terrorism follows whatever strategy it deems necessary to promote its agenda and to accomplish the political objectives. Critics of characterizing terrorism as a mode of warfare say that terrorists are not guerrillas because they do not seize any terrain. Post-modern terrorism does not need to seize terrain. Instead the importance for the terrorist in the new strategic age is who, what, when, where, and how he can effect his target(s) with the least risk to his forces. In essence, terrorism becomes a war of attrition.

*-Captain Arthur M. Loureiro
United States Army*

In his piece, Captain Loureiro argues that terrorism is the same as war, but as war is by definition an event that takes place between states, terrorism cannot be war. Loureiro's reasoning that this state of war is necessary in order to justify state use of military force against terrorism is also, however incorrect. The state is designed to be a method of collective self-defense, against threats both foreign and domestic. If Terrorism is taking the lives of citizens of a nation, then it is that nation's duty to do all it can to protect its civilians, and if that means use of military force then such force is justified.

But if military force is justifiable to prevent terrorism, one can ask the question of whether there is any time when terrorism can be justified as a method of protection of minorities against a tyranny of a majority. The following questions should allow us to receive an answer.

Is terrorism a justified method of revolt?

The answer to this question is no. Some terrorist groups have viable political representation: for example Hamas and Hizbollah are both well represented in their respective areas of activity, Hamas is represented in the Palestinian Authority and Hizbollah has become one of the most powerful groups in the Lebanese government. Since these groups have political outlets that are responsive to their needs, revolt should not be the method of choice to attain their desires. Further, one revolts against a government, not the civilian public. Terrorism targets civilians specifically, and thus terrorism cannot be considered revolt because rather than challenging the legitimacy of a government, they are simply murdering its people who may in fact not support the government to any greater extent than the terrorist.

Is one man's terrorist another's freedom fighter?

Terrorist groups do not make use of civil disobedience, thus they are not freedom fighters in the sense of the word that Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi were. They do not explore other options before resulting to use of killing though to a great extent these options may exist. And again, to gain freedom one must be oppressed. Generally speaking oppression must come from a government, which brings us back to the argument of why terrorism is not a legitimate form of revolt.

Is Terrorism a justifiable method of self-defense?

No, self-defense implies one's life or livelihood is threatened and one takes action in order to remove the threat. This means stopping the *killer* specifically, not the civilian on the bus, at the disco, driving their car, or eating pizza. If one was to use terrorism to stop a well defined enemy from injuring oneself, than and only than can terrorism begin to be justified, though there are certainly still problematic issues with this conclusion.

Thus, because terrorism does not fit into any of the generally accepted reasons for justification of violence, terrorism cannot be justified.

**Note: I exclude by definition an attack on a government or government representative as not being terror.*