



inside

terrorism



bruce hoffman



revised and expanded edition

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REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

Bruce Hoffman



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Chapter 1

Defining Terrorism

What is terrorism? Few words have so insidiously worked their way into our everyday vocabulary. Like “Internet”—another grossly overused term that has similarly become an indispensable part of the argot of the early twenty-first century—most people have a vague idea or impression of what terrorism is but lack a more precise, concrete, and truly explanatory definition of the word. This imprecision has been abetted partly by the modern media, whose efforts to communicate an often complex and convoluted message in the briefest amount of airtime or print space possible have led to the promiscuous labeling of a range of violent acts as “terrorism.” Pick up a newspaper or turn on the television and—even within the same broadcast or on the same page—one can find such disparate acts as the bombing of a building, the assassination of a head of state, the massacre of civilians by a military unit, the poisoning of produce on supermarket shelves, or the deliberate contamination of over-the-counter medication in a drugstore, all described as incidents of terrorism. Indeed, virtually any especially abhorrent act of violence perceived as directed against society—whether it involves the activities of antigovernment dissidents or governments themselves, organized-crime syndicates, common criminals, rioting mobs, people engaged in militant protest, individual psychotics, or lone extortionists—is often labeled “terrorism.”

Dictionary definitions are of little help. The preeminent authority on the English language, the much-venerated *Oxford English Dictionary*, is disappointingly unobliging when it comes to providing edification on this subject, its interpretation at once too literal and too historical to be of much contemporary use:

Terrorism: A system of terror. 1. Government by intimidation as directed and carried out by the party in power in France during the revolution of 1789–94; the system of “Terror.” 2. *gen.* A policy intended to strike with terror those against whom it is adopted; the employment of methods of intimidation; the fact of terrorizing or condition of being terrorized.¹

These definitions are wholly unsatisfying. Rather than learning what terrorism is, one instead finds, in the first instance, a somewhat pedestrian historical—and, in respect of the modern accepted usage of the term, a uselessly anachronistic—description. The second definition offered is only slightly more helpful. While accurately communicating the fear-inducing quality of terrorism, the definition is still so broad as to apply to almost any action that scares (“terrorizes”) us. Though an integral part of “terrorism,” this definition is still insufficient for the purpose of accurately defining the phenomenon that is today called “terrorism.”

A slightly more satisfying elucidation may be found in the *OED*’s definition of the perpetrator of the act than in its efforts to come to grips with the act itself. In this respect, a “terrorist” is defined thus:

1. As a political term: a. Applied to the Jacobins and their agents and partisans in the French Revolution, esp. to those connected with the Revolutionary tribunals during the “Reign of Terror,” b. Any one who attempts to further his views by a system of coercive intimidation; *spec.* applied to members of one of the extreme revolutionary societies in Russia.²

This is appreciably more helpful. First, it immediately introduces the reader to the notion of terrorism as a *political* concept. As will be seen, this key characteristic of terrorism is absolutely paramount to understanding its aims, motivations, and purposes and is critical in distinguishing it from other types of violence.

Terrorism, in the most widely accepted contemporary usage of the term, is fundamentally and inherently political. It is also ineluctably about power: the pursuit of power, the acquisition of power, and the use of power to achieve political change. Terrorism is thus violence—or, equally important,

the threat of violence—used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim. With this vital point clearly illuminated, one can appreciate the significance of the additional definition of “terrorist” provided by the *OED*: “Any one who attempts to further his views by a system of coercive intimidation.” This definition underscores clearly the other fundamental characteristic of terrorism: that it is a planned, calculated, and indeed systematic act.

Given this relatively straightforward elucidation, why, then, is terrorism so difficult to define? The most compelling reason perhaps is because the meaning of the term has changed so frequently over the past two hundred years.³

The Changing Meaning of Terrorism

The word “terrorism” was first popularized during the French Revolution. In contrast to its contemporary usage, at that time terrorism had a decidedly *positive* connotation. The system or *régime de la terreur* of 1793–94—from which the English word came—was adopted as a means to establish order during the transient anarchical period of turmoil and upheaval that followed the uprisings of 1789, and indeed many other revolutions. Hence, unlike terrorism as it is commonly understood today, to mean a *revolutionary* or antigovernment activity undertaken by nonstate or subnational entities, the *régime de la terreur* was an instrument of governance wielded by the recently established revolutionary *state*. It was designed to consolidate the new government’s power by intimidating counterrevolutionaries, subversives, and all other dissidents whom the new regime regarded as “enemies of the people.” The Committee of General Security and the Revolutionary Tribunal (“People’s Court” in the modern vernacular) were thus accorded wide powers of arrest and judgment, publicly putting to death by guillotine those convicted of treasonous (i.e., reactionary) crimes. In this manner, a powerful lesson was conveyed to any and all who might oppose the revolution or grow nostalgic for the *ancien régime*.

Ironically, perhaps, terrorism in its original context was also closely associated with the ideals of virtue and democracy. The revolutionary leader Maximilien Robespierre firmly believed that virtue was the mainspring of a popular government at peace, but that during the time of revolution virtue must be allied with terror in order for democracy to triumph. He appealed famously to “virtue, without which terror is evil; terror, without which virtue is helpless” and proclaimed: “Terror is nothing but justice, prompt, severe and inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue.”⁴

Despite this divergence from its subsequent meaning, the French Revolution's "terrorism" still shared at least two key characteristics with its modern-day variant. First, the *régime de la terreur* was neither random nor indiscriminate, as terrorism is often portrayed today, but was organized, deliberate, and systematic. Second, its goal and its very justification—like that of contemporary terrorism—was the creation of a "new and better society" in place of a fundamentally corrupt and undemocratic political system. Indeed, Robespierre's vague and Utopian exegeses of the revolution's central goals are remarkably similar in tone and content to the equally turgid, millenarian manifestos issued by many contemporary revolutionary—primarily left-wing, Marxist-oriented—terrorist organizations. For example, in 1794 Robespierre declared, in language eerily presaging the communiqués issued by groups such as Germany's Red Army Faction and Italy's Red Brigades nearly two centuries later:

We want an order of things . . . in which the arts are an adornment to the liberty that ennobles them, and commerce the source of wealth for the public and not of monstrous opulence for a few families. . . . In our country we desire morality instead of selfishness, honesty and not mere "honor," principle and not mere custom, duty and not mere propriety, the sway of reason rather than the tyranny of fashion, a scorn for vice and not a contempt for the unfortunate.⁵

Like many other revolutions, the French Revolution eventually began to consume itself. On 8 Thermidor, year two of the new calendar adopted by the revolutionaries (July 26, 1794), Robespierre announced to the National Convention that he had in his possession a new list of traitors. Fearing that their own names might be on that list, extremists joined forces with moderates to repudiate both Robespierre and his *régime de la terreur*. Robespierre and his closest followers themselves met the same fate that had befallen some forty thousand others: execution by guillotine. The Terror was at an end; thereafter "terrorism" became a term associated with the abuse of office and power—with overt "criminal" implications.⁶ Within a year of Robespierre's demise, the word had been popularized in English by Edmund Burke, who, in his famous polemic against the French Revolution, described the "Thousands of those Hell hounds called Terrorists . . . let loose on the people."⁷

One of the French Revolution's more enduring repercussions was the impetus it gave to antimonarchical sentiment elsewhere in Europe. Popular subservience to rulers who derived their authority from God through "divine right of rule," rather than from their subjects, was increasingly

questioned by a politically awakened Continent. The advent of nationalism, and with it notions of statehood and citizenship based on the common identity of a people rather than the lineage of a royal family, were resulting in the unification and creation of new nation-states such as Germany and Italy. Meanwhile, the massive socioeconomic changes engendered by the Industrial Revolution were creating new “universalist” ideologies (such as communism/Marxism), born of the alienation and exploitative conditions of nineteenth-century capitalism. From this milieu a new era of terrorism emerged, in which the concept had gained many of the familiar revolutionary, antistate connotations of today. Its chief progenitor was arguably the Italian republican extremist Carlo Pisacane, who had forsaken his birthright as duke of San Giovanni only to perish in 1857 during an ill-fated revolt against Bourbon rule. A passionate advocate of federalism and mutualism, Pisacane is remembered less on this account than for the theory of “propaganda by deed,”⁸ which he is credited with defining—an idea that has exerted a compelling influence on rebels and terrorists alike ever since. “The propaganda of the idea is a chimera,” Pisacane wrote. “Ideas result from deeds, not the latter from the former, and the people will not be free when they are educated, but educated when they are free.”⁹ Violence, he argued, was necessary not only to draw attention to, or generate publicity for, a cause, but also to inform, educate, and ultimately rally the masses behind the revolution. The didactic purpose of violence, Pisacane argued, could never be effectively replaced by pamphlets, wall posters, or assemblies.

Perhaps the first organization to put into practice Pisacane’s dictum was the *Narodnaya Volya*, or People’s Will (sometimes translated as “People’s Freedom”), a small group of Russian constitutionalists that had been founded in 1878 to challenge czarist rule. For the *Narodnaya Volya*, the apathy and alienation of the Russian masses afforded few alternatives besides resorting to daring and dramatic acts of violence designed to attract attention to the group and its cause. However, unlike the many late-twentieth-century terrorist organizations that have cited the principle of “propaganda by deed” to justify the wanton targeting of civilians in order to assure them publicity through the shock and horror produced by wholesale bloodshed, the *Narodnaya Volya* displayed an almost quixotic attitude toward the violence it wrought. To this group, “propaganda by deed” meant the selective targeting of specific individuals whom the group considered the embodiment of the autocratic, oppressive state.¹⁰ Hence the victims—the czar, leading members of the royal family, senior government officials—were deliberately chosen for their “symbolic” value as the dynastic heads and subservient agents of a corrupt and tyrannical regime. An intrinsic element

in the group's collective beliefs was that "not one drop of superfluous blood" should be shed in pursuit of aims, however noble or utilitarian they might be.¹¹ Even having selected their targets with great care and the utmost deliberation, group members still harbored profound regrets about taking the life of a fellow human being. Their unswerving adherence to this principle is perhaps best illustrated by the failed attempt on the life of Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich made by a successor organization to the *Narodnaya Volya* in 1905. As the royal carriage came into view, the terrorist tasked with the assassination saw that the duke was unexpectedly accompanied by his children and therefore aborted his mission rather than risk harming the intended victim's family (the duke was killed in a subsequent attack). By comparison, the midair explosion caused by a terrorist bomb on Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988 indiscriminately claimed the lives of all 259 people on board—innocent men, women, and children alike—plus eleven inhabitants of the village where the plane crashed.

Ironically, the *Narodnaya Volya*'s most dramatic accomplishment also led directly to its demise. On March 1, 1881, the group assassinated Czar Alexander II.¹² The failure of eight previous plots had led the conspirators to take extraordinary measures to ensure the success of this attempt. Four volunteers were given four bombs each and deployed along the alternative routes followed by the czar's cortege. As two of the bomber-assassins stood in wait on the same street, the sleighs carrying the czar and his Cossack escort approached the first terrorist, who hurled his bomb at the passing sleigh, missing it by inches. The whole entourage came to a halt as soldiers seized the hapless culprit and the czar descended from his sleigh to check on a bystander wounded by the explosion. "Thank God, I am safe," the czar reportedly declared—just as the second bomber emerged from the crowd and detonated his weapon, killing both himself and his target. The full weight of the czarist state now fell on the heads of the *Narodnaya Volya*. Acting on information provided by the arrested member, the secret police swept down on the group's safe houses and hideouts, rounding up most of the plotters, who were quickly tried, convicted, and hanged. Further information from this group led to subsequent arrests, so that within a year of the assassination only one member of the original executive committee was still at large. She too was finally apprehended in 1883, at which point the first generation of *Narodnaya Volya* terrorists ceased to exist, although various successor organizations subsequently emerged to carry on the struggle.¹³

At the time, the repercussions of the czar's assassination could not have been known or appreciated by either the condemned or their comrades languishing in prison or exiled to Siberia. But in addition to precipitating the

beginning of the end of czarist rule, the group also deeply influenced individual revolutionaries and subversive organizations elsewhere. To the nascent anarchist movement, the “propaganda by deed” strategy championed by the *Narodnaya Volya* provided a model to be emulated.¹⁴ Within four months of the czar’s murder, a group of radicals in London convened an “anarchist conference,” which publicly applauded the assassination and extolled tyrannicide as a means to achieve revolutionary change. In hopes of encouraging and coordinating worldwide anarchist activities, the conferees decided to establish the “Anarchist International” (or “Black International”). Although this idea, like most of their ambitious plans, came to naught, the publicity generated by even a putative “Anarchist International” was sufficient to create a myth of global revolutionary pretensions and thereby stimulate fears and suspicions disproportionate to its actual impact or political achievements. Disparate and uncoordinated though the anarchists’ violence was, the movement’s emphasis on individual action or operations carried out by small cells of like-minded radicals made detection and prevention by the police particularly difficult, thus further heightening public fears. For example, following the assassination of U.S. president William McKinley in 1901 (by a young Hungarian refugee, Leon Czolgosz, who, while not a regular member of any anarchist organization, was nonetheless influenced by the philosophy), Congress swiftly enacted legislation barring known anarchists or anyone “who disbelieves in or is opposed to all organized government” from entering the United States. However, while anarchists were responsible for an impressive string of assassinations of heads of state and a number of particularly notorious bombings from about 1878 until the second decade of the twentieth century,¹⁵ in the final analysis, other than stimulating often exaggerated fears, anarchism made little tangible impact on either the domestic or the international politics of the countries affected. It does, however, offer an interesting historical footnote: much as the “information revolution” of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries is alleged to have made the means and methods of bomb-making and other types of terrorist activity more readily available via the Internet, on CD-ROM, and through ordinary libraries and bookstores, one of anarchism’s flourishing “cottage industries” more than a century earlier was the widespread distribution of similar “how-to”- or “do-it-yourself”-type manuals and publications of violence and mayhem.¹⁶

Meanwhile, another series of developments was unfolding on the other side of Europe that would exert a similarly profound influence on future terrorist strategy and tactics. In this instance, the motivation was neither anti-monarchical nor anarchist, but nationalist and separatist. Although Britain’s rule of Ireland already had a centuries-long history of restiveness and rebel-

lion, in the mid-nineteenth century the locus of revolutionary activities had expanded from Ireland to include the United States as well. Among the mass of Irish emigrants who had fled the failure of successive potato crops and the resultant famine was a group of radical nationalists who in 1858 founded a secret society called the Fenian Brotherhood. The Fenians—and their Ireland-based offshoot, the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood (IRB)—were at once as daring and determined as they were impatient and incompetent. Their motto of “revolution sooner or never”¹⁷ accurately describes a string of half-baked plots that purported to kidnap the Prince of Wales,¹⁸ invade Canada, and orchestrate a popular uprising in Ireland. So successful were British efforts to penetrate the organization, and so abject were the Fenians’ failed grand schemes, that the movement fell into desuetude within a decade of its founding.¹⁹ But the Fenians’ unswerving commitment to both Irish republicanism and the use of violence to attain it²⁰ created a legacy that subsequently inspired a new generation of U.S.-based Irish revolutionaries.

Thus by 1873 a new organization, calling itself the Clan na Gael (United Irishmen), had taken up the Fenians’ mantle. Its driving force was a fire-brand named Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa. Sentenced to life imprisonment for sedition in 1865, O’Donovan Rossa was released only six years later after a commission of inquiry substantiated his claims of mistreatment. The abuse inflicted on imprisoned terrorists like O’Donovan Rossa in the nineteenth century actually bears a disquieting resemblance to the treatment reportedly meted out to some detainees in the war on terrorism today.²¹ Not only was O’Donovan Rossa held for more than a month with his hands handcuffed behind his back, but he was also “kept naked day and night” in a darkened cell and fed a meager ration of bread and water.²² Exiled to the United States, O’Donovan Rossa quickly resumed his subversive activities. He was assisted in these endeavors by Patrick Ford, the editor of the *Irish World*, a newspaper that became the main platform for Clan na Gael propaganda and incitement. Together, they developed a new strategy for the republican movement. “We are not now advising a general insurrection,” Ford explained in a December 4, 1875, column.

On the contrary, we should oppose a general insurrection in Ireland as untimely and ill advised. But we believe in action nonetheless. The Irish cause requires Skirmishers. It requires a little band of heroes who will initiate and keep up without intermission a guerrilla warfare.

In words that accurately presaged the advent of a form of transnational terrorism that has become a permanent fixture of our time, Ford also described

how these “Skirmishers” would “fly over land and sea like invisible beings—now striking the enemy in Ireland, now in India, now in England itself as occasion may present.”²³

O'Donovan Rossa and Ford displayed an uncommon understanding of the terrorist dynamic that went beyond even this early recognition of the media's power to communicate and amplify a violent message. Remarkably, both men grasped that just as money lubricates commerce, a solid financial base is required to sustain an effective terrorism campaign. It was thus not long before advertisements began to appear in the *Irish World* soliciting contributions on behalf of a “skirmisher fund.”²⁴ By March 1877 \$23,350 had been collected—a sum equivalent to nearly half a million dollars in 2005.²⁵ O'Donovan Rossa appears to have also fully appreciated terrorism's asymmetric virtues with regard to the disproportionate economic losses and damage that could be inflicted on the enemy state and the flood of contributions that a series of successful attacks might engender. “England,” he explained in the *Irish World*, “will not know how or where she is to be struck. A successful strike that will do her half a million dollars' worth of damage will bring us enough funds to carry on the work.”²⁶

Four years later, the Skirmishers commenced operations. On January 14, 1881, they bombed the Salford Infantry Barracks in Manchester. Their choice of target reflected yet another now-familiar pattern of contemporary terrorism: attacks on buildings or other inanimate objects designed to commemorate, and thereby draw attention to, some event of historic significance to the perpetrators. In this instance, the Salford Barracks was where three Fenians—the so-called Manchester Martyrs—had been hanged in 1867. Up until this point, the Irish terrorists seem to have differed only slightly from their Russian counterparts. Both attacked targets symbolizing their enemy (inanimate objects in the case of the Skirmishers and representatives of the czar by the Narodnaya Volya). Both also believed fervently in terrorism's didactic potential—whether directed toward the landless Irish or the Russian peasant.²⁷ But two years later, the Irish campaign diverged significantly from the highly discriminate terrorism practiced by the Narodnaya Volya to something both more sinister and consequential. The principal weapons in the Russians' campaign, as we have seen, were the handgun and the nineteenth-century equivalent of the hand grenade; employed in acts of individual assassination deliberately calculated to avoid death or injury to all but their intended target. By comparison, the Skirmishers had already spilled innocent blood: a seven-year-old boy had been killed and three other people injured in the Salford Barracks blast.²⁸ Still more innocent blood, however, was soon to be shed.

In 1883 the Clan na Gael and a rebranded IRB, now known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood, formed a tactical alliance and together embarked on a bombing campaign directed against the London Underground and mainline railway stations in both the United Kingdom's capital and other cities.²⁹ Although the bombers' intention was not to wantonly or deliberately kill or harm innocent persons, but instead to throttle Britain's economy and dramatically call attention to themselves and their cause,³⁰ their choice of both weapon (homemade bombs consisting of gunpowder detonated by primitive time-delay fuses) and target (locations in congested urban areas and public transportation) ensured that the effects of their operations could be neither constrained nor controlled. And, while it is true that these bombings claimed the lives of fewer than a dozen passersby or rail passengers, given that some of the explosive devices contained more than twenty pounds of commercial dynamite, this was more likely the result of luck and happenstance than any effort on the part of the bombers to limit by timing or placement the effect of their attacks.³¹

The "dynamite campaign," as this spasm of Victorian-era urban terrorism came to be known, lasted until 1887.³² It spread beyond London to Liverpool and Glasgow before collapsing under the weight of intensified police surveillance, heightened border and port control, the effective use of informants, and unprecedented national and even international cooperation and liaison among hitherto entirely parochial law enforcement agencies. Indeed, the advances in police investigative, intelligence, and preemptive operations necessitated by the bombings led that same year to the formal establishment of Scotland Yard's famed Special Branch—the first such police unit dedicated specifically to political crime and counterterrorism.³³ More significant for our purposes, however, is the impact that nineteenth-century Irish political violence had on terrorism's evolution and development. In retrospect, we can see that it was at this time that patterns and *modi operandi* first appeared that would become standard terrorist operating procedures decades later. The Irish groups, for example, were among the first to recognize the importance of establishing a foreign base beyond the reach of their enemy in order to better sustain and promote a protracted terrorist campaign. They were also ahead of their time in understanding the value of such a sanctuary not only for planning and logistical purposes but also for the effective dissemination of propaganda and the critical solicitation of operational funds. Their use of time-delayed explosive devices so that the perpetrator could easily effect escape, and thereby ensure the terrorist campaign's sustainment, was another important innovation that became a standard feature of twentieth-century terrorism. Finally, terrorist targeting

of mass transport—and especially subway systems—along with an almost callous, if not even casual, disregard of innocent life have now become commonplace. The July 2005 suicide attacks on London’s transit system, which killed 52 people and wounded 700 others, and the ten near-simultaneous bombings of commuter trains arriving at Madrid’s Atocha rail station in March 2004, which killed 191 people and wounded hundreds more, are especially apposite, and tragic, examples. “At the grand strategic level,” Lindsay Clutterbuck cogently notes, the Clan na Gael and IRB’s

ideas enabled terrorism to move away from being a phenomenon consisting of a single event, or at best a loosely connected series of events, and to evolve into sustained campaigns underpinned by their own well developed sense of timing and tempo. There was a quantum leap beyond the limited aim of assassinating an individual to achieve their objectives and into operational scenarios where terrorism could persist for years and encompass the deaths of thousands of people.³⁴

On the eve of the First World War, terrorism still retained its revolutionary connotations. By this time, growing unrest and irredentist ferment had already welled up within the decaying Ottoman and Hapsburg empires. In the 1880s and 1890s, for example, militant Armenian nationalist movements in eastern Turkey pursued a terrorist strategy against continued Ottoman rule of a kind that would later be adopted by most of the post-Second World War ethno-nationalist/separatist movements. The Armenians’ objective was simultaneously to strike a blow against the despotic “alien” regime through repeated attacks on its colonial administration and security forces, in order to rally indigenous support, and to attract international attention, sympathy, and support.³⁵ Around the same time, the Inner Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) was active in the region overlapping present-day Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia.³⁶ Although the Macedonians did not go on to suffer the catastrophic fate that befell the Armenians during the First World War (when an estimated one million people perished in what is considered to be the first officially implemented genocide of the twentieth century),³⁷ IMRO never came close to achieving its aim of an independent Macedonia and thereafter degenerated into a mostly criminal organization of hired thugs and political assassins.

The events immediately preceding the First World War in Bosnia are of course more familiar because of their subsequent cataclysmic impact on world affairs. There, similar groups of disaffected nationalists—Bosnian Serb intellectuals, university students, and even schoolchildren, collectively

known as *Mlada Bosna*, or Young Bosnians—arose against continued Hapsburg suzerainty. While it is perhaps easy to dismiss the movement, as some historians have, as comprising “frustrated, poor, dreary and maladjusted”³⁸ adolescents—much as many contemporary observers similarly denigrate modern-day terrorists as mindless, obsessive, and maladjusted—it was a member of Young Bosnia, Gavrilo Princip, who is widely credited with having set in motion the chain of events that began on June 28, 1914, when he assassinated the Hapsburg archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, and culminated in the First World War. Whatever its superficially juvenile characteristics, the group was nonetheless passionately dedicated to the attainment of a federal South Slav political entity—uniting Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs—and resolutely committed to assassination as the vehicle with which to achieve that aim. In this respect, the Young Bosnians perhaps had more in common with the radical republicanism of Giuseppe Mazzini, one of the most ardent exponents of Italian unification in the nineteenth century, than with groups such as the *Narodnaya Volya*—despite a shared conviction in the efficacy of tyrannicide. An even more significant difference, however, was the degree of involvement in, and external support provided to, Young Bosnian activities by various shadowy Serbian nationalist groups. Principal among these was the pan-Serbian secret society, the *Narodna Obrana* (the People’s Defense, or National Defense).

The *Narodna Obrana* had been established in 1908, originally to promote Serbian cultural and national activities. It subsequently assumed a more subversive orientation as the movement became increasingly involved with anti-Austrian activities—including terrorism—mostly in neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the *Narodna Obrana*’s exclusionist pan-Serbian aims clashed with the Young Bosnians’ less parochial South Slav ideals, its leadership was quite happy to manipulate and exploit the Bosnians’ emotive nationalism and youthful zeal for its own purposes. To this end, the *Narodna Obrana* actively recruited, trained, and armed young Bosnians and Herzegovinians from movements, such as the Young Bosnians, who were then deployed in various seditious activities against the Hapsburgs. As early as four years before the archduke’s assassination, a Herzegovinian youth, trained by a Serbian army officer with close ties to the *Narodna Obrana*, had attempted to kill the governor of Bosnia. But while the *Narodna Obrana* included among its members senior Serbian government officials, it was not an explicitly government-controlled or directly state-supported entity. Whatever hazy government links it maintained were further and deliberately obscured when a radical faction left the *Narodna Obrana* in 1911 and established the *Ujedinjenje ili Smrt* (the Union of Death,

or Death or Unification)—more popularly known as the Crna Ruka, the Black Hand. This more militant and appreciably more clandestine splinter group has been described by one historian as combining

the more unattractive features of the anarchist cells of earlier years—which had been responsible for quite a number of assassinations in Europe and whose methods had a good deal of influence via the writings of Russian anarchists upon Serbian youth—and of the [American] Ku Klux Klan. There were gory rituals and oaths of loyalty, there were murders of backsliding members, there was identification of members by number, there were distributions of guns and bombs. And there was a steady traffic between Bosnia and Serbia.³⁹

This group, which continued to maintain close links with its parent body, was largely composed of Serbian military officers. It was led by Lieutenant Colonel Dragutin Dmitrievich (known by his pseudonym, Apis), himself the chief of the Intelligence Department of the Serbian general staff. With this key additional advantage of direct access to military armaments, intelligence, and training facilities, the Black Hand effectively took charge of all Serb-backed clandestine operations in Bosnia.⁴⁰

Although there were obviously close links between the Serbian military, the Black Hand, and the Young Bosnians, it would be a mistake to regard the relationship as one of direct control, much less outright manipulation. Clearly, the Serbian government was well aware of the Black Hand's objectives and the violent means the group employed in pursuit of them; indeed, the Serbian crown prince Alexander was one of the group's benefactors. But this does not mean that the Serbian government was necessarily as committed to war with Austria as the Black Hand's leaders were, or that it was prepared to countenance the group's more extreme plans for fomenting cross-border, anti-Hapsburg terrorism. There is some evidence to suggest that the Black Hand may have been trying to force Austria's hand against Serbia and thereby plunge both countries into war by actively abetting the Young Bosnians' plot to assassinate the archduke. Indeed, according to one revisionist account of the events leading up to the murder,⁴¹ even though the pistol used by Princip had been supplied by the Black Hand from a Serbian military armory in Kragujevac, and even though Princip had been trained by the Black Hand in Serbia before being smuggled back across the border for the assassination, at the eleventh hour Dmitrievich had apparently bowed to intense government pressure and tried to stop the assassination. According to this version, Princip and his fellow conspirators would hear nothing of

it and stubbornly went ahead with their plans. Contrary to popular assumption, therefore, the archduke's assassination may not have been specifically ordered or even directly sanctioned by the Serbian government.⁴² However, the obscure links between high government officials and their senior military commanders and ostensibly independent, transnational terrorist movements, and the tangled web of intrigue, plots, clandestine arms provision and training, intelligence agents, and cross-border sanctuary that these relationships inevitably involved provide a pertinent historical parallel to the contemporary phenomenon known as "state-sponsored" terrorism (that is, the active and often clandestine support, encouragement, and assistance provided by a foreign government to a terrorist group).

By the 1930s, the meaning of "terrorism" had changed again. It was now used less to refer to revolutionary movements and violence directed against governments and their leaders and more to describe the practices of mass repression employed by totalitarian states and their dictatorial leaders against their own citizens. Thus the term regained its former connotations of abuse of power by government, and it was applied specifically to the authoritarian regimes that had come to power in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Stalinist Russia. In Germany and Italy, respectively, the accession to office of Hitler and Mussolini had depended in large measure on the "street"—the mobilization and deployment of gangs of brown- or black-shirted thugs to harass and intimidate political opponents and root out other scapegoats for public vilification and further victimization. "Terror? Never," Mussolini insisted, demurely dismissing such intimidation as "simply . . . social hygiene, taking those individuals out of circulation like a doctor would take out a bacillus."⁴³ The most sinister dimension of this form of "terror" was that it became an intrinsic component of Fascist and Nazi governance, executed at the behest of, and in complete subservience to, the ruling political party of the land—which had arrogated to itself complete, total control of the country and its people. A system of government-sanctioned fear and coercion was thus created whereby political brawls, street fights, and widespread persecution of Jews, communists, and other declared "enemies of the state" became the means through which complete and submissive compliance was ensured. The totality of party control over, and perversion of, government was perhaps most clearly evinced by a speech given by Hermann Göring, the newly appointed Prussian minister of the interior, in 1933. "Fellow Germans," he declared,

my measures will not be crippled by any judicial thinking. My measures will not be crippled by any bureaucracy. Here I don't have to worry about Justice; my mission is only to destroy and exterminate, nothing more. This

struggle will be a struggle against chaos, and such a struggle I shall not conduct with the power of the police. A bourgeois State might have done that. Certainly, I shall use the power of the State and the police to the utmost, my dear Communists, so don't draw any false conclusions; but the struggle to the death, in which my fist will grasp your necks, I shall lead with those there—the Brown Shirts.⁴⁴

The “Great Terror” that Stalin was shortly to unleash in Russia both resembled and differed from that of the Nazis. On the one hand, drawing inspiration from Hitler's ruthless elimination of his own political opponents, the Russian dictator similarly transformed the political party he led into a servile instrument responsive directly to his personal will, and the state's police and security apparatus into slavish organs of coercion, enforcement, and repression. But conditions in the Soviet Union of the 1930s bore little resemblance to the turbulent political, social, and economic upheaval afflicting Germany and Italy during that decade and the previous one. On the other hand, therefore, unlike either the Nazis or the Fascists, who had emerged from the political free-for-alls in their own countries to seize power and then had to struggle to consolidate their rule and retain their unchallenged authority, the Russian Communist Party had by the mid-1930s been firmly entrenched in power for more than a decade. Stalin's purges, in contrast to those of the French Revolution, and even to Russia's own recent experience, were not “launched in time of crisis, or revolution and war . . . [but] in the coldest of cold blood, when Russia had at last reached a comparatively calm and even moderately prosperous condition.”⁴⁵ Thus the political purges ordered by Stalin became, in the words of one of his biographers, a “conspiracy to seize total power by terrorist action,”⁴⁶ resulting in the death, exile, imprisonment, or forcible impressment of millions.

Certainly, similar forms of state-imposed or state-directed violence and terror against a government's own citizens continue today. The use of so-called death squads (often off-duty or plainclothes security or police officers) in conjunction with blatant intimidation of political opponents, human rights and aid workers, student groups, labor organizers, journalists, and others has been a prominent feature of the right-wing military dictatorships that took power in Argentina, Chile, and Greece during the 1970s and even of elected governments in El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, and Peru during the upheavals that afflicted those countries, particularly in the 1980s. But these state-sanctioned or explicitly ordered acts of *internal* political violence directed mostly against domestic populations—that is, rule by violence and intimidation by those *already* in power against their

own citizenry—are generally termed “terror” in order to distinguish that phenomenon from “terrorism,” which is understood to be violence committed by nonstate entities.

Following the Second World War, in another swing of the pendulum of meaning, “terrorism” regained the revolutionary connotations with which it is most commonly associated today. At that time the term was used primarily in reference to the violent revolts then being prosecuted by the various indigenous nationalist/anticolonialist groups that emerged in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East during the late 1940s and 1950s to oppose continued European rule. Countries as diverse as Israel, Kenya, Cyprus, and Algeria, for example, owe their independence at least in part to nationalist political movements that employed terrorism against colonial powers. It was also during this period that the “politically correct” appellation of “freedom fighters” came into fashion as a result of the political legitimacy that the international community (whose sympathy and support were actively courted by many of these movements) accorded to struggles for national liberation and self-determination. Sympathy and support for the rebels extended to segments of the colonial state’s own population as well, creating a need for less judgmental and more politically neutral language than “terrorist” and “terrorism” to describe these revolutionaries and the violence they committed in what were considered justified “wars of liberation.”⁴⁷ Many newly independent Third World countries and communist-bloc states in particular also adopted this vernacular, arguing that anyone or any movement that fought against “colonial” oppression and/or Western domination should not be described as “terrorists” but were properly deemed to be “freedom fighters.” This position was perhaps most famously explained by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) chairman Yasir Arafat, when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly in November 1974. “The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist,” Arafat stated, “lies in the reason for which each 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 colonialists, cannot possibly be called terrorist.”⁴⁸

During the late 1960s and 1970s, terrorism continued to be viewed within a revolutionary context. However, this usage now expanded to include nationalist and ethnic separatist groups outside a colonial or neocolonial framework as well as radical, entirely ideologically motivated organizations. Disenfranchised or exiled nationalist minorities—such as the PLO, the Quebecois separatist group FLQ (Front de Liberation du Quebec), the Basque ETA (Euskadita Askatasuna, or Freedom for the Basque Homeland), and even a hitherto unknown South Moluccan irredentist group seeking inde-

pendence from Indonesia—adopted terrorism as a means to draw attention to themselves and their respective causes, in many instances with the specific aim, like their anticolonial predecessors, of attracting international sympathy and support. Around the same time, various left-wing political extremists—drawn mostly from the radical student organizations and Marxist/Leninist/Maoist movements in Western Europe, Latin America, and the United States—began to form terrorist groups opposing American intervention in Vietnam and what they claimed were the irredeemable social and economic inequities of the modern capitalist liberal-democratic state.

Although the revolutionary cum ethno-nationalist/separatist and ideological exemplars continue to shape our most basic understanding of the term, it was not long before “terrorism” was being used to denote broader, less distinct phenomena. In the early 1980s, for example, terrorism came to be regarded as a calculated means to destabilize the West as part of a vast global conspiracy. Books like *The Terror Network* by Claire Sterling propagated the notion to a receptive American presidential administration and similarly susceptible governments elsewhere that the seemingly isolated terrorist incidents perpetrated by disparate groups scattered across the globe were in fact linked elements of a massive clandestine plot, orchestrated by the Kremlin and implemented by its Warsaw Pact client states, to destroy the Free World.⁴⁹ By the middle of the decade, however, a series of suicide bombings directed mostly against American diplomatic and military targets in the Middle East was focusing attention on the rising threat of state-sponsored terrorism. Consequently, this phenomenon—whereby various renegade foreign governments such as the regimes in Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria became actively involved in sponsoring or commissioning terrorist acts—replaced communist conspiracy theories as the main context within which terrorism was viewed. Terrorism thus became associated with a type of covert or surrogate warfare whereby weaker states could confront larger, more powerful rivals without the risk of retribution.⁵⁰

In the early 1990s the meaning and usage of the term “terrorism” were further blurred by the emergence of two new buzzwords: “narco-terrorism” and the so-called gray area phenomenon.⁵¹ The former term revived the Moscow-orchestrated terrorism conspiracy theories of previous years while introducing the critical new dimension of narcotics trafficking. Thus “narco-terrorism” was defined by one of the concept’s foremost propagators as the “use of drug trafficking to advance the objectives of certain governments and terrorist organizations”—identified as the “Marxist-Leninist regimes” of the Soviet Union, Cuba, Bulgaria, and Nicaragua, among others.⁵² The emphasis on “narco-terrorism” as the latest manifestation of the

communist plot to undermine Western society,⁵³ however, had the unfortunate effect of diverting official attention away from a bona fide emerging trend. To a greater extent than ever in the past, entirely criminal (that is, violent, *economically* motivated) organizations were now forging strategic alliances with terrorist and guerrilla organizations or were themselves employing violence for specifically political ends. The growing power of the Colombian cocaine cartels, their close ties with left-wing terrorist groups in Colombia and Peru, and their repeated attempts to subvert Colombia's electoral process and undermine successive governments constitute perhaps the best-known example of this continuing trend.⁵⁴

Those who drew attention to this "gray area phenomenon" were concerned less with grand conspiracies than with highlighting the increasingly fluid and variable nature of subnational conflict in the post-cold war era. Accordingly, in the 1990s "terrorism" began to be subsumed by some analysts within the "gray area phenomenon." Thus the latter term came to be used to denote "threats to the stability of nation states by non-state actors and non-governmental processes and organizations";⁵⁵ to describe violence affecting "immense regions or urban areas where control has shifted from legitimate governments to new half-political, half-criminal powers";⁵⁶ or simply to group together in one category the range of conflicts across the world that no longer conformed to traditionally accepted notions of war as fighting between the armed forces of two or more established states, but instead involved irregular forces as one or more of the combatants.⁵⁷ Terrorism had shifted its meaning again from an individual phenomenon of subnational violence to one of several elements, or part of a wider pattern, of nonstate conflict.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, inevitably, redefined "terrorism" yet again. On that day, nineteen terrorists belonging to a group calling itself al Qaeda (or al-Qa'ida) hijacked four passenger aircraft soon after they took off from airports in Boston, Newark, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. Two of the planes were then deliberately flown into the twin towers of New York City's World Trade Center. Both structures collapsed shortly afterward. A third aircraft similarly smashed into the Pentagon, where the U.S. Department of Defense is located, severely damaging the southwest portion of that building. Meanwhile, passengers on board the fourth aircraft learned of the other attacks and struggled to subdue the hijackers. In the ensuing melee, the plane spun out of control and crashed into a field in rural Pennsylvania. A total of nearly three thousand people were killed in the attacks.⁵⁸ To put that death toll in perspective, in the entirety of the twentieth century no more than fourteen terrorist incidents had killed more than

one hundred people.⁵⁹ And until 9/11 no terrorist operation had ever killed more than five hundred people.⁶⁰ Among the dead were citizens of some eighty different countries,⁶¹ although the largest number of fatalities by far were U.S. citizens. Indeed, more than twice as many Americans perished on 9/11 than had been killed by terrorists since 1968⁶²—the year acknowledged as marking the advent of modern, international terrorism.

So massive and consequential a terrorist onslaught required nothing less than an equally comprehensive and far-reaching response. “This is a new kind of evil . . . [and we] will rid the world of the evildoers,” President George W. Bush promised just days later. “Our nation was horrified,” he continued, “but it’s not going to be terrorized.”⁶³ Yet when the president addressed a special joint session of the U.S. Congress on September 20, 2001, he repeatedly invoked the word “terror”—that is, the “state of being terrified or greatly frightened,” according to the *OED*’s definition⁶⁴—rather than the specifically political phenomenon “terrorism.” “Our war on terror,” the president famously declared, “begins with al-Qaida, but it does not end there.”⁶⁵ The consequences of his semantic choice, whether deliberate or not, nonetheless proved as portentous as they were significant: heralding a virtually open-ended struggle against anyone and anything that arguably scared or threatened Americans. The range of potential adversaries thus expanded beyond Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda’s leader, and his minions, who, the president explained, “hate us . . . [and] our freedoms,”⁶⁶ now to include “rogue” states arrayed in an “axis of evil” (e.g., Iraq, Iran, and North Korea)⁶⁷ and especially heinous Middle East dictators thought to possess weapons of mass destruction (WMD). As Professor Sir Michael Howard, the world’s leading authority on strategy and military history, later reflected,

President Bush’s declaration of a “war on terror” was generally seen abroad as a rhetorical device to alert the American people to the dangers facing them, rather than as a statement to be taken seriously or literally in terms of international law. But further statements and actions by the Bush Administration have made it clear that the President’s words were intended to be taken literally.⁶⁸

The implications of this policy were clearly demonstrated by the relationship that the president and his advisers believed existed between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. Although White House suspicions that Iraq was somehow behind 9/11 never completely faded,⁶⁹ they were eventually eclipsed by growing concerns about terrorists acquiring WMD from Iraqi stockpiles.⁷⁰ Indeed, it was precisely this fear that President Bush cited to

justify the March 2003 invasion. The Bush administration's conflation of terrorism and WMD was specifically cited by Richard Dearlove, then head of MI-6, Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, in his report to Prime Minister Tony Blair of high-level U.S.-U.K. consultations held in Washington, D.C., seven months before the invasion. "Military action was now seen as inevitable," notes of Dearlove's meeting with the prime minister stated. "Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD."⁷¹ The chain of events that began on 9/11 and the declaration of a "war on terror" that thereafter set America on the path to war with Iraq thus prompted Michael Howard again to note how it was evidently "not enough" for Americans

to be at war with an abstract entity described by their president as "Terror." They need a specific adversary who embodies the spirit of evil against whom national sentiment can be mobilised, as it was mobilised against Hitler in 1941. Osama bin Laden proved too evasive and evanescent a figure to provide the necessary catharsis, but prominent among the usual suspects was Saddam Hussein. There was little evidence to link him with this particular crime, but he was a bad guy, with whom many members of the Bush administration had unfinished business. . . . He was, in short, the most powerful and dangerous figure among the declared enemies of the US, which in itself gave them the right indeed the duty—to destroy him.⁷²

The "war on terror" thus became, in President Bush's infelicitous choice of words, as much a "crusade"⁷³ against evil as it was an unwavering reaction to the multiplicity of new security threats confronting the nation—and therefore accounts for the way terrorism was redefined in the early twenty-first century, according to Stanford University linguist Geoffrey Nunberg, in order to "encompass both the dark forces that threaten 'civilization' and the fears they arouse."⁷⁴

Why Is Terrorism So Difficult to Define?

Not surprisingly, as the meaning and usage of the word have changed over time to accommodate the political vernacular and discourse of each successive era, terrorism has proved increasingly elusive in the face of attempts to construct one consistent definition. At one time, the terrorists themselves were far more cooperative in this endeavor than they are today. The early practitioners didn't mince their words or hide behind the semantic camou-

flage of more anodyne labels such as “freedom fighter” or “urban guerrilla.” The nineteenth-century anarchists, for example, unabashedly proclaimed themselves to be terrorists and frankly proclaimed their tactics to be terrorism.⁷⁵ The members of Narodnaya Volya similarly displayed no qualms in using these same words to describe themselves and their deeds.⁷⁶ Such frankness did not last, however. Although the Jewish terrorist group of the 1940s known as Lehi (the Hebrew acronym for Lohamei Herut Yisrael, the Freedom Fighters for Israel), but more popularly called the Stern Gang after its founder and first leader, Abraham Stern, would admit to its effective use of terrorist tactics, its members never considered themselves to be terrorists.⁷⁷ It is significant, however, that even Lehi, while it may have been far more candid than its latter-day counterparts, chose as the name of the organization not Terrorist Fighters for Israel but the far less pejorative Freedom Fighters for Israel. Similarly, although more than twenty years later the Brazilian revolutionary Carlos Marighela displayed little compunction about openly advocating the use of “terrorist” tactics,⁷⁸ he still insisted on depicting himself and his disciples as “urban guerrillas” rather than “urban terrorists.” Indeed, it is clear from Marighela’s writings that he was well aware of the word’s undesirable connotations and strove to displace them with positive resonances. “The words ‘aggressor’ and ‘terrorist,’” Marighela wrote in his famous *Handbook of Urban Guerrilla War* (also known as the “Mini-Manual”), “no longer mean what they did. Instead of arousing fear or censure, they are a call to action. To be called an aggressor or a terrorist in Brazil is now an honour to any citizen, for it means that he is fighting, with a gun in his hand, against the monstrosity of the present dictatorship and the suffering it causes.”⁷⁹

This trend toward ever more convoluted semantic obfuscations to sidestep terrorism’s pejorative overtones has, if anything, become more entrenched in recent decades. Terrorist organizations almost without exception now regularly select names for themselves that consciously eschew the word “terrorism” in any of its forms. Instead these groups actively seek to evoke images of

- freedom and liberation (e.g., the National Liberation Front, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Freedom for the Basque Homeland);
- armies or other military organizational structures (e.g., the National Military Organization, the Popular Liberation Army, the Fifth Battalion of the Liberation Army);
- actual self-defense movements (e.g., the Afrikaner Resistance Movement, the Shankhill Defence Association, the Organization for the Defence of the Free People, the Jewish Defense Organization);

- righteous vengeance (the Organization for the Oppressed on Earth, the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide, the Palestinian Revenge Organization)

—or else deliberately choose names that are decidedly neutral and therefore bereft of all but the most innocuous suggestions or associations (e.g., the Shining Path, Front Line, al-Dawa (the Call), Alfaro Lives—Damn It!, Kach (Thus), al-Gamat al-Islamiya (the Islamic Organization), the Lantaro Youth Movement, and *especially* al Qaeda (the Arabic word for the “base of operation”⁸⁰ or “foundation”—meaning the base or foundation from which worldwide Islamic revolution can be waged—or, as other translations have it, the “precept” or “method”).⁸¹

What all these examples suggest is that terrorists clearly do not see or regard themselves as others do. “Above all I am a family man,” the archterrorist Carlos, the Jackal, described himself to a French newspaper following his capture in 1994.⁸² Similarly, when the infamous KSM—Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, mastermind of the 9/11 attacks whom bin Laden called simply “al Mukhtar” (Arabic for “the brain”)—was apprehended in March 2003, a photograph of him with his arms around his two young sons was found next to the bed in which he had been sleeping.⁸³ Cast perpetually on the defensive and forced to take up arms to protect themselves and their real or imagined constituents only, terrorists perceive themselves as reluctant warriors, driven by desperation—and lacking any viable alternative—to violence against a repressive state, a predatory rival ethnic or nationalist group, or an unresponsive international order. This perceived characteristic of self-denial also distinguishes the terrorist from other types of political extremists as well as from people similarly involved in illegal, violent avocations. A communist or a revolutionary, for example, would likely readily accept and admit that he is in fact a communist or a revolutionary. Indeed, many would doubtless take particular pride in claiming either of those appellations for themselves. Similarly, even a person engaged in illegal, wholly disreputable, or entirely selfish violent activities, such as robbing banks or carrying out contract killings, would probably admit to being a bank robber or a murderer for hire. The terrorist, by contrast, will *never* acknowledge that he is a terrorist and moreover will go to great lengths to evade and obscure any such inference or connection. Terry Anderson, the American journalist who was held hostage for almost seven years by the Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah, relates a telling conversation he had with one of his guards. The guard had objected to a newspaper article that referred to Hezbollah as terrorists. “We are not terrorists,” he indignantly stated, “we are fighters.” Anderson replied,

"Hajj, you are a terrorist, look it up in the dictionary. You are a terrorist, you may not like the word and if you do not like the word, do not do it."⁸⁴ The terrorist will always argue that it is society or the government or the socio-economic "system" and its laws that are the *real* "terrorists," and moreover that if it were not for this oppression, he would not have felt the need to defend either himself or the population he claims to represent.⁸⁵ Another revealing example of this process of obfuscation-projection may be found in the book *Invisible Armies*, written by Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, the spiritual leader of the Lebanese terrorist group responsible for Anderson's kidnapping. "We don't see ourselves as terrorists," Fadlallah explains, "because we don't believe in terrorism. We don't see resisting the occupier as a terrorist action. We see ourselves as *mujihadeen* [holy warriors] who fight a Holy War for the people."⁸⁶ Indeed, Hezbollah's efforts to distance itself entirely from any terrorist associations and appellations have only intensified in the years since it first entered mainstream Lebanese politics.⁸⁷ Perhaps because it now has thirteen elected members of the Lebanese Parliament, Hezbollah spokespersons persistently argue that it is a bona fide political party, cum "resistance movement."⁸⁸

On one point, at least, everyone agrees: "Terrorism" is a pejorative term.⁸⁹ It is a word with intrinsically negative connotations that is generally applied to one's enemies and opponents, or to those with whom one disagrees and would otherwise prefer to ignore. "What is called terrorism," Brian Jenkins has written, "thus seems to depend on one's point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgement; and if one party can successfully attach the label *terrorist* to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint."⁹⁰ Hence the decision to call someone or label some organization "terrorist" becomes almost unavoidably subjective, depending largely on whether one sympathizes with or opposes the person/group/cause concerned. If one identifies with the victim of the violence, for example, then the act is terrorism. If, however, one identifies with the perpetrator, the violent act is regarded in a more sympathetic, if not positive (or, at the worst, ambivalent) light, and it is not terrorism.

The implications of this associational logic were perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the exchanges between Western and non-Western member states of the United Nations following the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre, in which eleven Israeli athletes were killed. The debate began with the proposal by the UN secretary general, Kurt Waldheim, that the UN should not remain a "mute spectator" to the acts of terrorist violence then occurring throughout the world but should take practical steps that might prevent further bloodshed.⁹¹ While a majority of the UN member states

supported the secretary general, a disputatious minority—including many Arab states and various African and Asian countries—derailed the discussion, arguing (much as Arafat would do two years later in his own address to the General Assembly) that “people who struggle to liberate themselves from foreign oppression and exploitation have the right to use all methods at their disposal, including force.”⁹²

The Third World delegates justified their position with two arguments. First, they claimed that all bona fide liberation movements are invariably decried as “terrorists” by the regimes against which their struggles for freedom are directed. The Nazis, for example, labeled as terrorists the resistance groups opposing Germany’s occupation of their lands, Moulaye el-Hassen, the Mauritanian ambassador, pointed out, just as “all liberation movements are described as terrorists by those who have reduced them to slavery.” Therefore, by condemning “terrorism” the UN was endorsing the power of the strong over the weak and of the established entity over its nonestablished challenger—in effect, acting as the defender of the status quo. According to Chen Chu, the deputy representative of the People’s Republic of China, the UN thus was proposing to deprive “oppressed nations and peoples” of the only effective weapon they had with which to oppose “imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and Israeli Zionism.”⁹³ Second, the Third World delegates argued forcefully that it is not the violence itself that is germane but its “underlying causes”—that is, the “misery, frustration, grievance and despair”—that produce the violent acts.⁹⁴ As the Mauritanian representative again explained, the term “terrorist” could “hardly be held to apply to persons who were denied the most elementary human rights, dignity, freedom and independence, and whose countries objected to foreign occupation.”⁹⁵ When the issue was again raised the following year, Syria objected on the grounds that “the international community is under legal and moral obligation to promote the struggle for liberation and to resist any attempt to depict this struggle as synonymous with terrorism and illegitimate violence.”⁹⁶ The resultant definitional paralysis subsequently throttled UN efforts to make any substantive progress on international cooperation against terrorism beyond very specific agreements on individual aspects of the problem (concerning, for example, diplomats and civil aviation).

The opposite approach, in which identification with the victim determines the classification of a violent act as terrorism, is evident in the conclusions of a parliamentary working group of NATO (an organization comprising long-established, status quo Western states). The final report of the 1989 North Atlantic Assembly’s Subcommittee on Terrorism states: “Murder, kidnapping, arson and other felonious acts constitute criminal behav-

ior, but many non-Western nations have proved reluctant to condemn as terrorist acts what they consider to be struggles of national liberation.”⁹⁷ In this reasoning, the defining characteristic of terrorism is the act of violence itself, not the motivations or justification for or reasons behind it. After decades of debate and resistance, the UN itself finally embraced this rationale by adopting the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings. The convention outlawed the unlawful delivery, placement, discharge, or detonation of an

explosive or other lethal device in, into or against a place of public use, a State or government facility, a public transportation system or an infrastructure facility with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury; or with the intent to cause extensive destruction of such a place, facility or system, where such destruction results in or is likely to result in major economic loss.⁹⁸

It came into force just four months before the 9/11 attacks.⁹⁹

Indeed, this approach has long been espoused by analysts such as Jenkins who argue that terrorism should be defined “by the nature of the act, not by the identity of the perpetrators or the nature of their cause.”¹⁰⁰ But this is not an entirely satisfactory solution either, since it fails to differentiate clearly between violence perpetrated by states and by nonstate entities, such as terrorists. Accordingly, it plays into the hands of terrorists and their apologists who would argue that there is no difference between the “low-tech” terrorist pipe bomb placed in the rubbish bin at a crowded market that wantonly and indiscriminately kills or maims everyone within a radius measured in tens of feet and the “high-tech” precision-guided ordnance dropped by air force fighter-bombers from a height of twenty thousand feet or more that achieves the same wanton and indiscriminate effects on the crowded marketplace far below. This rationale thus equates the random violence inflicted on enemy population centers by military forces—such as the Luftwaffe’s raids on Warsaw and Coventry, the Allied firebombings of Dresden and Tokyo, and the atomic bombs dropped by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War, and indeed the countervalue strategy of the postwar superpowers’ strategic nuclear policy, which deliberately targeted the enemy’s civilian population—with the violence committed by substate entities labeled “terrorists,” since both involve the infliction of death and injury on noncombatants.¹⁰¹ Indeed, this was precisely the point made during the above-mentioned UN debates following the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre by the Cuban representative, who argued that “the methods of

combat used by national liberation movements could not be declared illegal while the policy of terrorism unleashed against certain peoples [by the armed forces of established states] was declared legitimate.”¹⁰²

It is a familiar argument. Terrorists, as we have seen, deliberately cloak themselves in the terminology of military jargon. They consciously portray themselves as *bona fide* (freedom) fighters, if not soldiers, who—though they wear no identifying uniform or insignia—are entitled to treatment as prisoners of war (POWs) if captured and therefore should not be prosecuted as common criminals in ordinary courts of law. Terrorists further argue that, because of their numerical inferiority, far more limited firepower, and paucity of resources compared with an established nation-state’s massive defense and national security apparatus, they have no choice but to operate clandestinely, emerging from the shadows to carry out dramatic (in other words, bloody and destructive) acts of hit-and-run violence in order to attract attention to, and ensure publicity for, themselves and their cause. The bomb in the rubbish bin, in their view, is merely a circumstantially imposed “poor man’s air force”:¹⁰³ the only means with which the terrorist can challenge—and get the attention of—the more powerful state. “How else can we bring pressure to bear on the world?” one of Arafat’s political aides once inquired. “The deaths are regrettable, but they are a fact of war in which innocents have become involved. They are no more innocent than the Palestinian women and children killed by the Israelis and we are ready to carry the war all over the world.”¹⁰⁴

But rationalizations such as these ignore the fact that, even while national armed forces have been responsible for far more death and destruction than terrorists might ever aspire to bring about, there nonetheless is a fundamental qualitative difference between the two types of violence. Even in war there are rules and accepted norms of behavior that prohibit the use of certain types of weapons (for example, hollow-point or “dum-dum” bullets, CS “tear” gas, chemical and biological warfare agents) and proscribe various tactics and outlaw attacks on specific categories of targets. Accordingly, in theory, if not always in practice, the rules of war—as observed from the early seventeenth century when they were first proposed by the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius and subsequently codified in the famous Geneva and Hague Conventions on Warfare of the 1860s, 1899, 1907, and 1949—not only grant civilian noncombatants immunity from attack but also

- prohibit taking civilians as hostages;
- impose regulations governing the treatment of captured or surrendered soldiers (POWs);

- outlaw reprisals against either civilians or POWs;
- recognize neutral territory and the rights of citizens of neutral states; and
- uphold the inviolability of diplomats and other accredited representatives.

Even the most cursory review of terrorist tactics and targets over the past quarter century reveals that terrorists have violated all these rules. They not infrequently have

- taken civilians as hostages, and in some instances then brutally executed them (e.g., the former Italian prime minister Aldo Moro and the German industrialist Hans Martin Schleyer, who, respectively, were taken captive and later murdered by the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction in the 1970s and, more recently, Daniel Pearl, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, and Nicholas Berg, an American businessman, who were kidnapped by radical Islamic terrorists in Pakistan and Iraq, respectively, and grotesquely beheaded);
- similarly abused and murdered kidnapped military officers—even when they were serving on UN-sponsored peacekeeping or truce supervisory missions (e.g., the American Marine Lieutenant Colonel William Higgins, the commander of a UN truce-monitoring detachment, who was abducted by Lebanese Shi'a terrorists in 1989 and subsequently hanged);
- undertaken reprisals against wholly innocent civilians, often in countries far removed from the terrorists' ostensible "theater of operation," thus disdaining any concept of neutral states or the rights of citizens of neutral countries (e.g., the brutal 1986 machine-gun and hand-grenade attack on Turkish Jewish worshipers at an Istanbul synagogue carried out by the Palestinian Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) in retaliation for a recent Israeli raid on a guerrilla base in southern Lebanon); and
- repeatedly attacked embassies and other diplomatic installations (e.g., the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 and in Beirut and Kuwait City in 1983 and 1984, and the mass hostage-taking at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, Peru, in 1996–97), as well as deliberately targeting diplomats and other accredited representatives (e.g., the British ambassador to Uruguay, Sir Geoffrey Jackson, who was kidnapped by leftist terrorists in that country in 1971, and the fifty-two American diplomats taken hostage at the Tehran legation in 1979).

Admittedly, the armed forces of established states have also been guilty of violating some of the same rules of war. However, when these transgressions do occur—when civilians are deliberately and wantonly attacked in war or taken hostage and killed by military forces—the term “war crime” is used to describe such acts and, as imperfect and flawed as both international and national judicial remedies may be, steps nonetheless are often taken to hold the perpetrators accountable for the crimes. By comparison, one of the fundamental *raison d’être* of international terrorism is a refusal to be bound by such rules of warfare and codes of conduct. International terrorism disdains any concept of delimited areas of combat or demarcated battlefields, much less respect for neutral territory. Accordingly, terrorists have repeatedly taken their often parochial struggles to other, sometimes geographically distant, third-party countries and there deliberately enmeshed people completely unconnected with the terrorists’ cause or grievances in violent incidents designed to generate attention and publicity.

The reporting of terrorism by the news media, which have been drawn into the semantic debates that divided the UN in the 1970s and continue to influence all discourse on terrorism, has further contributed to the obfuscation of the terrorist/“freedom fighter” debate, enshrining imprecision and implication as the lingua franca of political violence in the name of objectivity and neutrality. In striving to avoid appearing either partisan or judgmental, the American media, for example, resorted to describing terrorists—often in the same report—as variously “guerrillas,” “gunmen,” “raiders,” “commandos,” and even “soldiers.” A random sample of American newspaper reports of Palestinian terrorist activities between June and December 1973, found in the terrorism archives and database maintained by the RAND Corporation,¹⁰⁵ provides striking illustrations of this practice. Out of eight headlines of articles reporting the same incident, six used the word “guerrillas” and only two used “terrorists” to describe the perpetrators. An interesting pattern was also observed: those accounts that immediately followed a particularly horrific or tragic incident—that is, involving the death and injury of innocent people (in this instance, a 1973 attack on a Pan Am airliner at the Rome airport, in which thirty-two passengers were killed)—tended to describe the perpetrators as “terrorists” and their act as “terrorism” (albeit in the headline in one case only, before reverting to the more neutral terminology of “commando,” “militants,” and “guerrilla attack” in the text) more frequently than did reports of less serious or nonlethal incidents.¹⁰⁶ One *New York Times* editorial, however, was far less restrained than the stories describing the actual incident, describing it as “bloody” and “mindless” and using the words “terrorists” and “terrorism” interchangeably

with “guerrillas” and “extremists.”¹⁰⁷ Only six months previously, however, the same newspaper had run a story about another terrorist attack that completely eschewed the terms “terrorism” and “terrorist,” preferring “guerrillas” and “resistance” (as in “resistance movement”) instead.¹⁰⁸ The *Christian Science Monitor*’s reports of the Rome Pan Am attack similarly avoided “terrorist” and “terrorism” in favor of “guerrillas” and “extremists”;¹⁰⁹ an Associated Press story in the next day’s *Los Angeles Times* also stuck with “guerrillas,”¹¹⁰ while the two *Washington Post* articles on the same incident opted for the terms “commandos” and “guerrillas.”¹¹¹

This slavish devotion to terminological neutrality, which David Rapoport first observed nearly thirty years ago,¹¹² is still in evidence today. A telling illustration of the semantics of terrorism reportage can be found in some of the press coverage of the terrorist violence that afflicted Algeria during the 1990s and claimed the lives of an estimated hundred thousand people. An article appearing in the *International Herald Tribune* (a Paris-based newspaper then published in conjunction with the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*) reported a 1997 incident in Algeria in which thirty people had been killed by perpetrators who were variously described as “terrorists” in the article’s headline, less judgmentally as “extremists” in the lead paragraph, and as the still more ambiguous “Islamic fundamentalists” in the article’s third paragraph.¹¹³ In a country where terrorist-inflicted bloodshed was endemic, one might think that the distinctions between “terrorists,” mere “extremists,” and ordinary “fundamentalists” would be clearer. Equally interesting was the article that appeared on the opposite side of the same page of the newspaper that described the “decades of sporadic *guerrilla* [my emphasis] warfare by the IRA” in Northern Ireland.¹¹⁴ Yet sixty years ago this newspaper apparently had fewer qualms about using the word “terrorists” to describe the two young Jewish men in pre-independence Israel who, while awaiting execution after having been convicted of attacking British military targets, committed suicide.¹¹⁵ Other press accounts of the same period in *The Times* of London and the *Palestine Post* similarly had no difficulties, for example, in describing the 1946 bombing by Jewish terrorists of the British military headquarters and government secretariat located in Jerusalem’s King David Hotel as a “terrorist” act perpetrated by “terrorists.”¹¹⁶ And, in perhaps the most specific application of the term, the communist terrorists against whom the British fought in Malaya throughout the late 1940s and 1950s were routinely referred to as “CTs”—for “Communist terrorists.” As Rapoport warned in the 1970s, “In attempting to correct the abuse of language for political purposes, our journalists may succeed in making language altogether worthless.”¹¹⁷

More recently, the coverage given by the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* to the barricade-and-hostage situation that unfolded at a Beslan, North Ossetia, school in early September 2004 underscored these continuing semantic ambiguities. Even in the post-9/11 era, few terrorist attacks have evoked quite the horror and revulsion that the fifty-two-hour ordeal and its deliberate targeting of children produced. According to official Russian figures, at least 331 hostages—including more than 172 children—were killed, although many believe the actual numbers to be much higher. Yet the perpetrators, an indisputably cruel and ruthless group of Chechen terrorists, were repeatedly described in far more neutral and anodyne terms by both of America's national newspapers of record. The *Washington Post's* initial report of the seizure and its account of the rescue operations, for example, did not use the words "terrorism" and "terrorists" at all, except in the context of direct quotations or statements made by an aide to Russian president Vladimir Putin, various other Russian official spokespersons, or President Bush himself. Instead, a variety of other adjectives were employed in the two articles sampled, including "guerrillas" (seventeen references), "hostage takers" (eleven), "rebels" (six), "fighters" (three), and "separatists" (two).¹¹⁸ The *New York Times's* reporting and rhetorical choices were little different. Admittedly, its first article detailing the incident used the word "terrorist" twice, in both instances independently of quotes or statements made by Russian officials. But more inoffensive terms such as "guerrillas" (seventeen references), "fighters" (nine), "insurgents" (six), "rebels" (six), and "hostage takers" (two) predominated in both this story and the report of the siege's grisly denouement.¹¹⁹ The word "terrorist" again appeared twice in the second piece, but only when quoting Russian president Vladimir Putin and his spokesman.¹²⁰ Indeed, the "unrelenting use of such euphemistic language" in the *Washington Post's* reporting of the Beslan incident prompted one reader to ask in a letter to the editor, "Why can't your editors just identify these people for what they are . . . terrorists?"¹²¹ The *New York Times's* first public editor, Daniel Okrent, devoted a column to the subject after readers similarly complained about the paper's reluctance to use the words "terrorist," "terrorism," and "terror." His explanation was that the *Times* in fact has no policy governing the use of such words—except to eschew them as much possible.¹²²

The cumulative effect of this proclivity toward equivocation is that today there is no one widely accepted or agreed-upon definition for terrorism. Different departments or agencies of even the same government will themselves often have very different definitions for it. The U.S. State Department, for example, uses the definition of terrorism contained in Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f(d):

premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.

In an accompanying footnote is the explanation that:

For purposes of this definition, the term “noncombatant” is interpreted to include, in addition to civilians, military personnel who at the time of the incident are unarmed and/or not on duty. . . . We also consider as acts of terrorism attacks on military installations or on armed military personnel when a state of military hostilities does not exist at the site, such as bombings against US bases in Europe, the Philippines, or elsewhere.¹²³

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as

the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a Government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives,¹²⁴

while the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) states that terrorism is

any activity that involves an act that:

is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources; and . . . must also appear to be intended

(i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.¹²⁵

And the U.S. Department of Defense defines it as

the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological objectives.¹²⁶

Not surprisingly, each of the above definitions reflects the priorities and particular interests of the specific agency involved. The State Department’s emphasis is on the premeditated and planned or calculated

nature of terrorism in contrast to more spontaneous acts of political violence. Its definition is also the only one of the four to emphasize both the ineluctably political nature of terrorism and the perpetrators' fundamental "subnational" characteristic. The State Department's approach is also noteworthy in that it expands the definition of a terrorist act beyond the usual, exclusive focus on civilians to include "noncombatant targets." This broad category encompasses not only assassinations of military attachés and military forces deployed on peacekeeping missions, but also attacks on cafes, discotheques, and other facilities frequented by off-duty service personnel, as well as on military installations and armed personnel—provided that a "state of military hostilities does not exist at the site." Under this rubric, incidents such as the 1983 suicide truck bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks at Beirut International Airport; the similar attack thirteen years later against a U.S. Air Force housing complex in Khobar, Saudi Arabia; and the October 2000 seaborne suicide assault on a U.S. Navy destroyer, the USS *Cole* while it was at anchor in Aden, Yemen, are defined as terrorist acts.¹²⁷ The State Department definition is deficient, however, in failing to consider the psychological dimension of terrorism. Terrorism is as much about the threat of violence as the violent act itself and, accordingly, is deliberately conceived to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the actual target of the act among a wider, watching, "target" audience. "Terrorism," as Jenkins succinctly observed two decades ago, "is theatre."¹²⁸

Given the FBI's mission of investigating and solving crimes—both political (e.g., terrorism) and other—it is not surprising that its definition focuses on different elements. Unlike the State Department's, this definition does address the psychological dimensions of the terrorist act described above, laying stress on terrorism's intimidatory and coercive aspects. The FBI definition also identifies a much broader category of terrorist targets than only "noncombatants," specifying not only governments and their citizens but also inanimate objects, such as private and public property. Accordingly, politically motivated acts of vandalism and sabotage are included, such as attacks on:

- abortion clinics by militant opponents of legalized abortion in the United States;
- retail businesses and stores by anti-globalists and/or anarchists;
- medical research facilities by groups opposing experimentation on animals, such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF); and

- ski resorts, condominium vacation developments, commercial logging operations, or automobile dealerships by radical environmentalists associated with the Earth Liberation Front (ELF).¹²⁹

Although the FBI definition recognizes social alongside political objectives as fundamental terrorist aims, it offers no clear elucidation of the differences between them to explain this distinction. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) definition clearly reflects its mission: concentrating on attacks to critical infrastructure and key national resources that could have grave societal consequences. In this respect, the DHS cites specifically in its definition the threat of “mass destruction,” the better to differentiate and distinguish its responsibilities from those of other agencies.

The Department of Defense definition of terrorism is arguably the most complete of the four. It highlights the terrorist threat as much as the actual act of violence and focuses on terrorism’s targeting of whole societies as well as governments. Curiously, unlike the State Department definition, it does not include the deliberate targeting of individuals for assassination and makes no attempt to distinguish between attacks on combatant and non-combatant military personnel. The Defense Department definition, significantly, also cites the religious and ideological aims of terrorism alongside its fundamental political objectives—but omits the social dimension found in the FBI’s definition.

It is not only individual agencies within the same governmental apparatus that cannot agree on a single definition of terrorism. Experts and other long-established scholars in the field are equally incapable of reaching a consensus. In the first edition of his magisterial survey, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide*,¹³⁰ Alex Schmid devoted more than a hundred pages to examining more than a hundred different definitions of terrorism in an effort to discover a broadly acceptable, reasonably comprehensive explication of the word. Four years and a second edition later, Schmid was no closer to the goal of his quest, conceding in the first sentence of the revised volume that the “search for an adequate definition is still on.”¹³¹ Walter Laqueur despaired of defining terrorism in both editions of his monumental work on the subject, maintaining that it is neither possible to do so nor worthwhile to make the attempt.¹³² “Ten years of debates on typologies and definitions,” he responded to a survey on definitions conducted by Schmid, “have not enhanced our knowledge of the subject to a significant degree.”¹³³ Laqueur’s contention is supported by the twenty-two different word categories occurring in the 109 different definitions that Schmid identified in

his survey (see table 1). At the end of this exhaustive exercise, Schmid asks “whether the above list contains all the elements necessary for a good definition. The answer,” he suggests, “is probably ‘no.’”¹³⁴

If it is impossible to define terrorism, as Laqueur argues, and fruitless to attempt to cobble together a truly comprehensive definition, as Schmid admits, are we to conclude that terrorism is impervious to precise, much less accurate definition? Not entirely. If we cannot define terrorism, then we can at least usefully distinguish it from other types of violence and identify the characteristics that make terrorism the distinct phenomenon of political violence that it is.

TABLE 1 Frequencies of definitional elements in 109 definitions of “terrorism”

<i>Element</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
1 Violence, force	83.5
2 Political	65
3 Fear, terror emphasized	51
4 Threat	47
5 (Psychological) effects and (anticipated) reactions	41.5
6 Victim-target differentiation	37.5
7 Purposive, planned, systematic, organized action	32
8 Method of combat, strategy, tactic	30.5
9 Extranormality, in breach of accepted rules, without humanitarian constraints	30
10 Coercion, extortion, induction of compliance	28
11 Publicity aspect	21.5
12 Arbitrariness; impersonal, random character; indiscrimination	21
13 Civilians, noncombatants, neutrals, outsiders as victims	17.5
14 Intimidation	17
15 Innocence of victims emphasized	15.5
16 Group, movement, organization as perpetrator	14
17 Symbolic aspect, demonstration to others	13.5
18 Incalculability, unpredictability, unexpectedness of occurrence of violence	9
19 Clandestine, covert nature	9
20 Repetitiveness; serial or campaign character of violence	7
21 Criminal	6
22 Demands made on third parties	4

Source: Alex P. Schmid, Albert J. Jongman, et al., *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1988), pp. 5–6.

Distinctions as a Path to Definition

Guerrilla warfare and insurgency are good places to start. Terrorism is often confused or equated with, or treated as synonymous with, guerrilla warfare and insurgency. This is not entirely surprising, since guerrillas and insurgents often employ the same tactics (assassination, kidnapping, hit-and-run attack, bombings of public gathering places, hostage-taking, etc.) for the same purposes (to intimidate or coerce, thereby affecting behavior through the arousal of fear) as terrorists. In addition, terrorists as well as guerrillas and insurgents wear neither uniform nor identifying insignia and thus are often indistinguishable from noncombatants. However, despite the inclination to lump terrorists, guerrillas, and insurgents into the same catchall category of “irregulars,” there are nonetheless fundamental differences among the three. “Guerrilla,” for example, in its most widely accepted usage, is taken to refer to a numerically larger group of armed individuals,¹³⁵ who operate as a military unit, attack enemy military forces, and seize and hold territory (even if only ephemerally during daylight hours), while also exercising some form of sovereignty or control over a defined geographical area and its population. “Insurgents” share these same characteristics; however, their strategy and operations transcend hit-and-run attacks to embrace what in the past has variously been called “revolutionary guerrilla warfare,”¹³⁶ “modern revolutionary warfare,” or “people’s war”¹³⁷ but is today commonly termed “insurgency.” Thus, in addition to the irregular military tactics that characterize guerrilla operations, insurgencies typically involve coordinated informational (e.g., propaganda) and psychological warfare efforts designed to mobilize popular support in a struggle against an established national government, imperialist power, or foreign occupying force.¹³⁸ Terrorists, however, do not function in the open as armed units, generally do not attempt to seize or hold territory, deliberately avoid engaging enemy military forces in combat, are constrained both numerically and logistically from undertaking concerted mass political mobilization efforts, and exercise no direct control or governance over a populace at either the local or the national level.¹³⁹

It should be emphasized that none of these are pure categories and considerable overlap exists. Established terrorist groups like Hezbollah, FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or Tamil Tigers), for example, are also often described as guerrilla movements because of their size, tactics, and control over territory and populace. Indeed, nearly a third of the thirty-seven

groups on the U.S. State Department's "Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations" list could just as easily be categorized as guerrillas.¹⁴⁰ The ongoing insurgency in Iraq has further contributed to this semantic confusion. The 2003 edition of the State Department's *Global Patterns of Terrorism* specifically cited the challenge of making meaningful distinctions between these categories, lamenting how the "line between insurgency and terrorism has become increasingly blurred as attacks on civilian targets have become more common."¹⁴¹ Generally, the State Department considers attacks against U.S. and coalition military forces as insurgent operations and incidents such as the August 2003 suicide vehicle-borne bombings of the UN headquarters in Baghdad and the Jordanian embassy in that city, the assassinations of Japanese diplomats, and kidnapping and murder of aid workers and civilian contractors as terrorist attacks.¹⁴² The definitional rule of thumb therefore is that secular Ba'athist Party loyalists and other former regime elements who stage guerrilla-like hit-and-run assaults or carry out attacks using roadside IEDs (improvised explosive devices) are deemed "insurgents," while foreign jihadists and domestic Islamic extremists who belong to groups like al Qaeda in Mesopotamia,¹⁴³ led by Abu Musab Zarqawi, and who are responsible for most of the suicide attacks and the videotaped beheading of hostages, are labeled terrorists.

It is also useful to distinguish terrorists from ordinary criminals. Like terrorists, criminals use violence as a means to attain a specific end. However, while the violent act itself may be similar—kidnapping, shooting, and arson, for example—the purpose or motivation clearly is different. Whether the criminal employs violence as a means to obtain money, to acquire material goods, or to kill or injure a specific victim for pay, he is acting primarily for selfish, personal motivations (usually material gain). Moreover, unlike terrorism, the ordinary criminal's violent act is not designed or intended to have consequences or create psychological repercussions beyond the act itself. The criminal may of course use some short-term act of violence to "terrorize" his victim, such as waving a gun in the face of a bank clerk during a robbery in order to ensure the clerk's expeditious compliance. In these instances, however, the bank robber is conveying no "message" (political or otherwise) through his act of violence beyond facilitating the rapid handing over of his "loot." The criminal's act therefore is not meant to have any effect reaching beyond either the incident itself or the immediate victim. Further, the violence is neither conceived nor intended to convey any message to anyone other than the bank clerk himself, whose rapid cooperation is the robber's only objective. Perhaps most fundamentally, the criminal is not concerned with influencing or affecting public opinion; he simply wants to

abscond with his money or accomplish his mercenary task in the quickest and easiest way possible so that he may reap his reward and enjoy the fruits of his labors. By contrast, the fundamental aim of the terrorist's violence is ultimately to change "the system"—about which the ordinary criminal, of course, couldn't care less.¹⁴⁴

The terrorist is also very different from the lunatic assassin, who may use identical tactics (e.g., shooting, bombing) and perhaps even seeks the same objective (e.g., the death of a political figure). However, while the tactics and targets of terrorists and lone assassins are often identical, their purpose is different. Whereas the terrorist's goal is again ineluctably *political* (to change or fundamentally alter a political system through his violent act), the lunatic assassin's goal is more often intrinsically idiosyncratic, completely egocentric and deeply personal. John Hinckley, who tried to kill President Reagan in 1981 to impress the actress Jodie Foster, is a case in point. He acted not from political motivation or ideological conviction but to fulfill some profound personal quest (killing the president to impress his screen idol). Such entirely *apolitical* motivations can in no way be compared to the rationalizations used by the Narodnaya Volya to justify its campaign of tyrannicide against the czar and his minions, nor even to the Irish Republican Army's efforts to assassinate Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher or her successor, John Major, in hopes of dramatically changing British policy toward Northern Ireland. Further, just as one person cannot credibly claim to be a political party, so a lone individual cannot be considered to constitute a terrorist group. In this respect, even though Sirhan Sirhan's assassination of presidential candidate and U.S. senator Robert Kennedy in 1968 had a political motive (to protest against U.S. support for Israel), it is debatable whether the murder should be defined as a terrorist act since Sirhan belonged to no organized political group and there is no evidence that he was directly influenced or inspired by an identifiable political or terrorist movement. Rather, Sirhan acted entirely on his own, out of deep personal frustration and a profound animus.¹⁴⁵

Finally, the point should be emphasized that, unlike the ordinary criminal or the lunatic assassin, the terrorist is not pursuing purely egocentric goals; he is not driven by the wish to line his own pocket or satisfy some personal need or grievance. The terrorist is fundamentally an *altruist*: he believes that he is serving a "good" cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency—whether real or imagined—that the terrorist and his organization purport to represent. The criminal, by comparison, serves no cause at all, just his own personal aggrandizement and material satiation. Indeed, a "terrorist without a cause (at least in his own mind)," Konrad Kellen has argued,

“is not a terrorist.”¹⁴⁶ Yet the possession or identification of a cause is not a sufficient criterion for labeling someone a terrorist. In this key respect, the difference between terrorists and political extremists is clear. Many people, of course, harbor all sorts of radical and extreme beliefs and opinions, and many of them belong to radical or even illegal or proscribed political organizations. However, if they do not use violence in the pursuit of their beliefs, they cannot be considered terrorists. The terrorist is fundamentally a *violent intellectual*, prepared to use and, indeed, committed to using force in the attainment of his goals.

In the past, terrorism was arguably easier to define than it is today. To qualify as terrorism, violence had to be perpetrated by an individual acting at the behest of or on the behalf of some existent organizational entity or movement with at least some conspiratorial structure and identifiable chain of command. This criterion, however, is no longer sufficient. In recent years, a variety of terrorist movements have increasingly adopted a strategy of “leaderless networks” in order to thwart law enforcement and intelligence agency efforts to penetrate them.¹⁴⁷ Craig Rosebraugh, the publicist for a radical environmentalist group calling itself the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), described the movement in a 2001 interview as a deliberately conceived “series of cells across the country with no chain of command and no membership roll . . . only a shared philosophy.” It is designed this way, he continued, so that “there’s no central leadership where [the authorities] can go and knock off the top guy and [the movement then] will be defunct.”¹⁴⁸ Indeed, an ELF recruitment video narrated by Rosebraugh advises “individuals interested in becoming active in the Earth Liberation Front to . . . form your own close-knit autonomous cells made of trustworthy and sincere people. Remember, the ELF and each cell within it are anonymous not only to one another but to the general public.”¹⁴⁹ As a senior FBI official conceded, the ELF is “not a group you can put your fingers on” and thus is extremely difficult to infiltrate.¹⁵⁰

This type of networked adversary is a new and different breed of terrorist entity to which traditional organizational constructs and definitions do not neatly apply. It is populated by individuals who are ideologically motivated, inspired, and animated by a movement or a leader, but who neither formally belong to a specific, identifiable terrorist group nor directly follow orders issued by its leadership and are therefore outside any established chain of command. It is a structure and approach that al Qaeda has also sought to implement. Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden’s deputy and al Qaeda’s chief theoretician, extolled this strategy in his seminal clarion call to jihad (Arabic for “striving,” but also “holy war”), *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*:

Meditations on the Jihadist Movement. The chapter titled “Small Groups Could Frighten the Americans” explains:

Tracking down Americans and the Jews is not impossible. Killing them with a single bullet, a stab, or a device made up of a popular mix of explosives or hitting them with an iron rod is not impossible. Burning down their property with Molotov cocktails is not difficult. With the available means, small groups could prove to be a frightening horror for the Americans and the Jews.¹⁵¹

Whether termed “leaderless resistance,” “phantom cell networks,” “autonomous leadership units,”¹⁵² “autonomous cells,” a “network of networks,”¹⁵³ or “lone wolves,” this new conflict paradigm conforms to what John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt call “netwar”:

an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels, short of traditional military warfare, in which the protagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies attuned to the information age. These protagonists are likely to consist of dispersed organizations, small groups, and individuals who communicate, coordinate, and conduct their campaigns in an internetted manner, often without precise central command.¹⁵⁴

Unlike the hierarchical, pyramidal structure that typified terrorist groups of the past, this new type of organization is looser, flatter, more linear. Although there is a leadership of sorts, its role may be more titular than actual, with less a direct command and control relationship than a mostly inspirational and motivational one. “The organizational structure,” Arquilla and Ronfeldt explain,

is quite flat. There is no single central leader or commander; the network as a whole (but not necessarily each node) has little to no hierarchy. There may be multiple leaders. Decisionmaking and operations are decentralized and depend on consultative consensus-building that allows for local initiative and autonomy. The design is both acephalous (headless) and polycephalous (Hydra-headed)—it has not precise heart or head, although not all nodes may be “created equal.”¹⁵⁵

As part of this “leaderless” strategy, autonomous local terrorist cells plan and execute attacks independently of one another or of any central command

authority, but through their individual terrorist efforts seek the eventual attainment of a terrorist organization or movement's wider goals. Although these ad hoc terrorist cells and lone individuals may be less sophisticated and therefore less capable than their more professional, trained counterparts who are members of actual established terrorist groups, these "amateur" terrorists can be just as bloody-minded. A recent FBI strategic planning document, for instance, describes lone wolves as the "most significant domestic terrorism threat" that the United States faces. "They typically draw ideological inspiration from formal terrorist organizations," the 2004–09 plan states, "but operate on the fringes of those movements. Despite their ad hoc nature and generally limited resources, they can mount high-profile, extremely destructive attacks, and their operational planning is often difficult to detect."¹⁵⁶

Conclusion

By distinguishing terrorists from other types of criminals and irregular fighters and terrorism from other forms of crime and irregular warfare, we come to appreciate that terrorism is

- ineluctably political in aims and motives;
- violent—or, equally important, threatens violence;
- designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target;
- conducted *either* by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia) or by individuals or a small collection of individuals directly influenced, motivated, or inspired by the ideological aims or example of some existent terrorist movement and/or its leaders; and
- perpetrated by a subnational group or nonstate entity.

We may therefore now attempt to define terrorism as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change. All terrorist acts involve violence or the threat of violence. Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider "target audience" that might include a rival ethnic or religious group,

an entire country, a national government or political party, or public opinion in general. Terrorism is designed to create power where there is none or to consolidate power where there is very little. Through the publicity generated by their violence, terrorists seek to obtain the leverage, influence, and power they otherwise lack to effect political change on either a local or an international scale.