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A Thorn by any other Name: Definitions, Typologies, and Various Explanations for Terrorism

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Abstract- An ancient Chinese parable tells of a poor young farmer who lost his only possession: The horse that he had inherited from his father. The members of the village visited the poor farmer and expressed their condolences for his loss.

"How do you know that losing my horse was a misfortune?"

Sure enough, about a week later the horse returned with a healthy young mare as its wife. The citizens of the village were shocked, and they all went to visit the farmer to congratulate him on his good fortune.

"How do you know that gaining the mare is good fortune?"

Again, the young farmer's words rang true. About two weeks later, as he was breaking the mare, she threw him and he broke his leg. All the people of the village gathered around his bed to console him for his tragedy. "How do you know that breaking my leg was a tragedy?.

Later that month, the Japanese invaded. The emperor sent emissaries to every village to find healthy young men. All the young men of the village were sent to the front except the young farmer whose leg had not yet healed. None of the young men returned…all were killed in battle.

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ATHORNBYANYOTHERNAMEDEFINITIONSTYPOLOGIESANDVARIOUS EXPLANATIONSFORTERRORISM

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And so it is with terrorism. We see violence on the news and just accept that it is what the mainstream media and politicians tell us— never once considering that it may be something else entirely.

I. Introduction

This article addresses the many challenges faced by academics and policymakers alike when attempting to define terrorism, categorize it, and identify its causes. The article begins with a brief discussion of the problem. Next it evaluates Alex Schmid's attempt to arrive at a consensus on the various elements included in various definitions of terrorism. From there, the article examines the four main approaches to defining terrorism. While it is not possible to explicitly discuss every definition, typology and suggested cause of terrorism within the space allotted, the main theoretical constructs are represented. The article concludes that a great majority of the various efforts to define terrorism all largely share a common shortcoming—namely that they approach the definition of terrorism deductively rather than inductively. This approach creates several definitional problems because the lion's share of the suspected causes of terrorism focus on the actor, the ideology of the actor or the deed itself. As such, the definition of terrorism often becomes politicized.

In fact, Silke (2014) suggests that the concept of terrorism is so difficult to define precisely because the term is so politically charged. Thus, if terrorism is defined as violence committed by non-state actors, state terrorism is excluded by definition. Likewise, if terrorism is defined as violence committed against innocent noncombatants, who decides whether one is innocent and whether he or she is a noncombatant? Finally, when terrorism is associated with certain ideologies, such blatant politicization creates the opportunity for actors to justify their own violence as necessary (perhaps even heroic) while condemning their enemies as "terrorists."

Given the political climate created by the U.S.-led Global War on Terror (GWOT), some basic international consensus concerning what constitutes terrorism versus other forms of violence would be extremely beneficial (Richards 2014). This sentiment is particularly true regarding the effort to distinguish between terrorism and the various categories of unconventional warfare.

By relegating irregular warfare to the ungoverned spaces outside the civilized realm of inter-state warfare, strategic theorists have clung to antiquated battle plans and outdated realities (Sitaraman 2009;Honig 2015). Meanwhile, terrorism scholars and policymakers alike have been busy creating a preserve for the irrational, the unpredictable and the inhuman…a jungle where only the most marginalized, debased and immoral creatures dwell. In the following section, I will examine this concept further.

a) Welcome to the Jungle

The title of this section refers to Upton Sinclair's classic 1906 novel depicting the harsh economic, cultural and institutional realities of life for immigrants in Chicago at the turn of the century. These same realities still exist on a global scale, and more often than not (particularly with the growing migrant crisis), they are cited as potential root causes of terrorism. The explosion of multidisciplinary literature in terrorism studies, while positive in many respects, has also

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contributed to what appears at face value to be a very disjointed and chaotic body of literature- what Ramsay (2015, p. 212) calls a "cacophony of competing definitions." For example, there are over 200 definitions of terrorism currently in existence in the broader terrorism literature (Jackson 2010).

A bit of etymology is in order. First of all, the word "terrorist" is not a noun. It is an adjective, but it does not describe any particular person or organization. Nor does it describe a certain type of violence. Any violence can constitute an act of terrorism. What defines terrorism is not the type of violence employed, but the strategic objective behind the violence. By strategic objective, I donot mean motive. A strategic goal is *what* an actor hopes to accomplish. Motive is *why* the actor wishes to accomplish it. It may seem like I am splitting hairs, but the distinction is an important one. It can be very difficult to establish motive with any degree of certainty. However, most violent actors tend to publicize their strategic goals. Finally, because terrorism is defined by the strategic objective of the actor (and not the actor, the actor's ideology or the violence itself), it can be employed by virtually anyone as well as against a variety of actors. This distinction makes it much harder to politicize the concept.

As a terrorism scholar, I employ strategic theory to better understand the goal(s) of those I study. Strategic theory, in turn, requires an in-depth understanding of the individuals or groups under examination. One side of this coin is comprised of objective fact such as the historical and political context in which the violence occurs as well as the perpetrator's socio-economic position within that context. Objective fact only paints half of the picture, however.

Often we can glean enough information from the historical and political context to determine what an actor's strategic goal is, but we're still left guessing as to other important considerations. The opposite side of the coin is subjective in nature, requiring insight concerning how an actor views itself and those around it. For example, al Qaeda and Islamic State share the same strategic goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate yet they employ very different tactics in pursuit of this goal. They also target different victims. Why?

To answer this question we require more subjective information to shed light in the shadows. It is only by attempting to view these actors and the world through their eyes rather than through our own that we can begin to see a more complete picture.

A component of this analysis is the theory of perception of the other. Strategy is the use of one's resources towards the attainment of one's goals. Therefore, how an actor perceives its own resources vis-a-vis the resources of another plays as large a role as the strategic goal itself. Perception also plays a huge role in both the decision to engage in violence and in the way targets and victims respond.

When defining terrorism, it is absolutely crucial to keep in mind that terrorism is a strategy to be countered, and not an enemy to be defeated (Crocker 2005; Neumann and Smith 2005). Terrorism is just one of several means employed to obtain a desired political end. As such, it can be carried out in a wide variety of ways and by a wide variety of actors—including states (Rummel 1998).[1] As Neumann and Smith (2005) aptly contest, terrorism is not always a weapon of the weak, nor is it always employed by illegitimate actors.

However, Washington's GWOT and the aid it offers those who join it has greatly exacerbated the misuse of the term to denounce one's political opponents. The obvious cure for this malady is to remove the stigma associated with the label "terrorist." This articles suggests that the best way to accomplish this goal is to eliminate those subjective elements of the definition that lend to the politicization of the term—namely those that focus on the actor, the ideology of the actor and the deed itself. This article also argues that it is imperative that we arrive at a uniform and objective definition of terrorism.

As Smith (2005 p.29) so aptly states, "if one cannot define and articulate precisely the object of one's inquiry, then plainly the effort to describe the essence of a particular kind of strategic practice is likely to be flawed." Speaking of terrorism, Stern (2000, pp. 12-13) states that the "definition inevitably determines the kind of data we collect and analyze, which in turn influences our understanding of trends and our prediction about the future…How we define it profoundly influences how we respond to it." Therefore, it behooves us, whenever possible, to distinguish between terrorism and other types of violence.

Sánchez-Cuenca (2014) laments that scholars have collected more concrete knowledge about interstate war, civil war, genocide and ethnic conflict than they have about terrorism and blames this shortcoming on the ambiguity of the concept. Similarly, Wilkinson (1974) contends that there is not even a theory of political instability or civil violence, much less a theory of terrorism. Laqueur (1977a) goes even further to suggest that there is no reason to assume a connection between instability, civil violence and terrorism.

Levitt (1986) compares the endeavor to arrive at a common definition of terrorism to the quest for the Holy Grail. The past four or five decades have witnessed an explosion of multidisciplinary literature in terrorism studies, spanning the fields of political science, criminology, sociology, media studies, history, psychology and many others.

Silke (2008) estimates that in the English language alone, a new book is published with terrorism

[1] When compared with the violence perpetrated by states (Stalin killed 42 million, Mao killed 37 million and Hitler killed 20 million), non-state actors pale in comparison(Rummel 1998).

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in the title every six hours. Likewise, Neumann and Smith (2005, p. 571) observe that, particularly since September 11, 2001 (9/11), there has been a "flood of (often forgettable) books" on the subject. In the following section, I will evaluate one particular response to this dilemma.

b) Consensus or Coincidence?

In 1983, Alex Schmid attempted to make sense of the deluge of data that, even back then, was inundating the field. He compiled 109 different definitions of terrorism employed by leading academics in the field between 1936 and 1980. From this survey data, Schmid (1983) identified 22 separate definitional elements of terrorism and observed that definitions vary regarding which of these 22 elements are incorporated and which are left out (see Table 1).

Table 1: 22: Definitional Elements of Terrorism

Element	% of responses
Violence, force	83.5
Political	65
Fear, terror emphasized	51
Threat	47
Psychological effects and (anticipated) reactions	41.5
Victim-target differentiation	37.5
Purposive, planned, systematic, organized action	32
Method of combat	30.5
Extra-normality, breach of accepted rules, without humanitarian constraints	30
Coercion, extortion, induction of compliance	28
Publicity aspect	21.5
Arbitrariness	21
Civilians, non-combatants, neutrals, outsiders as victims	17.5
Intimidation	17
Innocence of victims emphasized	15.5
Group, movement, organization as perpetrator	14
Symbolic aspect, demonstration to others	13.5
Incalculability, unpredictability, unexpectedness of occurrence of violence	9
Clandestine, covert nature	9
Repetitiveness, serial or campaign character of violence	7
Criminal	6
Demands made on third parties	4

Schmid and Jongman (1988).

Based upon the results of this survey, Schmid proposed the following definition which incorporates 16 of the 22 elements identified above:

> Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby—in contrast to assassination—the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human targets of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorists, (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion or propaganda is primarily sought (Schmid and Jongman 1988, p. 28).[2]

Schmid's seminal work inspired a number of subsequent studies which attempted to arrive at a consensus (which of the 22 elements are most commonly included in various definitions of terrorism). One such study examined 73 definitions of terrorism extrapolated from 55 articles appearing in three major journals in the field of terrorism studies: *Terrorism, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* and *Terrorism and Political Violence*(Weinburg, et. al., 2004).The authors found that the main difference between Schmid' soriginal survey and their own study was the comparative lack of the psychological element among the definitions appearing in the journals (5.5%) as opposed to Schmid's original 1985 survey (45.5%) even though a similar percentage of psychologists were represented in both samples.

[2] So many scholars have cited Jongman and Schmid's work that it has become both a scholarly necessity for any comprehensive literature review and redundant at the same time. See for example Badey (1998); Ganor (2002); Crenshaw (2010); Chesney et al. (2011).

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Criticism of the consensus approach is rather extensive (Sederberg, 1991; Badey, 1998; Ramsay, 2015). Schmid's basic reasoning supposes that consensus regarding the definition of terrorism can be reached by including as many of the 22 elements as possible. But there are some real problems with this approach. Of the 22 elements Schmidentified, only six appeared in more than 30% of the definitions and only three appeared in 50% or more. The remaining 14 elements appeared substantially less often. These numbers hardly comprise a consensus. The question that should concern any serious scholar is why? Were they simply neglected to be added, or were they deliberately left out of the definition. If the answer is the latter, then simply combining all 22 elements into a single definition is problematic at best.

Furthermore, several of Schmid's elements are highly subjective and therefore open to interpretation. For example, what is the definition of "noncombatant?" How does one determine "innocence?" Other elements are interrelated, and therefore difficult to parse out.The subjective nature of Schmid's elements combined with the fact that they are not mutually exclusive has gained almost as much scholarly attention as his study has. Finally, the consensus approach to defining terrorism is very general and vague—calling to mind Sartori's (1970) now classic observation that the more general and abstract a concept, the less clear its attributes and properties.

Therefore, while it is true that Schmid identified 22 elements that are commonly included in the definition of terrorism, one has to question the usefulness of such information. The simple fact of the matter is that we are still left with a diverse assortment of definitions—an example par excellence of the blind men's elephant (Silke, 1996). All contain elements of truth, however, they have not brought us any closer to a true consensus on the phenomenon. Definitions of terrorism range from the minimalist, but highly-regarded characterization, "terrorism is theater," offered by Jenkins (1985) to the convoluted amalgamation of the 109 definitions referred to above.

From just these two extreme examples, one can see how arduous the effort to define terrorism has become. The United States, for example, faced tremendous opposition from several European states for its labeling of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization primarily because they insist on a more precise definition (Norton 2007a). Clearly, a more uniform definition is desirable. However, to date such a definition remains beyond our reach.

Interestingly, Ramsay (2015) argues that the scholarly debate over a lack of consensus on the definition of terrorism is largely exaggerated. According to Ramsay, the debate is "premised on unrealistic assumptions about what level of scholarly agreement can be expected on any key social or political concept." Ramsay's point is certainly nothing new, however. Acknowledging that "a comprehensive definition of terrorism . . .does not exist nor will it be found in the foreseeable future," Laqueur (1977b,p. 5) went on to insist that "To argue that terrorism cannot be studied without such a definition is manifestly absurd."

Senechaldela Roche disagrees. "Without a useful definition of terrorism, a theory of the subject is not even possible" (Senechaldela Roche, 2004. p. 1). While conceding that any simple definition of terrorism is inconsistent with human nature itself, Gibbs nevertheless also insists that a comprehensive definition is necessary if we are to understand the phenomenon. "A definition of terrorism must promise empirical applicability and facilitate recognition of logical connections and possible empirical associations" (Gibbs, 1989, p. 339). To make his point, Gibbs asks whether JFK's assassination should be defined as an act of terrorism. Widespread disagreement over the answer to this question is enlightening.

Inconsistencies in the definition of terrorism continue to plague global governance. For example, the European Union (EU) has established a rather comprehensive definition of terrorism while the United Nations (UN) has not (Tiefenbrun 2002; Rosand 2003; Keohane 2005; Saul 2005).[3] Furthermore, while terrorism is not explicitly listed as an offence under International Criminal Court (ICC) statutes, Title 22 of the U.S. Code Section 2656f(d)very specifically defines terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents(Sampson and Onuoha 2011).

The lack of consensus over what constitutes terrorism also causes discrepancies regarding data collection and contradictions in the actual number of terrorist incidents that have occurred. A quick look at the Global Terrorism Database, for instance, lists Burkina Faso as having had five separate incidents of terrorism since independence with a total of three fatalities and two injuries (GTD 2016a), and Ghana as having 25 separate incidents of terrorism since independence with a total of 31 fatalities and 25 injuries (GTD 2016b). Meanwhile, Rand's Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents and Maplecroft's Terrorism Index both record zero incidents for either country (RDWTI 2016; Maplecroft 2011). We cannot contribute this disparity to a simple distinction between global and domestic terrorism as the indices above report both.

Finally, this ambiguity leaves room for discrepancies when prosecuting acts of terrorism. Amnesty International (AI) has criticized the United Kingdom's Terrorism Act 2000; Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005;

[3] A 20-year-old draft of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism defines terrorism but has not been adopted (Hmoud 2006).

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Terrorism Act 2006; and Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 on the basis that all allow for potential human rights violations. For instance, AI claims that the definition of terrorism in the Terrorism Act 2000 is too broad and potentially allows for the prosecution of individuals who are merely exercising their rights as protected under international law (AI 2010).

One response to these issues has been growing interest in the field of critical terrorism studies (e.g. Chomsky and Herman 1979; George 1991; Zulaika and Douglass 1996 & 2008; Jackson 2005b, 2007, 2008 & 2010; Blakeley 2007; Gunning 2007a; McDonald 2007; Booth 2008; Burke 2008; Hülsse and Spencer 2008; Jarvis 2009; Joseph 2009; Sluka 2009; Altheide 2010; Bryan 2012; Ramsay 2015; Solomon 2015) as well as reactions to it (e.g. Horgan& Boyle 2008; Weinberg and Eubank 2008; Egerton 2009; Jones and Smith 2009; Stokes 2009; Lutz 2011).[4]

Maintaining that terrorism is as much a social construct as it is a physical act, critical terrorism studies (CTS) embraces terrorism from a much broader sociological and historical perspective than most mainstream orthodox approaches. Focusing on the unequal distribution of power and resources and the hegemony of the West, CTS explores the multi-causality of terrorism in all its complexity (Hocking 1984; Jackson 2007; Walklate and Mythen 2014; Solomon 2015).

CTS also challenges the epistemological and ontological assumptions made by orthodox terrorism scholars. Namely CTS opposes the state-centric perspective of most mainstream approaches to terrorism studies and instead advocates the emancipation of people from both physical and social constraints.[5] McDonald (2007) argues that by focusing on emancipation, CTS invites dialogue that has the potential to both minimize non-state actor violence as well as violent state responses.[6]

Furthermore, CTS generally insists that any discussion of terrorism must be interdisciplinary in scope, considering specific relevant social, political, historical and ideological power structures in order to truly understand why actors choose violence over the status quo (Gunning 2007a; Booth 2008). CTS also acknowledges the subjective nature of knowledge and rejects the default to superficial quick fixes in lieu of more lasting solutions.

Africa offers a classic example. As Solomon (2015, p. 224) observes, "the legitimacy of the political elites in Abuja, Bamako or Mogadishu never comes under scrutiny in traditional terrorism studies—rather the focus is on Boko Haram, Ansar Dine and Al Shabab entirely." However quick fixes do not address the underlying issues, which often times have as much to do with the regime as they do the actors opposing it.

Finally, CTS opposes any definition of terrorism that empowers elites, marginalizes women and other vulnerable populations, neglects key areas of study (such as states) and perpetuates Eurocentric or masculinized constructions of knowledge. For instance, Jackson (2005a) notes that the term, 'war on terror' is value-laden and frames war as something desirable.

As Gunning (2007b) puts it, "a critical turn within terrorism studies is necessary" because the orthodox approach often produces an "a-historical, de-politicized, state-centric account of 'terrorism' that relies heavily on secondary sources and replicates knowledge that by and large reinforces the status quo." In other words, CTS scrutinizes orthodox terrorism literature, the discourse it generates and the institutions that produce it (Joseph 2009). On the other hand, Gunning (2007b, p.237) also insists that CTS needs to acknowledge the expertise of many traditional terrorism scholars and, to be inclusive, it needs to converge with the "more rigorous traditional, problem-solving perspectives."

Richard Jackson (2010) is highly critical of the current state of terrorism studies, and he advocates (among other things) a less subjective definition. Observing that many common definitions of terrorism include components such as illegitimate violence committed against innocent civilians intended to terrify a group of people toward the advancement of a political goal, Jackson argues that the subjective nature of terms such as illegitimate, innocent, intended, and political perpetuate the conceptual incoherence so common among definitions of terrorism.

For example, Rapoport and Alexander (1982) define terrorism as the threat or use of violence intended to coerce a group toward a political, religious or ideological end. This definition is one of the more objective descriptions of terrorism, but still it possesses ambiguous terminology.

The problem, as Jackson sees it, lays not in the definitions of terrorism but in the very nature of terrorism itself. Jackson argues that terrorism cannot be objectively defined as it is a socially constructed concept. To bolster his position, Jackson points to Nobel Peace Prize winners Nelson Mandela, Menachim Begin, Yassir Arafat, and Sean McBride—all once denounced as terrorists—as examples of the ontological instability of the phenomenon.

[4] Lutz (2011) offers a balanced discussion regarding the claims made by critical terrorism scholars concerning the narrow, ethnocentric, non-state actor focus of traditional terrorism studies. See also Jones and Smith (2009) who conclude that the critical approach is obscure and pedantic.

[5] See for example, Toros and Gunning (2009) who advocate a shift from focusing on the security of the state to the security of individuals, families and communities. See also Herring (2008) who in addition to advocating for a more emancipatory practice, calls for minimizing the use of knowledge to maintain the hegemony of powerful elites and therefore, the status quo.

[6] Buzan (2006) criticizes the Bush administration for its zero-sum approach to counterterrorism because it leaves no room for dialogue or positive-sum alternatives.

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A similar point can be made concerning the Afghan *mujahidin*, who were widely described as freedom fighters in the 1980s, but later became known as Islamic terrorists (Livingston 1994).[7] Clearly, no group considers itself a terrorist organization, which is perhaps the best example of the subjectivity of the term. In the words of Eqbal Ahmad (2011, pp. 12-13), "The terrorist of yesterday is the hero of today, and the hero of yesterday becomes the terrorist of today." Of course, it is entirely possible to be both at the same time (Smith 2011).

c) Four Common Approaches to Defining Terrorism

Jackson (2010) identifies four common approaches used by scholars and policymakers when dealing with the conceptual quagmire known as terrorism. First, due to the negative connotation of the term, a growing number of scholars simply choose not to define terrorism at all. Second, it is popular among politicians and security professionals to refer to terrorism as an ideology. Third, terrorism is defined according to the parties that engage in it. And finally, a majority of scholars define terrorism by the deed itself. In the pages that follow, I will explore these concepts more fully.

d) To Define or Not to Define?

One issue that has emerged is whether to define terrorism or not. On the one hand, as noted earlier, a universal definition would aid in more accurate data collection, more consistent reporting and a more unified body of scholarship (Schmid and Jongman 1988; Coady 2004; Meisels 2006). More importantly, it would require more accountability on the part of those engaged in it as well as their supporters (Ganor 2005).

On the other hand, no actor views the violence that it commits as terrorism, but most actors are quick to label the violence committed by their enemies as terrorism (Jackson et. al. 2011; Bryan 2012; Ramsay 2015). Due to the subjectivity and political misuse of the term as well as close organizational and ideological ties between state institutions and prominent researchers- what Burnett and Whyte (2003) label 'embedded expertise'- others have elected not to seek a common definition.[8]

A classic example is the deliberate decision not to define terrorism by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in order to obtain consensus on Resolution 1373. Rather the UNSC opted to allow each member state to arrive at its own definition (Rosand 2003; Saul 2005).

Interestingly, arriving at a common definition has not been the main obstacle for the EU. What has proven to be insurmountable are various other challenges such as vastly different threat perceptions among EU member states, a resistance to true integration of national counterterrorism efforts in favor of cooperation between them, and ineffective implementation of policies (Monar 2007, Coolsaet 2010).

Finally, Ramsay (2015) suggests that terrorism should not be defined because such a definition could not be correctly applied to the many diverse instances of political violence which bear little, if any, resemblance to one another. Thus, a common definition would serve to blur rather than sharpen our understanding of the term. Furthermore, Ramsay insists that the opposite is also true. When states engage in tactical violence that is covert and non-conventional, it is called special operations. However, when non-state actors engage in the very same type of activity, it is called terrorism.

e) Terrorism as an Ideology

Terrorism has been around since antiquity. The Jewish Zealots employed terrorism against the Romans, the Thuggees engaged in acts of terrorism against the British in India, and it is a tactic that is still in use today. In this respect, one could say that terrorism changes little over time. However, scholars have noted an ideological cleavage in recent decades between what many refer to as "old terrorism" and "new terrorism." As with any definition of terrorism, however, this categorization is also debated (Lesser et al. 1999; Merari 1999; Juergensmeyer 2000; Laqueur 2000; Duyvesteyn 2004; Kurtulus 2011; Harmon 2013).

Old terrorism has taken several forms throughout history (anti-imperial, anti-colonial, etc...); however, it has typically been perpetrated toward the liberation of some group. Even between 1960 and 1980, transnational terrorism (which was primarily driven by Marxist ideology, nationalism, separatism, and nihilism) attempted to liberate oppressed peoples. Right-wing terrorism, on the other hand, is usually waged against ethnic minorities rather than on their behalf (Heitmeyer 2005). However with the emergence of religious extremist groups, some scholars contend that a "new face of terrorism" was born (Sampson and Onuoha 2011, p. 36). What is this new face, and what makes it so different from the terrorism that came before it?

A major facet of new terrorism is that it is fundamentally religious in nature (Roy 1994). Hoffman (2013) defines a religious terrorist group as one that has religiously motivated goals (as opposed to politically motivated ones). Hoffman (1997) also points out that by 1995, religious terrorism had increased from two out of

[7] Mujahidin (sometimes transliterated as mujahideen) is plural for mujahid, meaning one who struggles (Bassiouni 2007).

[8] Representative of Burnett and Whyte's (2003) concept of 'embedded expertise' is Huntington's clash of civilization theory. The phrase was originally coined by Bernard Lewis (1990), and the theory resonated so well among various high ranking officials within the Bush administration that Lewis became quite influential in Washington (Frum 2003). In a 2002 article entitled, *Time for Toppling*, Lewis advocates regime change in Iraq. His advice was obviously taken seriously.

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64 active groups to roughly 29 out of 58 active terrorist groups.

Moreover, Hoffman (1999) draws our attention to the connection between religious terrorism and increased lethality. For example, between 1982 and 1989 *Shia* Islamic terrorist groups perpetrated a mere eight percent of all international terrorist incidents. However, in that same period they accounted for 30 percent of the casualties.

White (2003) agrees that violence has substantially increased with religious terrorism. This marked increase in casualties associated with the rise of religious terrorism is evident in the fact that prior to 9/11 no single terrorist incident resulted in the death of more than 500 people.

How to explain this increase in casualties associated with the rise of religious terrorism? Hoffman (1995) argues that the apocalyptic conviction of religious terrorists makes them more focused on the life to come and, therefore, inclined to view human life in this world with relatively less importance.

Wilkinson (2014) argues that terrorists in the Marxist/nationalist/separatist vein maintained a constituency and hence, had a vested interest in keeping casualties to an acceptable level. However, religiously motivated terrorist groups such as al Qaeda view violence against apostates as a duty, and therefore they are motivated to increase casualties rather than to limit them. Wilkinson supports this line of reasoning with examples such as al Qaeda's Second Fatwa, issued on February 23, 1998, encouraging all Muslims to kill Americans wherever they can be found.

Wilkinson differs with Hoffman however, in that; in Wilkinson's view American lives can be sacrificed with little or no account while Hoffman suggests that the apocalyptic vision of religious terrorists casts all human life as expendable given the impending doom of the human race itself.

One problem with Hoffman's explanation is that not all so-called religious terrorists subscribe to an apocalyptic vision. Of those who do, many are more nationalist than apocalyptic which leads to contention over whether they are indeed fundamentally religious or secular (Juergensmeyer 1993).

A similar problem presents itself regarding Wilkinson's argument: not all scholars agree that groups such as al Qaeda are fundamentally religious in nature (Rapoport 1984; Benjamin and Simon 2002; Bergen 2002;Kepel 2006).[9]

However, the main problem as I see it, is the descriptive nature of the theories themselves. While both theories essentially describe the terrorism that they identify, each of them also ignores the strategic objective of the actors involved and focuses entirely on motive.

For instance, Wilkinson conflates al Qaeda's religious motivation with the duty to kill Americans. But, of course, the two have nothing to do with one another. Bin Laden's justification for killing Americans is not the *fatwa* he issued, but the fact that the United States government has killed so many Muslims. The *fatwa* just represents the authority behind the proclamation (much like Bush put the authority of the United States' government behind the military's mandate in the war on terror). To say that al Qaeda kills Americans because it is religiously motivated to do so is comparable to claiming that America kills "terrorists" because they are Muslim.

Likewise, Hoffman conflates apocalyptic vision with the fact that all life is expendable. However, a quick comparison of al Qaeda and Islamic State reveals otherwise. While both groups share the same religion and apocalyptic vision, al Qaeda demonstrates a basic concern for all Muslim lives (as demonstrated in bin Laden's concern over Zarqawi's slaughtering of them), and IS only demonstrates disdain for apostate Muslims. Neither group considers all life expendable. If they did, who would populate the Islamic *caliphate* that both groups share as a strategic objective?

Others, such as Kurtulus (2011) and Brown and Rassler(2013), argue that religion is just one of several factors to consider regarding new terrorism (e.g. horizontal organizational structure, the desire to use weapons of mass destruction, indiscriminate killing of civilians, etc.).

Sedgwick (2004) contends that the confusion over whether a group is fundamentally religious or secular derives from the fact that religious terrorists employ political tactics toward the attainment of a more far-reaching religious goal. While Sedgwick's approach purports to distinguish between a group's strategic objectives and its behavior, it still does not explain why some individuals and groups who subscribe to a particular ideology resort to violence to achieve their ends while others do not.

So is new terrorism new? Duyvesteyn (2004) argues that it is not. After discussing the supposedly new aspects of terrorism such as its transnational nature, religious ideology and indiscriminate targeting of victims, Duyvesteyn maintains that there are more similarities than differences between the old terrorism and the new.

Similarly, Juergensmeyer (2003) suggests that rather than representing something new, religious terrorism is just old terrorism wrapped in a new package. Furthermore, Juergensmeyer views religious terrorism as a public act performed out of desperation.

[9] A second problem with Wilkinson's explanation is the substantial popular support al Qaeda enjoyed as a result of the sheer unpopularity of U.S. foreign policy in the Arab world. Furthermore, groups such as al Qaeda clearly engaged in a propaganda war in an effort to win popular support (Norton 2007b; Leuprecht et al. 2010). This suggests that the group is concerned with a constituency of sorts, even if it is not an electorate in the traditional sense of the word.

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Religion simply offers a framework that justifies such violence, and it provides the symbols that communities can rally around. Juergensmeyer offers a compelling argument that accounts for the rise of religious terrorism in predominantly desperate communities.

However, Juergensmeyer does not explain religious terrorism of the 9/11 variety. If religious terrorism is essentially a public outcry engaged in by the politically marginalized and disadvantaged poor, how does one explain the 19 educated, financially well-off young men who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks? Even more importantly, what explanation accounts for the numerous (and equally religious) desperate communities around the globe that do not engage in religious terrorism? Furthermore, Juergensmeyer's explanation does not consider the religious violence perpetrated by groups such as Islamic State, al Shabaab and Boko Haram that are clearly motivated by the *takfiri* doctrine, not inequality.

The debate surrounding old and new terrorism is largely symptomatic of the lack of cohesion in the field of terrorism studies as a whole, as well as the inclination to lump disparate groups together under a common label.

As becomes evident, the current lack of consensus within the field of terrorism studies makes the task of defining terrorism by ideology difficult. Even more difficult is the challenge of distinguishing between secular terrorism and religious terrorism, if such a distinction can in fact be made at all. The complex network of terrorist organizations with its diverse membership and cobwebs of alliances makes such an undertaking problematic (Arquilla et al. 1999).

f) Terrorism Defined by the Actor

This definition of terrorism is usually applied to national separatist groups and other non-state actors (Reinares 2005). The main justification for this approach is that focus on the actor results in less focus on the behavior- which tends to produce normative analyses (Lizardo 2015).

The most well-known defender of this definition is the U.S. State Department. Title 22 of the United States Code defines domestic terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." Alternatively, the U.S. State Department defines international terrorism as "terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country" (U.S. Department of State 2006). As is evident, both definitions exclude states.

One main problem with this approach is that it has led to considerable selection bias. The actor-based definition largely singles out non-state actors and ignores state terrorism altogether (Blakeley 2007; Jackson 2008). As Richardson (2005) argues, those who adhere to the actor-based definition (such as various U.S. administrations) largely only consider rogue states as culpable of acts of terrorism and even then, usually only through their terrorist clients such as with Iran and Hezbollah. Of course, this is completely absurd as many of the actions of the United States during the Cold War alone plainly demonstrate (Gareau 2004). In fact, the concept of nuclear deterrence was based entirely on the threat to annihilate mass numbers of non-combatant civilians in order to restrain the actions of the two superpowers.

While the exclusion of state terrorism from the definition naturally leads to the exclusion of states from the study of terrorism, other scholars (who recognize that states can and do commit acts of terrorism) still choose not to focus on states in their research. This decision may be for financial reasons as states may or may not be willing to finance research on their own atrocities (Hayner 2001), for theoretical reasons as states have considerably greater resources at their disposal (as well as greater accountability) and thus are difficult to compare with most non-state actors (Pape 2003), or for reasons of preference or academic interest (Laqueur 1977b; Ganor 1998; Carr 2003; Black 2004; Bergesen and Lizardo 2004).

Perhaps the most obvious reason for excluding states from the study of terrorism is the subjective nature of the term itself. No actor considers itself a "terrorist" or a "terrorist organization," nor do their supporters. For instance, a significant number of Palestinians do not consider attacks against Israeli citizens to be terrorism because they perceive Israel as their enemy (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002).

Given that terrorism is often defined by one's enemies, Hülsse and Spencer (2008) suggest a discourse-centered perspective rather than an actor-centered approach. Zulaika and Douglass (1996), on the other hand, claim that society actually empowers those who engage in terrorism by its discourse. Similarly, Stokes (2009) argues that CTS actually places too much emphasis on discourse and tends to ignore other geopolitical factors such as the world's economic dependence on oil, the strategic value of military bases and the West's desire to maintain hegemony by controlling resource-rich areas of the planet. Hence actors are important.

Dalacoura (2009) takes a third path, suggesting that much of what is called state-terrorism is actually an emotive or polemic distortion of the facts. She advises us to build stronger links between area studies and terrorism studies to take advantage of the former's area-specific expertise and the latter's theoretical capacity. Likewise, English (2010) distinguishes between analytical shortcomings and real practical problems involving terrorism and observes that the latter are usually related to the former. Noting that our analytical shortcomings involve shortsightedness and an even

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shorter historical memory, English recommends that the West re-think its policies of ill-conceived legislative measures and overwhelming but counterproductive military solutions.

Finally, the perception of Western duplicity (condemning others for the very acts it does itself) and ethnocentrism shared by much of the rest of world is a credibility problem for those who would attempt to deny, ignore or otherwise downplay state terrorism in the current political climate of the Global War on Terror (Lewis 1990; Kagan 2004; Byman 2005; Kohut 2005; Carothers 2006).

Grosscup (2006) maintains that a problem with the actor-based definition is the perceived hypocrisy in labeling incidents such as the 9/11 attacks acts of terrorism while calling the intentional bombing of entire cities acts of war when the strategic objectives in both are clearly to coerce political concessions from a target government. Similar criticism has been raised against counterterrorism measures that fail to differentiate between the innocent and the guilty and are, in fact, intended to terrorize an entire population into submission (Goodin 2013). This is particularly relevant in Africa "where counter-terrorism policies would have us defend the predatory African state" (Solomon 2015, p. 221).

Still others criticize the tendency to ignore acts of terrorism committed by groups supported by Western states such as anti-Castro groups, the Contras, certain Afghan and Iraqi groups, and factions in Mozambique and Angola while focusing on acts of terrorism committed by groups that have not secured such support (Krasner 1999; Acharya 2007).

Of course, not all terrorism research ignores state actors. For instance, Stohl (2004) concludes that states resort to acts of terrorist violence when it is the most efficient and cost-effective means of governance at their disposal. Likewise, Neumann and Smith (2005) clearly contend that states have historically relied upon the tactic of terrorism when it served their purposes.

To sum it up, the main difficulty involved in defining terrorism by the actor is the fact that no group considers itself to be a terrorist organization, while most groups are quick to label their opponents as terrorists. States can be especially culpable in this regard. Because of this reality, definitions of terrorism based on the actor tend to lead to selection bias, discrepancies in data collection and controversies over whether a given event was an act of terrorism or a legitimate act of war.[10]

g) Terrorism Defined by the Deed

Jenkins (1974) points out that most terrorist activity involves six basic tactical operations: kidnappings; hostage-takings; bombings; hijackings; armed attacks and assassinations. But if this is the case, how to differentiate between terrorism and other acts of political violence and crime? Neumann and Smith (2007, p. 16) suggest that a differentiation of this sort can be "highly contentious," especially in times of insurgency or war. "Who defines what does or does not constitute political violence may itself be a deeply political act." And, indeed, it usually is. However, several scholars have considered this very distinction nonetheless (Dishman 2001; Ruby 2002; Shelley and Picarelli 2002; Jamieson 2005).

For instance, Dishman(2001) has taken an interesting look at the relationship between terrorist organizations and criminal organizations. Dishman concludes that while terrorists engage in illegal activities and may even collaborate with criminal organizations, terrorists are driven by a particular objective, not just the pursuit of profit. Ruby (2002) asserts a similar point when he distinguishes between criminal acts that are aimed at the achievement of a personal objective and acts of terrorism intended to induce a government to make political concessions.

Jamieson (2005) observes a somewhat clearer distinction between terrorism and organized crime. She argues that terrorists are revolutionaries bent on the overthrow of the existing political order, while organized crime tends to be conservative and seeks to maintain the status quo. However, Jamieson's definition flies in the face of Neumann and Smith's (2005) terrorism/insurgency dichotomy that suggests insurgents want to overthrow the existing regime whereas acts of terrorism are intended to coerce the regime into making certain concessions.

Beyond the academic interest in determining between criminal acts and acts of terrorism, there are practical advantages as well. Clearly distinguishing one from the other affords policy makers a more accurate perspective of the severity of the problem and allows them to properly prioritize security initiatives. For instance, between 1965 and 2001, 64,246 Americans were murdered by other Americans in New York alone (Disaster Center 2010). This constitutes an annual average of 2,471 deaths for the 26 year period leading up to and including 2001. When one compares this to the 3,031 people killed in the 9/11 attacks, it doesn't minimize the attacks; but it does demonstrate that crime is a statistically more persistent challenge than terrorism.

In addition to the body of scholarship attempting to differentiate between terrorism and crime, there is also an abundance of literature that focuses on the similarities between terrorism and war (Hyams 1975; Silke 1996; Scharf, 2004; Tilly 2004; Neumann & Smith 2005;Bergen 2006; Morag 2006).

For example, Tilly (2004) discusses the difficulty of distinguishing acts of terrorism from other types of military aggression, particularly when such aggression targets government security personnel and/or military

[10] Contentions surrounding Israel and the Intifadas are a classic example.

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actors as fundamentally part of a larger political/military struggle. Likewise, Silke(1996) defines terrorism as nothing more than a subset of guerrilla war, while Wilkinson (1974) categorizes terrorism as a tactic used by guerrillas. Bergen (2006) argues that the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center cost only a few thousand dollars while the 9/11 attacks cost roughly $200,000, making terrorism a very inexpensive class of warfare.

Morag (2006) agrees that, from a purely economic standpoint, terrorism is an extremely cost-effective variety of warfare for the terrorists. Morag adds that, in addition to fear, chaos and loss of human life, terrorism can also cause substantial economic damage to the target community. For example, WWII cost the United States roughly $296 billion (in 1941-1945 dollars). The attacks of September 11, however, cost the U.S. approximately $27.2 billion in direct losses and nearly $500 billion in indirect losses (lost income, increased insurance premiums, increased defense budgets, etc.). Even considering the difference between the value of money in 1941 and 2011, the fact that an organization could cause that much damage with such a minimal investment of resources (19 men and $200,000) is truly staggering.

Finally, Scharf (2004) defines terrorism as the peacetime equivalent of war crimes. Still, these perspectives offer no more of a consensus on the difference between terrorism and war than exists on the difference between terrorism and crime. Given the rapidly changing face of warfare today and the increasing number of non-state actors involved in warfare, it will only become increasingly more difficult to parse out acts of terrorism from acts of war. Neumann and Smith (2005, p. 572) make this very point, and they insist that any credible theoretical framework must address terrorism "as a bona fide method for distributing military means to fulfill the ends of policy."

Still others distinguish between terrorism as an incident and terrorism as a process. For instance, Rapoport (1971) defines assassination as an incident but terrorism as a process as it requires a lifetime of dedication and discipline. Of course, one could make the opposing argument that it takes a great deal more discipline to become a skilled marksman than it does to strap on some explosives and push a plunger.

In addition to the difficulties associated with defining terrorism by the deed and distinguishing it from other phenomena such as acts of war and crime, there are also challenges involved in analyzing acts of terrorism. For example, Kruglanski and Fishman (2006) contrast terrorism as a syndrome with terrorism as a tool. According to Kruglanski and Fishman, terrorism as a syndrome suggests that terrorists can be identified apart from non-terrorists. It views terrorism as the product of certain personality traits or predispositions of character. To be useful, however, this understanding of terrorism presupposes the ability to psychologically profile terrorists; which as stated above, is dubious.

Terrorism as a tool, on the other hand, views terrorism as a strategic means to a desired outcome. Kruglanski and Fishman suggest that approaching terrorism from this perspective allows experts to focus on countering the strategy of terrorism without having to *necessarily* understand the mindset of the terrorist. However, as Harris (2006) makes clear, the strategic approach requires an understanding of an actor's preferences and therefore, an understanding of their mindset.

II. Conclusion

This article has addressed the many challenges faced by academics and policymakers alike when attempting to define terrorism, categorize it, and identify its causes. When defining terrorism, it is absolutely crucial to keep in mind that terrorism is a strategy to be countered, and not an enemy to be defeated. Terrorism is just one of several means employed to obtain a desired political end. As such, it can be carried out in a wide variety of ways and by a wide variety of actors—including states (Rummel 1998). As Neumann and Smith (2005) aptly contest, terrorism is not always a weapon of the weak, nor is it always employed by illegitimate actors. However, Washington's GWOT and the aid it offers those who join it has greatly exacerbated the misuse of the term to denounce one's political opponents. The obvious cure for this malady is to remove the stigma associated with the label "terrorist" and to arrive at a common, objective definition. This article has argued that the best way to achieve this goal is to eliminate those subjective elements of the definition that lend to the politicization of the term—namely those that focus on the actor, the ideology of the actor and the deed itself.

"The dropping of bombs on people—isn't that terrorism?"

—Alice Walker The Poor Young Farmer

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