

### Combatting Terrorism by Defining Terrorism

The word terrorism was first used during the French Revolution to describe the brutal actions taken by the French government against their citizens (Martin 25). Since then, it has continuously evolved to signify various violent actions throughout history. Today, terrorism is often used to describe a violent act or actions taken by groups to achieve a goal. However, confusion persists when examining if an incident was truly an act of terror (Martin 36). Scholars who study security, look to give the term a concrete definition so world governments may begin to combat terrorism (Martin 39). The simple question often posed is, “How does one define terrorism?” And more specifically, “How does one define terrorism within the United States post 9/11?” To be able to successfully combat and eradicate terrorism, it is necessary to craft an objective and unified definition of terrorism.

Historically, terrorism has often been used to describe the methods and actions taken by violent combatants, but the issue is becoming more complex (Roberts). In order to properly form a cohesive definition for terrorism, Professor Boaz Ganor, an expert in the field of terrorism studies, suggests taking a three-part approach to the issue. He argues that it is necessary to not only look at how the terrorist acted, but also the objective of the attack and the target of the attack (Ganor). First and foremost, for an event to be classified as an act of terror, an actor must threaten to use or use violence; without violence it is not terrorism (Ganor). The second piece necessary is that there must be motive to achieve a political goal, either religious and ideological aims. Violence without political goals would just be classified as a felonious act (Ganor). The final piece is that the victims of the attacks must be civilians. Accidental violence on civilians would not classify as terrorism, but deliberate, targeted actions would make for a terrorist attack (Ganor).

Accumatively, these three elements result in a cohesive, objective, and concise definition of terrorism that can be utilized both within the United States and internationally. Simply put, terrorism is “a violent struggle, intentionally using or threatening to use, violence against civilians, in order to attain political aims” (Ganor). When discussing terrorism within the United States’ borders, it is crucial to realize that most acts of terror are not carried out by jihadists. According to Risa Brooks, a professor of political science at Marquette University, in the decade that followed the 9/11 attacks most terror plots inspired by jihadist ideology had been foiled by the United States government (Brooks 25). Instead, the majority of successful domestic terror attacks were done by far-right extremist groups, ecoterrorist, anarchist, and animal rights groups (Brooks 23, 26). The classification of these types of groups as terrorist organization is a subject of debate within the United States. When you apply Ganor’s definition of terrorism to the actions these groups take, it is clear that they have all engaged in terrorism. First, these groups all have intentionally utilized violence. Furthermore, it is clear each of these groups functions to achieve their own political, religious, or ideological objectives. Finally, the aforementioned organizations do not target the US military, these groups look to disrupt public life and therefore do target civilians (Brooks 22). When examining radical groups within the United States through the lens of Ganor’s definition, it becomes impossible to refute their classification as terrorist actors.

The American public needs to understand the dire need for a cohesive, objective, and internationally recognized definition for terrorism. According to Roberts, since the Cold War, we have existed within a “globalized world”. This has allowed for the free transfer of ideas across cultures, including the ideas of terror (Roberts). Terrorist actors look to conduct attacks beyond their home countries, recruit members from various ethnic backgrounds, and receive financial aid from numerous countries around the world (Ganor). If countries continue to form their own definitions of what terrorism constitutes then the term will fall victim to “cultural relativism”

(Ganor). Cultural relativism - when cultural beliefs influence the perceptions of a certain issues within that culture - gives way for different interpretations between definitions. Consequently, an action that constitutes terrorism in one country may not be terrorism in another country (Ganor). With a unified, international definition, various basic necessities in the War on Terror will be met (Roberts). First and foremost, the identification of terrorism will come without confusion because we have set forth qualifications. Secondly, a universal definition will allow for international coalitions against terrorism to more simply decide which nations to admit into their alliances and which nations and organization need to be a target by the coalition (Ganor). Finally, and most importantly, an internationally accepted definition will allow for the world to successfully combat, and possibly defeat, terrorism. According to Ganor, "Without a change in the priorities of all the enlightened countries, and their determination to fight against terrorism apart from any other political or economic interest, it will not be possible to wage an effective war against terrorism (Ganor)."

Counterarguments have proposed that a cohesive definition just is not possible, nor necessary. Most recently, scholars have argued it is impossible to define terrorism because, "one's man terrorist is another man's freedom fighter (Chase)." Given that guerilla fighters and terrorist often employ similar tactics, it is often difficult to distinguish between the two; but when examining Professor Ganor's definition the difference between the two quickly becomes clear. According to researchers, there are various distinctions, one being that groups practicing guerilla warfare are looking to elevate themselves to the status of the government with which they are embroiled in conflict (Copley). The largest distinction between guerilla fighters and terrorists come with which groups they aim to target. Terrorists target civilians, while guerilla fighters target militaries. According to Boaz Ganor, guerilla warfare is the purposeful attack on militaries with the goal of achieving political, religious, or ideologically objectives, while terrorism is the

purposeful attack on civilians with the goal of achieving political, religious, or ideologically objectives (Ganor). Once this definition is nationally and internationally accepted, terrorists can no longer claim to be participating in guerilla warfare due to the nature of their targeted victims. Determining a definition of terrorism no longer will allow for terrorist to attack under the guise of “freedom fighters.”

The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 were indisputably terroristic in nature; there was no debate to whether or not the hijackers were “freedom fighters” or terrorists. The aftermath of the attacks were devastating to the American population; our country was left crippled and the public was then faced with a threat they were previously unaware of, terrorism. According to former Ambassador to Qatar, Kenton W. Keith, 9/11 was a wake-up call to the American public (Keith). America began to realize the opinion much of the world held towards the itself as a nation: it was egotistical, ignorant, and self-serving. Furthermore, our response to the 9/11 attacks only furthered this position, especially within Middle Eastern countries (Keith). With a new generation of Americans, there is a possibility for change. To achieve this change, Keith recommends both governmental and academic assistance (Keith). He claims Americans are simply globally unaware, and therefore globalization of college students must be a priority. Such awareness can be achieved through diverse student bodies and staffs, changes to the United States’ curriculum, and increased study abroad opportunities (Keith). Global education is not solely an educational matter; it is a matter of national security. As Keith states,

“For America and the post 9/11 world, for all those who want to maintain our freedom to live as we choose in a perilous world, for all those who believe we must offer to the dispossessed a better way than that promoted by the Osama Bin Ladens of the world, we are talking about nothing less than education for survival (Keith).”

Through an enhanced collegiate education system, the United States will be able to defeat the growing threat of terroristic ideals around the world.

As we progress farther into the twenty-first century, terrorism continues to be a dominating issue within the United States. As the leaders of the US struggle to simply define the term, terroristic actors continue to cause harm to people across the globe. It is necessary to craft an objective and unified definition of terrorism to successfully combat and eradicate terrorism. Once a universal definition is secured, we can begin to restore peace to the world.

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