

Terrorism and the Terrorism Industry

GOVT 332

A. The Question of Terrorism

Although there isn't a universal definition that everyone agrees upon, most people, including adversaries, agree on the basic components of the definition: namely, that terrorism is the *politically motivated killing of innocent civilians*.

What is the disagreement really about then? If it is not about the basic tenor of the definition, what is it about?

1. One of the foundational disagreements in the discourses on terrorism is about the identity of the parties that (can) commit terrorism. In the dominant discourse states are absolved from being called terrorist: states can be accused of war crimes, but not terrorism.
2. The other part of the disagreement is about the target, the civilians: they potentially can be considered collateral damage if the state is launching a war offensive. Thus, there's consensus only on the Act of terrorism, while the Actor and Target component of the process are the more significant source of controversy. Here, the power to define, is supreme (who can define?)



However, more recently, terrorism has become associated more with an identity than with an act.

B. The Accusation of “Terrorism” Increasingly Refers to an Identity, Not an Act

In many circles in the West, the word, label, or accusation of ‘terrorism’ is something that is associated with certain individuals and groups, usually Arab or Muslim, rather than an act.

In other words, the term “terrorism” now increasingly refers to an identity, rather than an act, something that those with an Arab or Muslim identity are prone to being or committing, whereas Western governments and their allies engage in legitimate and justified wars, often to stem the tide of terrorism.

This characterization of terrorism can be observed in much of the mainstream media in the United States, Britain, and Israel. It is not ubiquitous, but is becoming increasingly ingrained in the minds of wider segments of these populations, if only because of the ad nauseam repetition of the association in print and visual media, in government discourse, and in academia as well.

The Consequence is Failure to Deal with Terrorism and Increased Anti-Arab Racism

We are left with a sloppy application of the term at best, and an ethnocentric semi-racism at worst. As a consequence, we fail to deal with real “terrorist” threats to the entire human community and fighting ‘terrorism’ becomes another way of fighting one’s enemies. The results of the 7-year long US-led ‘War on Terrorism’ speak for themselves: the number of terrorist incidents, however the term is defined, has increased considerably, so did the number of innocent victims and the number of “terrorist” individuals, cells, or organizations.

When Analyzing Quotes/Speeches/Documents: Consider the following questions and provide your answers based on the readings (what are the mainstream answers and what are the critical responses?)

1. How terrorism is defined (by the people you're reading)
2. Distinctions that are or are not made (by the people you're reading) between:
 - a. individual/group and state terrorism
 - b. terrorism and resistance
 - c. groups that are accused of terrorism
3. Who are the terrorists (according to the people you're reading)? What is the nature of these groups? What are their characteristics?
4. What are the causes of terrorism?
5. The relationship between Arab/Islamic culture and forms of violence (with terrorism as one of these forms)
6. What is the war on terrorism?

Mainstream Discourse on Terrorism in the West

Characteristics Based on Government Documents and Statements by Officials

1. Terrorism is what is done to us (we are the victims of terrorism, and we were attacked and/or singled out because of who we are)
2. We were attacked because of who we are, because we're free, because they hate us
3. Terrorism is done by someone else (the "they" includes many disparate groups and cultures)
4. Terrorism existed for a long time, but it really started after September 9-11
5. The causes of terrorism have more to do with nature, culture, and upbringing than anything else
6. Because the causes of terrorism are endemic, the fight against terrorism may have no end
7. The groups that are accused of terrorism are pretty much all the same