The Terrorism of 'Terrorism'

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Introduction

Any intelligent discussion of terrorism must have some way of identifying the phenomenon under scrutiny. Only then is it possible to devise criteria for describing a given action, agent, or organization as 'terrorist', to investigate the causes and objectives of terrorism, and to set parameters for a legitimate response to what some regard as a fundamental challenge to world peace. Scholars have long recognized these points, but the same is not true of more prominent forces shaping contemporary Western perceptions. In the United States, the mainstream media (newspapers, television, cinema), the independent "think tanks," and the main sectors of the Government, have sponsored a public discourse about terrorism devoid of any serious inquiry into, or concern about, the nature, origins, and goals of terrorist actions. The rhetoric, with which they assail popular consciousness, deflects attention away from a critical examination of these issues, and thereby contributes to the increasing spiral of hatred and atrocity. This happens because the use of 'terror' and its cognates obscures the causes of political unrest and, consequently, impedes the development of rational policies for dealing with underlying grievances.

The rhetoric of 'terror' is not always innocent; there are those who employ it deliberately in pursuit of specific political objectives. This is especially true in the popular discourse about political tensions in the Middle East, particularly, concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The result has been disastrous, not only for the lives and well-being of individual Palestinians and

Israelis, but increasingly, for the entire world. Unless we diminish the use of emotive language in describing the circumstances, actions, and tendencies constituting this and similar such conflicts, we risk multiplying the amount of terrorist violence in the world and moving even further from just and peaceful resolutions of pressing political problems.

The Semantics and Pragmatics of 'Terrorism'

There is little agreement on the meaning of 'terrorism.'[1] Often an explicit definition is not even attempted, and when the matter is broached, it is routinely admitted that there is no single universally accepted definition of the term—even the various agencies of the U.S. Government are not united.[2] This might not be a problem for rhetorical purposes, but scholarship, policy-making, and law enforcement require some sort of definition in order to identify the phenomenon and to justify ascriptions.

To avoid lengthy debate over the merits of competing definitions, a standard description of 'terrorism' will be adopted herein:

> Terrorism is the deliberate use of violence, or the threat of such, directed upon civilians in order to achieve political objectives.[3]

A few clarifications are in order. First, this definition is not only a stipulation indicating how 'terrorism' will be used in this essay, but also a hypothesis about about the way the term is commonly, though perhaps not universally, understood in English discourse. In this latter sense, it can be viewed as a reportive definition. Second, the occurrence of 'deliberate' suggests that the perpetrator is intentionally using or threatening violence to achieve political objectives *and* is identifying the targets as civilians. Some (e.g., Wilkinson 2000) go further and insist that the targets are also to be described as "innocent." While this might seem to have the advantage of

revealing what is wrong with terrorism, it has the disadvantage of making classification of a particular act as "terrorist" more controversial. This drawback is even more evident if a definition requires that the perpetrator himself or herself *identifies* the targets as "innocents" (Primoratz 1990). Such a requirement is likely to make terrorism exceedingly rare given that political violence is often committed by those who act from outrage over perceived injustices and who do not think their targets to be "innocent" of these injustices. Third, an act is not "terrorist" solely because of its results or the sources of its motivation, e.g., revenge killings are not "terrorist" even if political conflict caused the desire for revenge.[4] Similarly, violence against military targets are not "terrorist" on the standard definition, despite government and media descriptions to the contrary. The perpetrator must have a political objective and identify the targets *as* civilians—allowing that in some cases an off-duty soldier can be classified as a civilian. Fourth, unlike the characterization favored by the U.S. State Department,[5] the standard definition allows any kind of person or organization to be an agent of terrorism, including states, even though there is little acknowledgment of this subcategory in popular discourse.

While we might spar over semantics, there are two points of particular importance in understanding the contemporary usage of 'terrorism.' One undeniable fact is that whether or not terrorism is illegitimate by definition, terms like 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' have acquired an intensely negative connotation in contemporary discourse.[6] The reasons behind this are complex, but part of the explanation is the perception that terrorism targets people who should not be targeted and involves methods that should not be employed, for example, the taking and killing of hostages. As such, quite apart from considerations of just cause, it violates some of the standard rules of *jus in bello*, specifically, the principle of discrimination that rules out intentional attacks upon civilians, and the principle of legitimate means (proportionality) that prohibits acts of treachery, wanton

destruction, and massacre. Accordingly, the perpetrators of terrorist acts are commonly viewed as morally depraved, even when they are willing to go the extreme ends of sacrificing their own lives.

A further point is that 'terrorism', as typically employed, has an *indexical* character bearing an implicit reference to the speaker's point of view, so that, for practical purposes, 'terrorism' is coextensive with the phrase 'terrorism against us'. In this way, it behaves much like the phrase 'the enemy,' though without the same semantic backing since 'enemy' is relational in a way that 'terror,' terrorism' and 'terrorist' are not. Several writers have pointed out this speaker-oriented bias,[7] and occasionally, media representatives have been candid about it. For example, in March 2002 the Public Editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, Don Wycliff, pointed out that while his paper routinely refers to the attacks of September 11 as acts of terrorism, it withholds that designation from actions in other places where some argue it is warranted. He explained the *Tribune*'s policy:

> . . . the *Tribune* is an American newspaper written principally for an American audience . . .. Our perspective is inescapably American (which is not to say it is necessarily the same as that of the U.S. government). Inevitably, as the news of Sept. 11 is reported and interpreted, that perspective is reflected in the product. Indeed, it almost has to be if we are to speak intelligibly on those events to our audience.[8]

Neither the *Tribune*, the American media in general, nor the U. S. Government, is unique in this regard. Given the speaker-oriented bias, who receives the 'terrorist' label depends on where you are and to whom you are listening. As Wycliff points out, it is generally agreed that those who flew hijacked planes into the World Trade Center towers, were engaged in terrorist activity. But one effect of speaker-bias is that many actions and agents that would qualify as terrorist under the most definitions—certainly under the standard definition—have not been described as such in the U.S. media or Government reports. For example, the killing of over 3000 civilians in Nicaragua

by the U.S.-supported "contra" rebels of the 1980s was not generally classified as 'terrorism' (Herman and O'Sullivan 1989: 46). Again, the massacre of over 2000 Palestinian civilians in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Beirut in 1982 is not referred to as 'terrorist' activity, nor are the alleged perpetrators of that massacre, and their allies in the Israeli military, called 'terrorists.'

At the level of overt actions committed by states, there are numerous examples that are not usually labeled as 'terrorist,' though they qualify as such under those definitions that allow for state terrorism. These include the destruction of Grozny by Russian forces during the Chechnya war of 1999, the U.S. bombing of Tripoli, Libya in April 1986, the U.S. naval bombardment of Lebanese villages in the Chouf mountains in October 1983, and the Israeli aerial and land bombardment of Beirut in the summer of 1982 that resulted in the deaths of 5000-6000 civilians.[9] This is to say nothing about more large-scale military campaigns, like the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam and Cambodia during the Vietnam war, or the bombings of German and Japanese cities near the end of WWII.

State-terrorism can take other forms. For example, there is the institutionalized violence exercised against Palestinian civilians during Israel's 35-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The occupation has featured torture, deportations, collective punishment, economic strangulation, destruction of property, confiscation of land, and firing upon unarmed civilians, actions that are routinely designed to intimidate a civilian population in order to secure political objectives. Yet, this brand of structural violence against civilians is not referred to as 'terrorism.' The same can be said about the U.S.-led campaign against Iraq, including both the bombing of Iraqi technological infrastructure in 1991 and the subsequent policy of sanctions that have led to the deaths of over a million Iraqis.[10]

At the opposite extreme, some actions are routinely labeled 'terrorist' that do not qualify as such under the standard definition. For example, throughout the 1990s, the Israeli and U.S. media were replete with references to "terrorist" actions by the Lebanese group, Hezbollah, against the Israeli military in southern Lebanon, or by Palestinians against Israeli soldiers in the occupied territories, targets that hardly qualify as civilians or noncombatants. Apart from the State Department's idiosyncratic definition of 'noncombatant' to include off-duty soldiers, the same can be said for actions directed against the U.S. military, say, the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen in October 2000, or of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983.[11]

These few examples illustrate that, in the American context at least, widely-shared conceptions about the types of individuals and groups engaged in terrorist activity are not based on semantic considerations alone. Instead, they are fashioned by the speaker-oriented bias that permeates the rhetoric of 'terror' used to describe contemporary political violence. When adding to the negative connotation, this rhetoric becomes a shaper—and perhaps, a distorter—of both value judgments and the actions to which such judgments give rise.

The Political Use of 'Terrorism' and its Effects

The discriminatory applications of the terms 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' by the American Government and mainstream media reveal that these terms are not used with any real concern for scientific precision, consistency, or completeness. If they were so used, and if the Government really meant what it says it means when it proclaims a "war on terrorism," then the United States would be declaring war on itself, or, at the very least, upon its allies that have practiced or supported violence against civilians for political ends. Instead, in the popular American discourse, 'terrorism' and its derivatives are used selectively to depict those who resort to force in opposing

U. S. governmental policies or the policies of its allies. This development is not entirely surprising. We might expect that the U.S. State Department would be selective in its catalog of terrorist incidents and organizations since it is an arm of a government pursuing its own political agenda. It is a bit more difficult to understand why a free press should follow the Government's lead, but some have tried to explain this phenomenon by pointing out that the American media "support the existing social, political, and economic order in which they operate because they are part of and benefit from that order, and the views they convey rarely stray far from the norm."[12]

The American situation is not unique. Other countries, including Israel, Great Britain, Russia, India and Egypt routinely do the same, and so might any state in describing militant insurgents opposed to its policies, e.g., as the Nazis did in describing resistance fighters in the Warsaw ghetto (Herman and O'Sullivan 1989, p. 261). There is a definite political purpose in so doing. Because of its negative connotation, the 'terrorist' label automatically discredits any individuals or groups to which it is affixed. It dehumanizes them, places them outside the norms of acceptable social and political behavior, and portrays them as people who cannot be reasoned with (Picard 1993, p 10).[13] By delegitimizing any individuals or groups described as 'terrorist,' the rhetoric,

- erases any incentive an audience might have to understand their point of view so that questions about the nature and origins of their grievances and the possibility legitimacy of their demands will not even be raised;
- deflects attention away from policies that might have contributed to their grievances;
- repudiates any calls to negotiate with them;
- paves the way for the use of force and violence in dealing with them, and in particular, gives a government "freedom of action" by exploiting the fears of its own citizens and stifling any objections to the manner in which it deals with them;[14]

- fails to distinguish between national liberation movements and fringe fanatics.

The general strategy is nothing new; it is part and parcel of the war of ideas and language that accompanies overt hostilities; 'terrorism' is simply the current vogue for discrediting one's opponents before the risky business of inquiry into their complaints can even begin. If individuals and groups are portrayed as irrational, barbaric, and beyond the pale of negotiation and compromise, then asking why they resort to terrorism is viewed as pointless, needlessly accommodating, or, at best, mere pathological curiosity.

The language of 'terror' thereby fosters an unfortunate attitude, especially among those who are oblivious to its propagandistic employment. Obviously, to point out the causes and objectives of particular terrorist actions is to imply nothing about their legitimacy and justification—that is an independent matter—nor is it any sort of capitulation to terrorist demands. To ignore these causes and objectives, on the other hand, is to seriously undermine attempts to deal intelligently with terrorism, since it leaves untouched the factors motivating recourse to this type of violence. Far from contributing to a *peaceful* resolution of conflict, the rhetoric of 'terror' prepares the uncritical person to sanction a violent response.

More dramatically, the 'terrorist' rhetoric actually increases terrorism in four distinct ways. *First*, it magnifies the effect of terrorist actions by heightening the fear among the target population. If we demonize the terrorists, if we portray them as arbitrary irrational beings with a "disposition toward unbridled violence," then we are amplifying the fear and alarm generated by terrorist incidents. *Second*, those who succumb to the rhetoric contribute to the cycle of revenge and retaliation by endorsing terrorist actions of their own government, not only against those who commit terrorist actions, but also against those *populations* from whose ranks the terrorists emerge, for the simple reason that terrorists are frequently themselves civilians, living amid other civilians

not so engaged. The consequence has been an increase in terrorist violence under the rubric of 'retaliation' or 'counter-terrorism' [15] *Third*, short of genocide, a violent response is likely to stiffen the resolve of those from whose ranks terrorists have emerged, leading them to regard their foes as people who cannot be reasoned with, as people who, because they avail themselves so readily of the 'terrorist' rhetoric, know only the language of force. As long as they perceive themselves to be victims of intolerable injustices and view their oppressors as unwilling to arrive at an acceptable compromise, they are likely to answer violence with more violence. *Fourth*, and most insidiously, those who employ the rhetoric of 'terrorism' for their own political ends, are encouraging actions that they understand will generate or sustain further violence directed against civilians. Inasmuch as their verbal behavior is intended to secure political objectives through these means, then it is an *instance* of terrorism just as much as any direct order to carry out a bombing of civilian targets. In both cases, there is purposeful verbal action aimed at bringing about a particular result through violence against civilians.[16]

The Rhetoric of 'Terror' in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Politically motivated violence has accompanied the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since its inception in the late 19th century. In 1920s and 1930s, there were numerous incidents resulting in casualties to hundreds of Arab and Jewish civilians battling over the future of British-governed Palestine. Each side had its ideologues and heroes. Among the first Palestinian Arabs to raise the banner of *jihad* was Sheikh Izzeddin Al-Qassim, whose followers included Arab peasants forced off farmlands that had been sold by absentee landlords to immigrant Jews. His death at the hands of British forces in 1935 sparked a three-year revolt that resulted in the deaths of over 450 Jews and 5000 Arabs. In

the process, the British demolished Palestinian homes, executed Palestinian leaders, and employed tanks, armored cars, and aircraft against Palestinian rifles (Hirst 1984: 75-97).

Within the Jewish community at the time were those who followed the lead of Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940) who argued that it was folly to expect the Arabs to acquiesce peacefully to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Since the end of Zionism is moral, Jabotinsky contended, so are the means necessary to achieve it, even if this requires an "iron wall" of military might to prevail against Arab opposition. Jabotinsky advocated "retaliating" against Arabs who had targeted Jews and Jewish property, and denied that there was a choice between pursuing "bandits" and punishing a hostile population. Instead, the choice is between "retaliating against the hostile population or not retaliating at all" (Schechtman 1961, p. 474).

In 1935, Jabotinsky's "Revisionist" party established the underground militia *Irgun Zwei Leumi*. In the 1940s, under the leadership of Menachem Begin, the *Irgun*, together with the Stern Gang, warred against British forces with the objective of making Palestine ungovernable. Threatening to "turn Palestine into a bloodbath," their tactics included bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, and letter bombs (O'Ballance 1979, 24-25). During the 1947-49 war between Jews and Arabs, the *Irgun* went beyond "retaliation" in its effort to induce Palestinian Arabs to flee from territory the UN had designated for the Jewish state. Through a few well-timed massacres of civilians, most notoriously, at the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin in April 1948, over 300,000 Palestinians fled from their homes in areas that eventually became part of Israel, paving the way for the establishment of a decisive Jewish majority in the nascent Jewish state (Childers 1961, Morris 1987, Flapan 1987). Afterwards Begin wrote, "Of the about 800,000 Arabs who lived on the present territory of the State of Israel, only some 165,000 are still there. The political and economic significance of this development can hardly be overestimated" (Begin 1951: 164).

After the establishment of Israel and the dismantling of large segments of the Palestinian community, organized struggle against Israel took time to develop among the Palestinian refugees. It was not until after the 1967 War and the occupation of the remaining portions of Palestine that Palestinian resistance fighters began to make international news. In the late 1960s, Palestinian militants, working within groups like *Al-Fatah,* were described in the international press as "guerrillas," "commandos," and "fedayeen" (sacrificers). It was not until after the September 1970 civil war in Jordan, that the Israeli designations of Palestinian fighters as 'murderers,' 'saboteurs' and 'terrorists' became more widespread, at least in the western media. This was partly due to notorious actions by some of the militants themselves, viz., airplane hijackings by PFLP members in 1968-1970, and the attempted kidnapping of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972 that led to the deaths of eleven Israelis and five Palestinians.

The world was horrified by what had happened at Munich, especially because the operation occurred at the Olympic Games, one of the foremost symbols of global unity and cooperation. But the operation succeeded in drawing attention to the cause of dispossessed Palestinians who had been largely ignored in the first two decades after the loss of their homeland. The *Al-Fatah* leader, Abou Iyad, said the following:

> The sacrifices made by the Munich heroes were not entirely in vain. They didn't bring about the liberation of any of their comrades imprisoned in Israel . . . but they did obtain the operations' other two objectives; world opinion was forced to take note of the Palestinian drama, and the Palestinian people imposed their presence on an international gathering that had sought to exclude them. (Abou Iyad 1978, pp.111-112)

It is estimated that over 500 million people witnessed these events on television (Wierinka 1993, p. 43). As another Palestinian spokesman put it: the Munich operation was like "painting the name of

Palestine on the top of a mountain that can be seen from the four corners of the earth" (Hirst 1984, p. 311).

The Palestinian's recourse to terrorism succeeded in placing Palestinian grievances and aspirations on the World's agenda. But, too often, their complaints were lost in the sensationalism of the deed. In the minds of many, disgust with the means outpaced sympathy with plight of Palestinian refugees and trumped the patience needed to understand core grievances. As the 1970s wore on, and various leftwing groups in Europe and elsewhere made headlines with similar sorts of violence, the "terrorists" came to be viewed as a new type of barbarians whose willingness to hijack airplanes, to take hostages, and especially, to carry their struggle into foreign lands, placed them outside the bounds of civilized behavior. When the Reagan Administration came into power in January 1981, combating this brand of "international terrorism" emerged as a foremost goal of U.S. foreign policy.

None of this has been lost upon those who employ the rhetoric of 'terror' as a propaganda device, not only to discredit their opponents, but also to obfuscate and to deflect attention away from their own controversial policies. A prime example relevant to the Middle East is a book edited by Benjamin Netanyahu entitled, *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* published in 1986. While it offers a standard definition of 'terrorism,' the editor and the contributors apply the term selectively, and argue that the only way to combat terrorism is to "to weaken and destroy the terrorist's ability to consistently launch attacks," even at the "risk of civilian casualties" (pp. 202-205). Throughout, very little is said about the possible causes of terrorist violence beyond vague allusions to Islam's confrontation with modernity (p. 82), or passages of this calibre:

> The root cause of terrorism lies not in grievances but in a disposition toward unbridled violence. This can be traced to a worldview that asserts that certain ideological and religious

goals justify, indeed demand, the shedding of all moral inhibitions. In this context, the observation that the root cause of terrorism is terrorists is more than a tautology. (p. 204)

One is tempted to pass off these comments as pure rant, except that the book has reached a large audience, especially since its contributors include not only academics and journalists but important policy makers as well. Netanyahu himself went on to become the Israeli Prime Minister, and among the American contributors were the Secretary of State George Schultz, U. N. Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and Senators Daniel Moynihan and Alan Cranston, each of whom voiced sentiments similar to those of Netanyahu. The upshot was that a terrorist is portrayed as a carrier of "oppression and enslavement," having "no moral sense," "a perfect nihilist" (pp. 29-30), and whose elimination is the only rational means for the West to "win."[17]

Netanyahu's book conceals an unspoken agenda. Coming straight out of Jabotinsky's brand of Zionism, Netanyahu believes the Occupied Territories must stay under Israeli control. Since this is inconsistent with granting Palestinians statehood in those territories, the legitimacy of the Palestinian claim to self-determination must be ignored or undermined. By classifying Palestinian resistance to Israeli policies as "terrorism" and by portraying "terrorists"as some sort of monsters unworthy of moral dialogue, the effect of his book, if not its intent, is to shift political focus away from Israeli designs, policies, and actions in the occupied territories, e.g., its land confiscations, settlement building, and human rights violations, and towards the more sensational reactions by the Palestinians.

The language typified in Netanyahu's book provides a paradigm of how the rhetoric of 'terror' has generated only more terrorism. Its principle that the only way to deal with terrorism is with counter-terrorist violence, has been the policy of successive Israeli governments since the early 1950s.[18] The result has not reduced, but *increased*, the amount of terrorism in the Near East.

There has been a steady increase in terrorist-related fatalities over the past quarter-century. For example, during the ten-year period from 1978-1987, eighty-two Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks perpetrated by Palestinians, a rate of a little more than eight Israelis per year, including both civilians and security personnel. Within the next ten-year period, 1988-1997, that figure had jumped to 421, that is, to an average of 42 Israeli deaths per year. During the same period, at least 1,385 Palestinians in the Occupied Territories were killed by Israeli security forces (all but 18 of these were civilians). In the first twenty months of the second Intifada (September 29, 2000 – May 28, 2002) approximately 470 Israelis lost their lives—a rate of 282 Israeli deaths per year—whereas at least 1400 Palestinians were slain. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) availed itself of tanks, attack helicopters, and F-16 fighter jets during this period, while Palestinians increasingly resorted to suicide bombings. The vast bulk of the fatalities on both sides were civilians.[19]

Figures like these can be used to show several things. They illustrate how the Israeli "reprisal" killings of Palestinians have not deterred Palestinian violence directed at Israelis. They disprove Netanyahu's claim that terrorists will rarely engage in terror tactics if the risks to their own survival are too great (Netanyahu 1986, p. 207), and they go directly against his argument that deterrence will put a stop to terrorism and protect innocent civilians from terrorist violence (p. 211). They show that despite Israel's policy of counter-terrorism, Israelis are less secure today than they were ten years ago, and certainly less than twenty years ago. If any causal claim is to be made, Israeli attacks against Palestinian leaders, institutions, towns, villages, and camps, have only intensified Palestinian anger and stiffened Palestinian resolve. Because honor, and its offspring, revenge, can override fear of death, the average Israeli lives in greater trepidation than ever before.

Yet, in terms of sheer numbers, Palestinians have been even more victimized by the rhetoric of 'terror'. The most devastating uses of 'terrorism' in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been to

justify actions by the IDF against Palestinians in refugee camps. In September 1982, for example, after the evacuation of PLO fighters from Beirut, Israeli officials contended that some "2000 terrorists" remained in the refugee camps Sabra and Shatilla in southern Beirut, a claim repeated in the Israeli press. On September 15, the Israeli Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon, authorized entry of what were presumed to be members of the Lebanese militia into the camps that were then sealed off by Israeli tanks. The only resistance they encountered came from a few lightly armed boys. For the next 38 hours, aided by Israeli flares at night, the militiamen raped, tortured, mutilated and massacred over 2000 civilians under the eye of IDF personnel (Hirst 1984, pp. 422-429; Ang 1989, pp. 53-72).

An Israeli commission of inquiry ridiculed the claim that a massacre was not forseen by Israeli officials, and concluded that "indirect responsibility" rested on the shoulders of Sharon and other Israeli leaders. Presumably, the qualifier "indirect" was based on the assumption that Israeli soldiers did not actually do the killing. Yet, allowing the revenge-seeking Lebanese militia into the camps under the fiction that they would clean out "terrorists" suggests complicity if not outright instigation. In other circumstances, those responsible—directly or indirectly—would have been charged with war crimes. But Israel was the victor in the Lebanon war, and memories are often short. Within four years, Ariel Sharon carried his *chutzpah* into the pages of *The New York Times*, arguing that the "civilized world" must form an alliance to wage a "war on terrorism" and stage "pre-emptive attacks on terror bases" in order to "eliminate" terrorists.[20]

As Prime Minister of Israel since March 2001, Sharon, once again, has been able to act on his ambitions, refusing to negotiate with the Palestinian leadership, intensifying settlement building in the West Bank,[21] and adopting an iron fist approach to Palestinian resistance. After the on-going battles of the Al-Aqsa Intifada led to a rash of suicide bombings in Israel in March 2002, Sharon

sent IDF troops, tanks, and helicopter gunships into the Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank, vowing to destroy the Palestinian "terrorist infrastructure." From April 4-13, the IDF besieged the Jenin refugee camp, home to 14,000 residents, meeting fierce resistance from some 160 Palestinian militants. IDF helicopters fired missiles into the camp, often striking civilian homes where no Palestinian fighters were present, and used armored bulldozers to penetrate into the center of the camp, destroying many buildings in the process. After thirteen Israeli soldiers died fighting in the Hawashin district of the camp, bulldozers proceeded to raze homes in that area even after most of the fighting had ended. The number of Palestinian casualties has yet to be determined, but according to Human Rights Watch, the "extensive, systematic, and deliberate leveling of the entire district was clearly disproportionate to any military objective that Israel aimed to achieve."[22]

The assault of the Jenin refugee camp was the most devastating attack on a Palestinian population center in the West Bank during 35 years of Israeli occupation. As with Sabra and Shatilla, the Israelis claimed to be fighting terrorism, but the principal result was the destruction of civilian property, institutions, and lives. That the Israeli government could succeed in convincing people that it was eliminating the "terrorist infrastructure" of the Palestinians, illustrates how the rhetoric of 'terror' is a causal factor in generating even more terrorism. On one side, the bulk of the Israeli public and the American Congress were led to endorse Sharon's actions, giving a green light for a continuation of his offensive against "terrorism." On the other side, the flames of outrage and revenge were fanned, once again, among Palestinians and their sympathizers.

Moving Beyond the Rhetoric of 'Terror'

In the absence of a negotiated settlement, the continuation of tit-for-tat violence between Israelis and Palestinians has long been foreseen. Already in 1956 the U.N. Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, informed Israel's Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, that Israel's retaliatory actions against Palestinians would postpone indefinitely peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Arabs (Urquhart 1972, p. 157). Hammarskjold's advice went unheeded as successive Israeli governments added retaliation to retaliation, with deterrence offered as the standard justification (Dayan 1968, Netanyahu 1993).[23] As Hammarskjold predicted, the effect has been the very opposite. Raymond Close summarized the situation accurately as follows:

> The state of Israel has been committed for 50 years to a policy of massive and ruthless retaliation—deliberately disproportional. "Ten eyes for an eye," the Israeli like to say. And still their policy fails, because they have not recognized what the thoughtful ones among them know to be true—that terrorism will thrive as long as the Palestinian population is obsessed with the injustice of their lot and consumed with despair." (Close 1998)

The United States has edged ever closer to mimicking Israeli strategy in its confrontation with terrorism. For example, the State Department has developed just "four basic policy tenets" for dealing with terrorism:

> *First*, make no concession to terrorists and strike no deals.
>
> *Second*, bring terrorists to justice for their crimes.
>
> *Third*, isolate and apply pressure on states that sponsor terrorism to force them to change their behavior.

> *Fourth*, bolster the counterterrorist capabilities of those countries that work with the United States and require assistance. ("Patterns of Global Terrorism," Alexander and Musch 2001, pp. 1-2)

Nowhere does the State Department call for investigating the *causes* of persistent terrorist violence, or for any sort of policy review. This is surprising given that the State Department is a policy-making sector of the U.S. Government—unlike the law-enforcement agencies for whom these guidelines are more understandable. Its refusal to deal squarely with the *political* origins of terrorism has led it to adopt a position of dealing with the symptoms while ignoring the causes. The rhetoric of 'terror' might not have caused the development of this curious stance, but it has paved the way for its acceptance by the general public.[24]

There are legitimate ways of responding *to* terrorist actions without responding *with* terrorism. Granting that terrorism is wrongful and intolerable, law enforcement agencies must make every effort to identify, apprehend, and prosecute individuals and organizations responsible for specific terrorist actions. A resort to force should occur only after the appropriate legal channels have been exhausted, and here one must be careful to target only those for whom one has firm evidence of terrorist activity. But it is a mistake to think of all terrorism merely as a problem of criminal offense and law enforcement. Persistent terrorism stemming from a given population is indicative of a serious political disorder. As long as the members of that population are outraged over perceived injustices and decide that terrorism is the *only* viable form of redress, then mere police action, coupled with a repeated failure to address their grievances, will solve nothing, and certainly, indiscriminate retaliation will only intensify hatred and resolve.

The solution to a particular problem of terrorism requires, at the very minimum, *examining* the circumstances wherein violence against civilians is seen as the only emotional outlet or route of

resistance. Only then can intelligent moral responses be crafted. To reach this stage, it is imperative that the rhetoric of 'terror' be recognized for what it is. Its practitioners are serving a political agenda, unwittingly or not. Its victims are innocents, civilians, noncombatants, whose plight is ignored and whose communities suffer from reprisals because some of their members have found violence to be the only way to react in a desperate hope that somehow, someone with enough sense and power, will realize that these grievances must be addressed. Perhaps they are wholly misguided, but when the rhetoric of 'terror' succeeds in discrediting them before rational inquiry into the causes of their grievances and behavior can begin, then it is itself a cause of terrorism. If its practitioners anticipate this sort of result, they are guilty of knowingly furthering terrorism. Should they *intend* to bring that result, then they are themselves guilty of terrorist actions.

Language moulds thought, and thought precipitates action. The pejorative bias that infects the current employment of 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' discourages a clear moral assessment of political conflicts like that between Israelis and Palestinians. If these words cannot be used in a consistent and unprejudiced manner, then they are obstacles in the path towards the resolution of such conflicts and stimulators of further violence against civilians. Consequently, if terrorism has no place in a civilized world, then the rhetoric of 'terror' has no place in the civilized discourse of today.[25]

Notes

1. The Jacobins first employed the term during the French Revolution, applying it to the actions of the revolutionary government in eradicating its enemies. By the mid-nineteenth century, it was used to signify anti-government activities, for example, the campaigns of Irish dissidents in the 1860s and of Russian revolutionaries of the 1880s (Laqueur 1987, chp. 1; White 2002, chap. 5).

2. See the definitions of the State Department in its *Patterns of Global Terrorism* at www.state.gov, the FBI at www.fbi.gov/publish/terror/terrusa.html, and the Defense Department at www.periscope.usni.com/demo/termst0000282.html. While the UN operates with its own definition (www.inlink.com/~civitas/mun/res9596/terror.html) it has been unable to agree on workable criteria for ascribing 'terrorism' (Deen 2002).

3. Here, *political objectives* have to do with control over certain regions or organizations. Noam Chomsky uses 'terrorism' to refer to "the threat or use of violence to intimidate or coerce (generally for political ends)" (Shafritz 1991, p. 264), and Paul Wilkinson describes terrorism as "the systematic use of coercive intimidation, usually to service political ends," that commonly targets "innocent civilians" (Wilkinson 2000, pp. 12-13).

4. In this sense, the usage of 'terrorist' is somewhat broader than what the standard definition permits. That is, the common media practice is to classify acts as "terrorist" if there is a suspicion that they stem from political grievances, regardless of whether the motive is accompanied by any definite political objectives (Margalit 1995: 18).

5. The U. S. State Department describes 'terrorism' as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by *sub-national groups or clandestine state agents*, usually intended to influence an audience" (my emphasis, "Patterns of Global Terrorism

2000," Alexander and Musch 2001, p. 5). This definition is contained in Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f(d).

6. While the Jacobins used 'terrorist' with a positive connotation (see note 1), a negative sense was associated with the term in the writings of Edmund Burke (Laqueur 1987, p. 11). Geoffrey Nunberg has noted that ". . . the word "terrorism" led a double life—a justified political strategy to some, an abomination to others. The Russian revolutionaries who assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881 used the word proudly. And in 1905, Jack London described terrorism as a powerful weapon in the hands of labor, though he warned against harming innocent people." As late as 1947, the Jewish Stern Gang in Palestine referred to themselves as 'terrorists' and Ben Hecht wrote approvingly of the Jewish "terrorists of Palestine" in their attacks upon British targets in Palestine (Hirst 1984, p. 119).

7. See, for example, O'Brien 1977, p. 91 and Oliverio 1998, chap. 1. Robert Picard writes that it "has become an axiom that terrorism describes acts of violence committed by others, and the similar violence committed by one's own nation or by those with whom one sympathizes, is legitimate" (Picard 1993, p. 3). Noam Chomsky points out that there is a "propangandistic usage" in which "the term 'terrorism' is used to refer to terrorist acts committed by enemies against us or our allies" (from Interview Number 5 with Chomsky on Znet at www.znet.com). I thank Erich Schulte for calling this point to my attention.

8. Don Wycliff, "Sorting out usage of the T-word," *The Chicago Tribune*, March 21, 2002.

9. The failure to recognize such instances of state terrorism is pointed out by several writers, including in Chomsky 1988a, 1988b, Herman 1982, Falk 1991, Ashmore 1997, and Oliverio 1998.

10. Documentation concerning both cases can be found on the websites of several human rights organizations, including, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Voices in the Wilderness,

The World Health Organization, and the Israeli human rights organization, B'tselem. Then Secretary of State Madeline Albright responded affirmatively when asked whether the U.N. sanctions on Iraq were "worth" the deaths of a half-million Iraqi children (*60 Minutes* interview, aired May 12th 1996).

11. See for example, the State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism-2000* (Alexander and Musch 2001). In it, Hezbollah's attacks on the Israeli targets are described as "terrorist" despite the fact that these attacks were directed upon the Israeli military in southern Lebanon (p. 39). Needless to say, Hezbollah is on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations. Again, the actions of Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad are described as "terrorist" even when directed against Israeli occupying forces, whereas Israel's undercover assassinations of Palestinian figures were not so described (pp. 41-45). That the bombing of the USS Cole was taken as a terrorist action is implicit in the descriptions given on pp. 47 and 76.

12. Picard 1993, p. 121. The collusion of interests between the U.S. Government and the mass media is also documented in Herman 1982, chp. 4; Herman and O'Sullivan 1989, chp. 8; Chomsky 1988a, chp. 11; and Chomsky 1988b.

13. See, for example, the description of terrorists in Netanyahu 1986: 7-15.

14. A case in point is the debate that took place early in 2002 over the status of the Al-Qaeda prisoners captured in the U.S.-Afghanistan war. The U.S. Administration determined that, as "terrorists," these prisoners are not governed by the Third Geneva Convention that deals with the treatment of those detained in wartime.

15. See, for example, the U. S. bombings in Lebanon and Libya cited above. Again, ever since the early 1950s, Israeli "reprisals" for violence against Israelis committed by Palestinians has routinely resulted in the deaths of more Arab civilians, for example, after the operation at the Munich

Olympics in 1972, the Israeli air force killed between 200-500 people, mainly civilians, in bombing raids in Lebanon and Syria. (Hirst 1984, p. 314).

16. A recent instance of an incitement to terrorist violence on the pretext of combating terrorism can be found in an article by Alan Dershowitz, "A New Way of Responding to Palestinian Terrorism" *The Jerusalem Post*, March 18, 2002. In describing his proposal to end the current Israeli-Palestinian violence, Dershowitz called for the organized destruction of a single Palestinian village in retaliation for every terrorist attack against Israel. "It will be a morally acceptable trade-off even if the property of some innocent civilians must be sacrificed in the process."

17. Given that the overwhelming number of examples of terrorism are identified as coming from the Arab and Islamic worlds, and that "retaliation" against terrorists is repeatedly urged even at the expense of civilian casualties, one can easily agree with Edward Said's assessment of the book as nothing short of "an incitement to anti-Arab and anti-Moslem violence" (Said 1988, p. 157).

18. See Alon 1980, pp. 68-81, which mentions that the Israeli policy of combating "international terrorism" included the proviso that civilian populations that "shelter anti-Israeli terrorists" will not be immune from punitive action. See also Gal-Or 1994, for a discussion of Israeli policy, and also the earlier study of Blechman 1971.

19. The estimate of Israeli fatalities comes from the Israeli Embassy in the United Kingdom, at www.israel-embassy.org.uk/web/pages/fatal.htm and the Israeli human rights group, B'tselem at www.btselem.org. The figures on the Palestinians are from B'tselem and from the Palestine Monitor at www.palestinemonitor.org/factsheet/Palestinian_killed_fact_sheet.htm. According to their estimates, civilians constituted approximately 70% of the Israelis killed and 85% of the Palestinians killed in the period from September 29, 2000 to May 14, 2002. The figures show that an approximate ratio of one dead Israeli for three dead Palestinians during the Al Aqsa Intifada,

whereas in the first year and a half of the first Intifada, one Israeli was killed for every 25 Palestinians (see "In New Conflict, Narrowing Ratio of Dead Pressures Sharon," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2002).

20. Ariel Sharon, "It's Past Time to Crush the Terrorist Monster," *The New York Times*, September 30, 1986.

21. Sharon has persistently advocated the on-going settlement of the occupied territories by Jewish citizens of Israel. In May 2002, B'tselem reported that in the first year of his tenure as Prime Minister, 34 new settlements were begun in the West Bank. B'tselem also reported that 41.9% of the West Bank is under the direct control of the settlers, and that since 1993, the population of West Bank settlers had doubled.

22. See the Human Rights Watch report issued in May 2002 on the IDF's siege of the Jenin camp at www.hrw.org/press/2002/05/jenin0503-prin. Related reports by Human Rights Watch reports can be found at their website www.hrw.org. Amnesty International and B'tselem published similar reports at the same time. It should be noted that the IDF closed off the camp to the media and humanitarian organizations until April 19, and the Israeli government refused to allow a UN investigation team to visit the area in the aftermath of the siege.

23. Blechman, 1971, suggests that Israeli governments have also resorted to the strategy of reprisals in an attempt to satisfy public rage, frustration, and anxiety by providing "a counterfeit form of redress" (p. 286).

24. The State Department's exclusion of any evaluation of policy or examination of causes is echoed in a recent publication from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, *To Prevail: An American Strategy for the Campaign Against Terrorism*. This study is summarized in "Defeating Terrorism: New Strategy for the Campaign Against Terrorism," November 27, 2001

http://www.csis.org/press/pr01_69.htm. Wilkinson 2000, pp. 233-234, advocates a similar tough line in dealing with terrorists, though he cautions that the "response of the liberal democratic state" should always remain within the rule of law. In the opposite direction, Raymond Close writes that for America to adopt the Israeli model would "weaken our leadership position in the world" and undermine the most effective defenses we have against terrorism, namely, "a commitment to the rule of law, dedication to the fairness and evenhandedness in settling international disputes, and a reputation as the most humanitarian nation in the world." Former Assistant Secretary of State George Ball argued in the same manner in *The New York Times* on December 16, 1984, emphasizing our "prime objective should clearly be to correct, or at least mitigate, the fundamental grievances that nourish terrorism rather than engage in pre-emptive and retaliatory killing of those affected by such grievances."

25. Discussions with Robert Ashmore, Orayb Najjar, Roy Pearson, Louis Pojman, and Erich Schulte have helped stimulate my thoughts on terrorism, and I express my gratitude to Raja Halwani and Herman Stark for helpful remarks on an earlier version of this essay.

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