

The anthropology of terrorism

[Society](#), [Terrorism](#)



Since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, "terrorism" has been a word that every American has used daily. It has been eleven years since these attacks, and our country is still at war, and we use terms like "acts of terror" to justify our invasion of their civilian space. Personally, I do not care much for conspiracy theories, but I was interested to know a little bit more about the Islamic culture that these "terrorists" stem from. While the majority of the population of Iraq and Afghanistan are practicing Muslims, they can not all be defined as "terrorists". In all actuality, a lot of them may define Americans and other westernized countries with seemingly unlimited war powers as "terrorist" groups. There are many differences from the American view of acts of terror, the Iraqi view of acts of terror, and the view of how those who commit crimes of terror see their own actions. I think it very important that American civilians, especially those who are not well educated on our foreign policies and the current war situation, take time to see how Iraqi civilians and the Muslim population view the September 11 acts of terror, and the subsequent war compared to those who chose to commit these acts.

I think that most would be surprised when they find that the Islamic religion does not actually promote those extensive "acts of terror" that they do not support the extremist groups like Al Qaeda, and that our presence in their civilian areas, like market places may not be necessary or productive for their day-to-day routines. In order for many people to understand these differing viewpoints on terrorism, I think it is important to focus on how different people may define an act of terror.

In December of 1994, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 49/60, "Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism," describes terrorism as: "Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them. Later, in 2004 at UN Security Council Resolution 1566 a definition is given, stating acts of terror are: Criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.

The United Nations adds to the definition again in 2005 at a panel, stating the definition of terrorism as: Any act intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act. ("Various Definitions of Terrorism") The United Nations has no official definition of terrorism, because some would argue that there is no real distinction between a "terrorist" and a "freedom fighter. Therefore, the United Nations' descriptions of the term are vague and always include that terrorism is "intimidating" or that it "provokes terror" on a group of people. The first description listed comments on the justification of these acts, which most others do not. Now, I would like to point out the differences in the definitions that are released by the Arabic

Community and the United States. In 1998, the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism was implemented by the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior and the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice in Cairo, Egypt.

They defined terrorism at this convention as: Any act or threat of violence, whatever its motives or purposes, that occurs in the advancement of an individual or collective criminal agenda and seeking to sow panic among people, causing fear by harming them, or placing their lives, liberty or security in danger, or seeking to cause damage to the environment or to public or private installations or property or to occupying or seizing them, or seeking to jeopardize national resources. "Various Definitions of Terrorism")

The United States has many different definitions of terrorism in almost every government organization's code. In Federal Criminal Code Title 18 of the United States defines terrorism and lists the crimes associated with terrorism.

In Section 2331 of Chapter 113(B), defines terrorism as: ...activities that involve violent... or life-threatening acts... that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State and... appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and...(C) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States..." FBI definition of terrorism:

The unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a Government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives. The definition of <https://assignbuster.com/the-anthropology-of-terrorism/>

terrorism used in the United States Army Field Manual FM 3-0, form 2001 is: The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear. It is intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies ... [to attain] political, religious, or ideological goals.

The Dictionary of Military Terms used by the Department of Defense defines terrorism as: The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological. (" Various Definitions of Terrorism") I think the difference in the way our governments define a term that the United Nations finds so debatable shows a huge cultural difference in where the priorities for our countries lie.

Obviously, since the September 11 attacks, the United States has spent an extensive amount of time coming up with more and more to add to the definition of terrorism and have worked to almost make ourselves seem like more of the victim. Our Federal Code includes mass destruction and assassination, but states that it primarily occurs within the United States jurisdiction. This is open to interpretation, as is all code, but it basically means that we are always the victim of acts of terror and can hardly ever be accused of committing the crime.

However, in the FBI definition, it says that terrorism is using violence and force to coerce a government and its civilians of political and social objectives. Are we not using force and asserting ourselves on the Iraqi government, and every other government that we have been at war with? Has it not all been for a political gain? Then the military definitions add that

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actions can only be defined in that way if they are being committed for political, religious, or ideological reasons. However, I think that most Americans, if asked would only include religion in the definition.

We have been trained to think that way, to only see terrorism as acts of Jihad, extremist Muslims. Americans, since I can remember have always been extremely proud. We are all truly blessed to come from a country that has a strong military backbone, free, accessible education, a comparably thriving economy, and the opportunity for social mobility. That being said, the majority of Americans are very ignorant and one-sided on a lot of political issues. Most are content with obtaining the easily accessible information from the news or internet and word of mouth.

Most do not take the time to educate themselves on social issues that they comment on daily. This is why people are so opposed to those who practice Islam using their first amendment right to freedom of religion, especially in the south where most are extremely prejudiced. The news and the coverage of the September 11 attacks and the war are to blame for this phenomenon of fearing those who are different. In *Packaging Terrorism: Co-opting the News for Politics and Profit*, Susan Miller criticizes the way the media chooses which stories to run. " Threats, danger, fear.

These words grab the attention of the readers and that's what the media want. Your attention. Be afraid. Be very afraid. " She shows that there are many more options of global stories that our local news stations could run, but those that involve Americans or anything involving conflict in the Middle East, or even stories of al-Qaeda action in other countries, will get higher ratings as " Big Stories" over stories like the huge crisis of bombings in <https://assignbuster.com/the-anthropology-of-terrorism/>

Mumbai in 2006, which is a place and event that Americans, in general, have no solid connection to.

However, our society is also very vain, and there are even international events that are very important to us and the action in the Middle East that constantly get trumped by "larger" domestic stories. A 2006 suicide bombing of the Golden Mosque, which was close to triggering an Iraq civil war was overshadowed by the Winter Olympics that year. A 2005 bombing was completely overshadowed by the kidnapping of Natalee Holloway in Aruba. The American people are more likely to be interested in our domestic actions than the stories of foreign events, especially when these events seem to run together and are so similar every time they are covered.

One thing that is extremely controversial in covering those true acts of terror is the fact that most terrorists really want the attention on them. If someone is taken hostage and taped, or there is a huge event, like the 9/11 attacks, those who commit these actions are doing so for the attention, and for the media to show these events to the public, some can argue that those who share the news are just giving them what they most desire: to have all eyes on them.

There is also an opinion, however, that if this footage is shown, it will show Americans the true brutality of the people who our military is fighting against, and that it will show that there truly is a threat, encouraging Americans to further support our military and create a unifying experience that promotes patriotism. This was shown in the case of the kidnapping of reporter, Daniel Pearl in Pakistan in 2002 by al-Qaeda operative Khalid

Shiekh Mohammad. The video of his execution was made available to news networks, and a portion of Pearl speaking was shown on CBS.

The full video shows his throat being slit and his severed head held up with a voiceover speaking out against the “ enemies of Islam. ” After much debate of whether or not the video should be seen by the public, whether it would violate the rights of Pearl’s grievingfamily, and whether the American people should be allowed to be exposed to witnessing a person’s murder, Peter Kadizis and Stephen Mindich of the Boston Phoenix posted a link to the video with a note above stating, “ This is the single most gruesome, horrible, despicable, and horrifying thing I’ve ever seen. . That our government and others throughout the world, who have had this tape for some time have remained silent is nothing less than an act of shame”(Moeller). While our media is the largest source of information for Americans and is the largest reason that Americans have an instilled fear of anyone of the Islamic religion, the USA Patriot Act passed in 2001 as a response to the terrorist attacks is one of the triggers that set off this fear, and is a constant reminder of the attack.

This Act was instated based on the theory that if there is a threat to national security, the public is more willing to allow for harsher policies and increased restrictions of civil liberties. The Act includes reduced restrictions in law enforcement agencies' gathering of intelligence within the United States; expanded the Secretary of the Treasury’s authority to regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreign individuals and entities; and broadened the discretion of law enforcement andimmigrationauthorities in detaining and deporting immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts.

Even though support for the Patriot Act has decreased, though not dramatically (from 60% classifying it as “ necessary” in 2001, to a 39% in 2006), President Barack Obama signed a four-year extension of the act to include, searches of business records that would assist in an investigation undertaken to protect against international terrorism, and surveillance of “ lone wolves,” individuals suspected of terrorist-related activities not linked to terrorist groups. (Borgeson, Valeri). This, eleven years later is an act that is still perfectly in tact, and is still restricting our rights.

It isn't the most invasive law, but it does hang over the heads of those who do business internationally and those who immigrated from other countries, because they are constantly under the threat of being watched and studied by the government. Since Americans have media coverage and restrictions that help to shape the idea of terrorism and the way we perceive terrorism and acts of violence, it is only logical to realize that the Iraqi people, have their own way of defining Terrorism in their country.

It is important to realize, when analyzing their views, that the United States have been seen as a threatening force to them for the past eleven years by imposing on their land and declaring warfare on their former leader and having our military staying within their civilian quarters. Though Iraq has been liberated for the past five years, American troops were just recently sent home, and they are suffering from terrorist attacks against them from other outside forces as well.

Most of those who practice the Islamic religion believe that warfare should only be used to suppress rebellion or to defend against imposing armies. They do not believe in starting wars, because the punishment is not in their

hands, violence should only be used for protection. Yousuf Baadarani, a popular writer defending the Islamic culture, states in an interview with Asia Times states, " Since Islam forbids terrorism, than no terrorist could be labeled Islamic. He would have had to abandon the Islamic path to become a terrorist" (Abedin).

Jihad is only supposed to be used to protect the Islamic religion against those who attack it, not to create terror in those who do not practice Islam. This counters a popular theory Americans have that all Muslims are destined to commit acts of terror and that they are instilling values that promote suicide bombings and murder of those who do not practice Islam. Al-Qaeda was born out of Osama Bin Laden's leftover defense force he gathered together for the Saudi Kingdom, but it was rejected after they allowed US troops to use Saudi Arabia after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

Al-Qaeda means " the basis" or " the base. " It is extremely difficult to find out the members of this organization and to figure out who is behind certain attacks. The chain of command is extremely difficult to follow. It has one goal: " to hit the West wherever and whenever it can, in order to further polarize the Muslim and Western worlds and effect an eventual victory of the Islamists, who claim leadership over the Muslim world"(Reuter).

This terrorist group- and there is no debate from anyone as to whether or not they are a terrorist group- has committed too many suicide bombings and killings of innocent westerners to name. They are the group behind the infamous September 11 attacks, and are the ones who created all of the fear of terrorism in the United States. This group of people is founded on a basic

principle: hate for all Westerners, and the desire to completely sever ties between those who practice Islam and Westerners.

This is not a group based on jihad; the exception to the Islamic law against violence, which should only be allowed when defending the Islamic religion. It is simply a hate group against Westerners that wears a mask of religion. In conclusion, there is a lot that is not perceived correctly when it comes to the idea of terrorism. Every citizen of Iraq is not a terrorist, and neither is every member of the Muslim community. A select few extremists have ruined the reputation of a religion in the United States, with the help of the media and politics.

I hope that every American citizen at some point realizes the difference between the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the Iraqi family that walks down the street. It is important to me and our country that people see that most Muslims do not support al-Qaeda and that the group of extremists is not practicing their religion properly. I hope that people will start to realize the importance of getting information from other sources than the popular media and that some will start to look up more information on important domestic and international events.

Most of all, I hope that I have been able to properly compare viewpoints on terrorism in different parts of the world accurately. Bibliography Abedin, Mahan. " Asia Times Online :: Middle East News, Iraq, Iran current affairs. " Asia Times Online :: Asian news hub providing the latest news and analysis from Asia. N. p. , 29 Dec. 2009. Web. 5 Dec. 2012. Arena, Michael P. , and Bruce A. Arrigo. The terrorist identity: explaining the terrorist threat. New

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