Terrorism: definitions, origins, responses and interventions.

Chapter One: Defining Terrorism

Part One – What is Terrorism

The Etymology of Terrorism

The etymological meaning of the English world ‘ terrorism’ was first adopted in medieval Britain but was first coined in medieval France from the Latin word ‘ terrere’ meaning ‘ to frighten’ (Jeffery 2006: 24). The suffix of ‘ ism’ on the end of the word ‘ terror’ can be constructed as a systematic activity aiming to promote and advance a certain ideological stance. For instance, Marxism argues ‘ society can, and will, change when the material conditions are in place to precipitate this change’ (Marx and Engels 1848: 27). Therefore, because Marx’s belief promotes a certain branch of communist philosophy the suffix ‘ ism’ is used to establish his particular ideological viewpoint. Conversely, if one chooses to ignore the political connotation associated with the phrase ‘ terrorism’, the etymology of terrorism, one could say, is to simply promote the systematic advancement of fear. For example, the parents of a child may simply choose to apply the metaphor of ‘ terrorist’ to personify their expression that their child annoy so frequently and unexpectedly that one fears what could come next.

Further to this, the etymology of terrorism brings fourth two observations. Firstly, terrorism’s rooted meaning has undergone a transformation (the historical context of terrorism will be highlighted later in chapter two, but I will give you a brief outline). Terrorism was first used within the latter part of the ninetieth century as a regime or system of governance, wielded to establish a revolutionary State against the enemies of the people

(Williamson 2009: 43). Terrorism, in modern society, is now more commonly used to describe terrorist acts committed by non-state or sub-national identities against the State. In 1848, terrorism in Europe and Russia was originated by its exponents as comprising a kind of action against tyrannical States. German radicalist, Karl Henizen, underpinned the policy of terrorism directed at tyrannical States as he argued ‘ while murder was forbidden in principle, this prohibition did not apply to politics, and the murder of political leaders might well be a ‘ physical necessity” (Laqueur 1980: 27). Henizen was therefore, perhaps, the first scholar to provide a doctrine for modern terrorism. Moreover, when Jacobins used the term ‘ terrorism’ to describe their regime during the French Revolution (1789-1794), it had a positive connotation, whereas now most commentators agree that the term ‘ terrorism’ is inherently a negative, pejorative term (Crenshaw 1989, Barker 2002). Thus, it is evident that the term ‘ terrorism’ has undergone a transformation both in meaning and in perception.

The second observation one identifies with in relation to the etymology of terrorism is that since its inception, the term ‘ terrorism’ has been linked to various ideals such as justice, liberty and morality. This idealism continued to be attached to ‘ terrorism’ into the mid-1800s, even though a transition had occurred in the meaning of the term (Kravchinsky 1884: 508). These idealistic principles upon the term ‘ terrorism’ continue today. For instance, many modern organisations, considered as ‘ terrorist organisations’, have chosen for themselves names which suggest that they are idealistic. One example of this is the terrorist organisation Al Qaeda. The term ‘ Al Qaeda’ roughly translates into ‘ The Base’ which suggests a certain level of moral

unity among its organisation. Additionally, the perception that exists between how terrorists' see themselves and how the way that others, particularly target governments, see them, can be explained by the well-known phrase ' one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fight' (I will explain different societal constructions of terrorism later on in this chapter as a critique towards defining the concept ' terrorism'). This phrase, therefore, represents the idea that terrorism is a political term and therefore has to be noted that the political, ideological and religious objectives, which have been an integral aspect of terrorism since its inception is what differentiates terrorism from mere criminal violence which has no greater criminal goal in mind and which is carried out for instant gratification (Williamson 2009: 45). Thus, whereas Osama bin Laden is deemed as a crazed killer within western society, among the east, especially parts of Pakistan and the Saudi kingdom he is deemed as a martyr (Gupta 2008: 8). And so, because of this, we need to adopt a politically scientific approach in helping to understand the definition of terrorism.

Applying Political Science to help Understand the Definition of Terrorism

The modern political usage of the phrase ' terrorism' can be traced back to 1795 (Laqueur 2001: 6). It is reported that Edmund Burke was the first person to use the word in English, in order to warn people about what he called ' those thousand of hell hounds called terrorist' (McDowell and Langford 1992: 87). The word first appeared in 1798 in the supplement of the Dictionnaire of the Academie Francaise where it was politically defined as a ' systeme, regime de la terreur' (' a system, reign of terror'). The entry that

first appeared in the ‘ Academie Francaise’ conjures up numerous observations that suggest that the term ‘ terrorism’ is political in nature. Firstly, it is clear that to any native French speaker, in the phrase ” systeme, regime de la terreur’ fear and terror play a predominant role. Therefore, in this respect, the definition of the Academie Francaise is to be taken more or less as equivalent to terrorism in its broadest sense which we were previously speaking about. Secondly, the political context ‘ regime’ furthers the argument that the term ‘ terrorism’ is inherently political in nature. And finally, there seems to be a hint of another condition embedded within the phrase that was placed in ‘ Academie Francaise’, namely that most terrorist activity is carried out by non-private individuals (thus ‘ systeme’). Therefore, presumably, these individuals were, or aspired to become legitimate rulers of a recognised States. Moreover, it appears that the definition of ‘ Academie Francaise’ solely aims to define rebel or revolutionary violence, rather than terrorism in its contemporary sense.

However, it has only been within the last thirty-five years that political science has enlightened us on terrorist campaigns, groups, activities, tactics, motives, finances, State support and trends (Enders and Sandler 2006: 9). This comparative approach towards defining terrorism has taught us much about what is common and what is different among terrorist activity. For example, a majority of political scientists have characterised many European terrorist organisations as ‘ fighting communist organisations’ with a focused ‘ Marxist-Lenin ideology, an anticapitalist orientation, a desire to limit casualties, and a need for external constituency’ (Alexander and Pluchinsky 1992: 27). Over the last few decades, political scientists have furthered

these comparative approaches towards the definition terrorism in which they have identified the changing nature of terrorism – for instance, the rise of State sponsorship in the early 1980s to the more modern increase in Islamic fundamentalism in postmodern society. Political scientists have also analysed the effectiveness of antiterrorist policies in helping to define the term ‘ terrorism’, but without the need to apply social statistics.

Further to this, Wilkinson maintains that political science defines the phrase ‘ terrorism’ by dividing its definition into three distinctive typologies, these include; revolutionary terrorism, sub-revolutionary terrorism and repressive terrorism. The first typology defines the phrase ‘ terrorism’ as the use of ‘ systematic tactics of terroristic violence with the objective of bringing about political revolution’ (Wilkinson 1975: 74). Wilkinson furthers the typology of revolutionary terrorism by characterising it into four major attributes; (1) it is always a group, not an individual phenomenon, even though the groups may be very small; (2) both the revolution and the use of terror in its furtherance are always justified by some revolutionary ideology or programme; (3) there exists leaders capable of mobilising people for terrorism and (4) alternative institutional structures are created because the revolutionary movement must partake action in the political system and therefore must develop its own policy-making bodies and codification of behaviour (Wilkinson 1975: 79). To give a more detailed picture of Wilkinson’s typology of revolutionary terrorism towards the political definition of terrorism we should add Hutchinson’s list of essential properties, these are; (1) it is part of a revolutionary strategy; (2) it is manifested through acts of socially and politically unacceptable violence; (3) there is a pattern of symbolic or

representative selection of victims or objects of acts of terrorism and (4) the revolutionary movement deliberately intends these actions to create a psychological effect on specific groups and thereby to change their political behaviour and attitudes' (Hutchinson 1978: 18).

The second category in Wilkinson's typology to define the political definition of terrorism is sub-revolutionary terrorism. Sub-revolutionary terrorism is defined as terror used ' for political motives other than revolution or governmental repression' (Wilkinson 1975: 81). Whereas revolutionary terrorism seeks total change, Wilkinson argues that sub-revolutionary terrorism is aimed at more limited goals such as forcing the government to change its policy on some issues, warning or punishing specific public officials, or retaliating against government action seen as reprehensible by terrorist (Wilkinson 1975: 82). Therefore, in this respect, under the typology of sub-revolutionary terrorism pressure groups such as Fathers for Justice and Green Peace may be deemed as ' terrorist organisations'.

Wilkinson's third typology, repressive terrorism, is defined as ' the systematic use of terroristic acts of violence for the purpose of suppressing, putting down, quelling, or restraining certain groups, individuals or forms of behaviour deemed to be undesirable by the oppressor' (Wilkinson 1975: 83). Therefore, the political definition of terrorism under the typology of repressive terrorism relies heavily upon the services of specialised agencies whose members are trained to torture, murder, and deceive. The terror apparatus is then deployed against specific opposition groups and can be later directed against much wider groups (Wilkinson 1975: 84). One example

of this is Nazi Germany, where the Schutzstaffel (SS), the specialised agency, deployed terroristic apparatus against the opposition group, the Jews.

Moreover, the main advantage of applying a politically scientific approach to defining terrorism has been its electric, multidisciplinary viewpoint encompassing historical, sociological, and psychological studies. Historical studies identify common features among terrorist campaigns and indicate how the phrase ‘ terrorism’ has evolved over time. In sociological studies, sociologists analyses societal norms and social structure within terrorist organisations. And, by using psychological studies, researchers have identified internal and external variables associated with the escalation of violence in a terrorist event (Enders and Sandler 2006: 10). Furthermore, some factors, for example, may induce an individual to become a suicide bomber, for example, include sociological – the approval of a group – and psychological factors – personal mentality. Thus, certain fields may interlink to accompany political science in helping to define ‘ terrorism’. Another field that has helped revolutionised the way we perceive the definition of ‘ terrorism’ is law and to illustrate this point one is about to examine the definition of ‘ terrorism’ under general international law.

Defining Terrorism under General International Law

Recent interest in the utility or propriety of a definition of terrorism under general international law has been driven by larger issues, such as the need to build international solidarity within the war of terrorism, and the opposing need felt by some of guarding any such possible definition of terrorism from any undue weightage likely to be given to the unilateral belief of any one State, and particularly the meaning likely to be or already given to the term ‘

terrorism’ in the foreign policy of any one State (Hor et al 2005: 37). Therefore, the need to define terrorism, comprehensively, under international law cannot be divorced from such over-riding political concerns which, together with some old diplomatic obstacles, continued to plague the negotiations towards the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in 2005. The rationale behind such a comprehensive treaty to define the phrase ‘ terrorism’ was a response to calls beginning within the 1990s for a departure from a regime of variegated subject-specific treaties. The initiative for such a treaty to define terrorism derived from India (United Nations General Assembly 2005: 166). The treaty established the United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/210 of 17 December 1996, which had established an Ad Hoc Committee together with a United Nations’ Sixth (Legal) Committee, which was tasked with negotiating on the Draft Comprehensive Convention (Reichard 2002: 18). However, one would like to focus upon the question of whether a customary or general international legal definition of terrorism already exists, and if so, what does a customary definition look like.

Legal guidance to define terrorism under general international law lies at least as much in international custom as it does under the Comprehensive Convention of International Terrorism treaty. This is partly due to the time-lag that occurred between the completed text-based treaty and widespread participation that took place within the new treaty regime. Moreover, it is due to the fact that much of the ‘ new comprehensive definition’ was not all that new, thus proving the United Nations are a long way off achieving essential combinations of (1) having a precise formation that would

necessarily prove useful in defining terrorism and (2) at the same time, attracting the necessary widespread participation of States to make such a comprehensive regime a success (Lim and Elias 1997: 27).

State-sponsored terrorism is a good exemplar over what terrorism might be taken to mean in the eyes of general international law. Professor Brownlie concurs with this statement as he maintains that State-sponsored terrorism is governed mainly, if not exclusively, by the available categories of international legal thought such as the prohibition of the use of force in international relations, the doctrine of imputability in establishing State responsibility for acts of the individual and the self-defence doctrine. He argues ‘ there is no category of the ‘ law on terrorism’ and the problems must be characterised in accordance with the applicable sectors of general international law: jurisdiction, international criminal justice, state responsibility, and so forth’ (Brownlie: 2004: 713).

However, this may to true insofar as international law has not yet evolved to encompass an agreed definition of terrorism, the various subject-specific rules of international law which focus on individual criminal responsibility for different acts of terror such as hijacking, terrorist financing, and so on, can neither be insulated from nor absorbed wholly by the currently existing international law rules which may be brought to bear on State-sponsored terrorism. Several States leading up to the Rome statute, for example, viewed terrorism, under international law, as a distinct criminal event which imposes individual criminal responsibility for State-sponsored terrorism.

In this respect, the definition of terrorism differs when defining the phrase ‘ terrorism’ under State-sponsored terrorism and from what the definition of terrorism means under the International Court of Justice. For example, in the Nicaragua case, Nicaragua had brought a claim against the United States for alleged covert support given by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to armed insurgents operating in Nicaraguan territory in response to the Sandinista Government’s covert support of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front in El Salvador. The issue was that there were interstate in international law rules pertaining to breach of the United States legal responses owed to Nicaragua by allegedly financing, supporting, equipping, arming, training and providing strategic guidance to Nicaraguan rebels seeking to overthrow the Sandinista Government (McCoubrey and White 1995: 12). In short, the case of Nicaragua was about defining the phrase ‘ terrorism’ through state responsibility and not solely as a means of political violence.

On the other hand, Professor Mani recently suggested that what we call ‘ terrorism’ today is, in fact, very much state-sponsored terrorism. This, he suggests, is a direct result of the prohibition in Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter of the use of the force in international relations, which would nonetheless attract individual responsibility for such acts. Therefore, the legal definition of terrorism may be seized by the figure of Osama bin Laden, and we may be startled that by the late twentieth century the only superpower in the world was required to ‘ go to war’ with a mere individual, but that does not change the fact that, for the most part, the definition of terrorism is closely linked to state-sponsorship (Murphy 1999: 161).

The difference, therefore, between Professor Mani's and Professor Brownlie's viewponts is one that has marked debate among the social sciences for a number of years. For example, a majority of scholars adopt Brownlie's viewpoint that the definition of terrorism, especially State-sponsored terrorism, is solely a product of individual extreme criminality. But we must not ignore Mani's argument that the definition of terrorism under State-sponsorship, which has become an ongoing growing phenomenon, and has become a powerful focal-point for advocating the plight of the Palestinian people, for example. Therefore, in a world where we have learnt to view some States as ' rogue' or ' parish', calling States such as Israel a ' terrorist State' serves to highlight the Palestinian cause, and stigmatise the perceived wrongdoer all at the same time (Jansen 2001: 47). Thus, by defining the phrase ' terrorism' under the use of general international law no one can pinpoint a precise definition of the phrase ' terrorism' as the word itself is unattainable. To further this discussion one will now begin to highlight the problems associated with defining the phrase ' terrorism' in which one will begin by examining terrorism as a moral problem.

Part Two – Problems in Defining Terrorism

Definition of Terrorism as a Moral Problem

A major stumbling block towards defining terrorism is that, at base, terrorism is a moral problem. This is, therefore, one of the major reasons for the difficulty over defining of terrorism. Attempts at defining the phrase ' terrorism' are often predicted on the assumption that some classes of political violence are justifiable whereas others are not. Many would label the latter as terrorism whilst being loathe to condemn the former with a term

that is usually used as an epithet. So, in order, for a definition to be universally accepted it must transcend behavioural description to include individual motivation, social milieu, and political purpose (Wardlaw 1989: 4). The same behaviour will or will not, therefore, be viewed as terrorism by any particular observer according to differences in these other factors. However, if the definition is to be of use to a wider audience than the individual who constructs it, students of violence will have to try and divest themselves of the traditional ways of its definition. Just as an increasing number of commentators seem to be able to even-handedly apply the term ‘ terrorist’ to non-State and State actors they will have to apply it even-handedly to those groups with whose cause they agree and those with whose cause they conflict (Wardlaw 1989: 4). The difficulty here is, however, is that different groups of users of definitions find it more or less easy to utilise definitions which focus on behaviour and their effects as opposed to these factors tempered by considerations of motives and politics. Thus many academic students of terrorism seem to find it a little difficult in labelling an event as ‘ terrorist’ without making a moral judgement about the act. Furthermore, many politicians, law enforcement and governmental officials, and citizens find themselves unable to take such a detached view (Wardlaw 1985: 4). For this reason, it may not be too difficult to construct an acceptable definition within this given reference group, but the problem arises when each group attempts to engage into dialogue with each other.

This communication problem is of more than academic importance. This is because it is one of the root causes of both the vacillations in policy which characterises the response of most individual states to terrorism and of the

complete failure of the international community to launch any effective multi-lateral initiatives to combat the problem (Wardlaw 1989: 5). Therefore, those who study terrorism within any given community often cannot communicate with the policy-makers and law enforcers because the latter groups often reject the analytical techniques of the former as being of insufficient relevance to the real world. This is partly due to the latter groups seeing the lack of relevance as an inability to distinguish between ‘ right’ and ‘ wrong’ acts. Moreover, at an international level, political support given to sectional interests militates against a universal definition that could form the basis for international law and action (Wardlaw 1989: 5). Thus, for example, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) is seen by some nations as a terrorist group having no political legitimacy and using morally unjustifiable methods of violence to achieve unacceptable ends. Conversely, other nations deem the actions of the PLO as acceptable legitimate representation of opposed people using necessary and justifiable violence (not terrorism, one needs to emphasise) to achieve a just and inevitable end. Therefore, the problem within defining the phrase ‘ terrorism’ rests upon moral justification. However, in order to further illustrate one’s argument into the problems of defining terrorism one needs to seek to explain such a phenomenon, and not solely justify the problems in defining terrorism wholly on moral justification. And so, in this respect, we need to assess the identity of terrorism in order to seek the problem of its definition.

Difficulties in Defining ‘ Terrorism’ Due to Identification

Another factor that deserves to be noted within the process of identifying the problems associated with defining the concept of terrorism is identification.

The reasoning for this is down to the fact that identification is key to its rhetorical success. Thus, an act will become to be seen as terrorist if people identify with the victim of the act. One example of this is the role of media in reporting terrorism. To explain, the media tend to portray terrorist acts as ‘ newsworthy’ because it acts as an instrument of legitimation. Other example of this happening are within areas of muggings, environment crime, and white-collar crime. Therefore, if the identification of the terrorist act, in the perpetrator’s eyes, is positive the implication for official regimes becomes positive. Take State-sponsored terrorism as an example, if such States are industrialised societies than industries are active participating actors within the official terrorist regime. Furthering the example, because State-sponsored terrorism usually involves bureaucracy (police, armed forces, intelligence agencies, secret police, immigration control, and information control) it becomes the administration of terror thus identifying the definition of ‘ terrorism’ as a positive outcome.

Moreover, Thornton describes the identification of terrorism as a problem of its definition by suggesting ‘ it’s a process of disorientation, the most characteristic use of terror’ (Thornton 2002: 86). However, it is important to emphasise that in Thornton’s quotation of terrorism he places emphasis on terrorism’s extranormal quality. Firstly, one would like to highlight the use of terror in Thornton’s quotation is solely placed within the upper levels of the continuum of political agitation and therefore is not representational of terrorism as a whole but only political motivated terrorism. Furthermore, Thornton is placed with the difficulty of defining ‘ extranormal’ – a difficulty which is not resolved throughout his argument. One maintains that it would

be more productive to seek other ways by which the identification of the definition of terrorism could be more distinguishable from other forms of crime, for example, muggings – both of which have the effect of producing State terror in the victim. One way terrorism can be distinguishes from other forms of crime is that it has an audience wider than the primary victim, although, the same can be said about muggings. For instance, if a number of muggings take place in certain location, intense fear will be engendered in many other individuals who have cause to be or in the same places. The identifiable feature, that distinguishes terrorism to other forms of crime, therefore, is the design to create anxiety rather than the ‘ extranormality’ of the anxiety, which Thornton discussed. Terrorism is further characterised by its highly symbolic content. Thornton contends that the symbolic nature of terrorism contributes significantly to its relatively high efficacy. Thus; –

‘ If the terrorist comprehends that he is seeking a demonstration effect, he will attack targets with a maximum symbolic value. The symbols of the State are particularly important, but perhaps even more are those referring to the normative structures and relationships that constitute the supporting framework of society. By showing the weakness of this framework, the insurgents demonstrate not only their own strength and the weakness of the incumbents but also the inability of the society to provide support for its members in a time of crises’. (Thornton: 2002: 91)

To further the claim that the problem in defining the phrase ‘ terrorism’ is down to identification we must strengthen Thornton’s argument by introducing two terrorist approaches, these are – enforcement terrorism and agitational terrorism.

A Tale of Two Terrorist Approaches – Enforcement Terror and Agitational Terror

Within Thornton's broad definition of terrorism, he has distinguished two categories of how terrorism can be defined. These are through the uses of enforcement terror and agitational terror within terrorist activities. The first approach, enforcement terror, is used by those in power who wish to annihilate challenges to their authority, and the second approach, agitational terror, describes the terroristic activities of those who wish to disrupt the existing status quo and ascend to political power (Thornton 2002: 117). For instance, Nazi Germany and Stalin Russia can be said to inhabit examples of enforcement terror as each government would use fear tactics such as the murder of their citizens to shock them into not establishing a rebellion. Whereas, it could be argued that some socio-political groups such as the Irish Republic Army (IRA) use agitational terror such as the bombing of public places in order to achieve political power. Similarly, May (1974: 285) also observed a divide into the broad definition of terrorism, he theorises these as; the regime of terror and the siege of terror. The former, May refers to, is terrorism in service of establishing order, while the latter refers to terrorism in service of revolutionary movements. May accedes that the regime of terror is more important of the two but also notes how the siege of terror is also what grips society's attention, as May states ' revolutionary terrorism, derivative and reflexive though it may be, exposes a level of perception into the universe of killing and being killed that may be even more revealing than state terrorism' (May 1974: 290).

The argument May puts forth about the regime of terror versus the siege of terror is in fact one of the most interesting puzzles of anyone studying terrorism to come to grips with as most commentators and scholars often focus their attention on the insurgence of terrorism rather than the incumbent nature of terrorism. There are a number of apparent explanations for this. Firstly, one of the hallmarks of insurgence terrorism is that it is dramatic and thus newsworthy. The reason why insurgence terrorism is newsworthy is that it is atypical in nature, it can be addressed stereotypically, and it can be contrasted against a backdrop of normality which is largely overly-typical (Cohen and Young 1981: 52). Thus, when terrorism becomes institutionalised as a form of governance it makes headlines less often simply because it has less news value than a high jacking of an airliner. Another reason for the lack of attention paid toward what May called ‘ the regime of terror’ may be traced back to the processes of constructing social realities. To explain, the portrayal of official terrorists as rational beings compared to the lunatic and out-of-control nature of the individual terrorist encourages the mass of society to see the threat to their physical and psychic integrity coming from the latter direction (Reddy 1998: 163).

Many academics adopt this notion that while states that enforce a regime of terror may be undesirable, the immediate fear from society – perhaps mostly from imagery projected into the public persona from the mass media – is individual terrorism. It is this component of uncertainly that plays a large part here. For instance, state terrorist activities may be brutal and unjust (Chomsky 2005: 185), but, in general, one knows what activities not to

indulge in in order to escape its immediate and person intrusion. Moreover, it also has to be noted that individual terrorism by contrast bears no necessary relation to one's own behaviour. It appears random and dangerous. Here again we hear the echoes of the impact the media has on reporting such events. Furthermore, it must be remembered that many states currently experiencing terrorism are authoritarian states that exert to some extent control over what the news reports. In said cases, therefore, the media can hardly castigate authoritarian governments for their excesses – thus fearing reprisals such as license cancellation – but they can, and do, bring the threat of terrorism by small groups and individuals into the homes of the masses. The view of terrorism therefore is fostered of a society plagued by dangerous extremists damaging the fabric of everyday life and threatening the sate whilst ignoring the greater damage that is being perpetrated as a result of government policies and action plans.

However, it is of course much easier to focus greater emphasis on a specific perpetrator than on one amorphous system. There is, therefore, are some sensible practical reasons for the reluctance of scholars studying the phenomenon of state terrorism. For instance, Gloom noted; –

‘ Historians find it difficult to think themselves into the mores of Robespierre's or a Stalin's regime of terror and it is dangerous to conduct field research in contemporary regime of terror. It is far easier to conceptualise the use of terror as a weapon to achieve a specific goal rather than a form of a regular and normal government’

(Gloom 1978: 73)

Further to this, the only systematic effort develop general theory of terrorism based on an analysis o