

1

Definition and nature of terrorism

19

1.1 Introduction

Terrorism is a highly complex, highly subjective and politically sensitive topic. In this chapter we will address some of this complexity, subjectivity and sensitivity. We will show why and how terrorism is receiving much attention from both the media and governments and how it impacts on societies. Discussing the geographical distribution of attacks and casualties we will arrive at what can be called the definition problem of terrorism. We will explore the questions about what can be labelled terrorism and what not, and why it is actually important (and difficult) to define the term. Finally, we discuss the nature of terrorism: what it is about, what it does to society, and how it works.

That terrorism indeed has an impact on society we can read in the papers and see on television and on the internet. In fact, terrorism is making headlines almost every day and almost everywhere around the globe. In recent years, major attacks or series of attacks have taken place in South America (Colombia), Europe (Norway, the United Kingdom (UK), Spain and Russia), North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, and Libya), Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria, Mali, Somalia and Kenya), The Middle East (Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Yemen), South Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan and India), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, the Philippines) and East Asia (China). The most lethal and most “spectacular” attacks received not only national attention, but in many cases made headlines across the world. For instance, the London bombings on July 7, 2005 not only

were breaking news in the UK and the rest of Europe, but also resulted in headlines in newspapers as far away as Indonesia. The morning after the attacks the readers of the *Media Indonesia* were confronted with a large picture of the devastation and a headline saying “London dibom!” (London the bomb!). Other examples are international responses to the many attacks by the terrorist organization *Boko Haram* in Nigeria. Its kidnapping of young girls in April 2014 made it to the front pages of newspapers around the world. US-based news network *CBS news* reported “100 schoolgirls kidnapped in Nigeria by suspected extremists”, and the Chinese newspaper, *China Daily*, reported “China condemns Nigeria kidnappings”. Also the rise of Islamic State (formerly known as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) and the atrocities committed by that organization led to worldwide condemnation. They even resulted in a *United Nations Security Council Resolution 2170* (15 August 2014) in which the Council deplored and condemned in the strongest terms “the terrorist acts of ISIL and its violent extremist ideology, and its continued gross, systematic and widespread abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law”. But what makes the acts by *Islamic State* or *Boko Haram*, and, for instance, the London bombings “terrorist acts”? When and why do we use that label to describe certain acts of violence? We will discuss this very important question after further exploring the seriousness and geographical scope of attacks that have been labelled, by some or by many, as terrorist attacks.

1.2 A worldwide phenomenon

Whatever definition one uses, unfortunately, there has not been a single day in recent history in which “extremists” or “terrorists” have not killed or wounded civilians, military personnel, police, or others. In the past decade, terrorism has left tens of thousands of people dead in many parts of the world. The *Global Terrorism Database (GTD)* (see box 1.01) of the *University of Maryland* is one of very few databases that has collected data on terrorism for a long time. According to that database there were 48,990 acts of terrorism – defined as intentional acts of violence or threats of violence by a non-state actor, and meeting two of the following three criteria:

1. The violent act was aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal;
2. The violent act included evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) other than the immediate victims; and
3. The violent act was outside the precepts of International Humanitarian Law.

Thus defined, these acts led to more than 100,000 fatalities and about 200,000 injuries in a ten-year timespan between 2004 and 2013. The now discontinued annual reports of the *US Department of State* (the US Ministry of Foreign Affairs) show a different number as it uses a different definition and methodology. According to the *Country Reports on Terrorism* of that Department, terrorists carried out 110,682 attacks worldwide, accounting for 161,449 fatalities and 317,323 injuries in a somewhat different time span, dating from 2005 to 2014.

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD)

The *University of Maryland* does extensive research on both trans- and international terrorist events and presents its data annually in its *Global Terrorism Database (GTD)*, starting in 1970. The *GTD* is currently maintained by the *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)* and consists of over 130,000 terrorist attacks, with information on dozens of variables, such as the nature of the attack and the number of casualties, but also the motive of the perpetrators and the amount of ransom paid in regard to kidnappings. For 2013 it lists 9,707 terrorist attacks and 2,990 kidnappings/hostage takings, resulting in 17,891 fatalities (including perpetrator deaths) and 32,577 injuries across 93 countries. However, more than half of the attacks (57%) and two-thirds of the fatalities (66%) occurred in just three countries – Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The actual datasets, along with additional information on research and methodology of the *GTD* can be accessed via their website at <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

BOX 1.01 THE GLOBAL TERRORISM DATABASE

Yet not all parts of the world are as much troubled by acts of terrorism as others. In fact, terrorism is a strategic threat – seriously challenging the existing political and social order – in only a limited number of countries. Among the countries that in the last few years have been confronted with extremely high numbers of terrorist attacks are Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, the Philippines, Thailand, Nigeria, Yemen, Syria, Somalia and Egypt. The figures differ depending on the definition of terrorism and the statistical approach selected. The differences between the reported data of the *GTD* and the older reports on terrorism of the US Department of State illustrate the impact of definitions and methodologies. Today, however, the *GTD/START* collects the statistical annex dataset and report to include in the State Department's annual *Country Reports on Terrorism*.

If we take that statistical annex published in 2014, we see that in 2013 Iraq suffered more than 6,300 fatalities, Pakistan about 2,300, while Afghanistan

counted more than 3,100 deaths. The fourth state on the list is India, with more than 1,800 fatalities in 2013, followed by Syria (1074), Somalia (408) and India (405). Along with those on Syria and Afghanistan, terrorist attacks in Nigeria are among the bloodiest, averaging nearly six fatalities per attack.

Parts of the world with much lower numbers of fatalities and injured people include most Western countries. According to the *GTD*, terrorism claimed four fatalities and 23 injuries in 2013 within the borders of the European Union (EU). The most notable attack was the murder of the British Army soldier *Lee Rigby* in the streets of London. The United States were confronted with the Boston Marathon bombings in which three people were killed and another 264 were injured. Other states in the Western hemisphere, such as Brazil and Mexico, are relatively safe from the terrorist threat (not counting criminal kidnappings or other forms of violence that might “terrorize” the population) with three and eight terrorist attacks respectively. The same holds for the largest state in the world in terms of population, the People’s Republic of China. The Chinese are occasionally confronted with fatal terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, the number of reported incidents and casualties has, until recently, been relatively low. According to the *GTD*, China recorded twelve terrorist attacks in 2013. The most notable attack occurred in late June 2013, when Uighur separatists were responsible for killing 24 people and injuring another six in different locations throughout the Xinjiang province, before eleven of the assailants were killed. Neighboring India, however, falls somewhere in between the two extremes with over 450 fatalities in 2013 that were linked to a variety of (types of) terrorist organizations.

The data of the *GTD* give a good overview of the magnitude of the physical threat of terrorism. But there are other ways to measure the seriousness of terrorism. By combining the data of the *GTD* – in particular the number of fatalities and injuries – with the amount of property damage, the *Global Terrorism Index* provides a broader picture of the consequences of terrorism. It shows a number of hotspots of terrorism: most parts of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, the Russian Federation, Northern Africa and the horn of Africa. These parts of the world are more often confronted with terrorist attacks and their consequences than a number of other regions where terrorism is less of a security issue. Moreover, they are confronted with counterterrorism measures – including the use of violence by states – which adds to terrorism-related insecurity. The relatively more fortunate parts of the world in this respect include the remaining parts of Asia, Southern Africa, the Americas, Australia and Europe. In these regions and countries, terrorism is a low physical and strategic threat. Nonetheless, rightly or wrongly, it is often perceived as the primary threat to security.

Key points

- Terrorism has a worldwide impact
- Although terrorism is a worldwide phenomenon, there are important regional differences
- Most terrorist attacks take place in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Russia, and the northern part of Africa
- Many parts of Asia, the southern part of Africa, the Americas and Europe are less frequently troubled by terrorism
- In many parts of the world it is a low strategic threat. Oftentimes it is nonetheless perceived as the primary threat to security

Recommended reading

- National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to terrorism (START). (2014). *Global Terrorism Database*. Retrieved November 6, 2014, from National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to terrorism (START): <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/about/>
- United States Department of State. (2013). *Country reports on terrorism 2013*: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/210204.pdf>

1.3 A primary threat to security?

As mentioned above, not only in the countries where terrorists strike most often, but also in parts of the world where they pose a low physical and strategic threat, terrorism ranks high on the political agenda. It is considered one of the most important and pressing security issues that requires the full attention of politicians and policy makers. In many countries, the public is also asked to play a role. Citizens are asked to be vigilant and to be on the alert in the fight against terrorism, for example by slogans like “when you see something, say something” as used by the US *Department of Homeland Security (DHS)*. Also security measures at airports increased significantly after the events on 9/11. Passengers are subjected to more intensive screening, and are, for example, no longer allowed to carry certain liquids through checkpoints. Biometric passports have been introduced, carrying information on their holders and using identification technologies such as facial, fingerprint and iris recognition. Moreover, airline passenger data are collected, stored and exchanged by the US, EU Member States and third countries.

Many of these measures have received criticism linked to fundamental questions about their legitimacy and proportionality. In particular, human rights organizations believe much of the post-9/11 counterterrorism

legislation to be dangerously over-broad, undermining civil liberties and fundamental human rights. Others have pointed to issues related to efficiency and effectiveness or unwanted negative side effects of counterterrorism. A number of the most controversial measures need mentioning. One of them is the 2001 '*Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act*', better known by its acronym, the "PATRIOT Act", which expanded the investigatory instruments of American law enforcement agencies in their fight against terrorism. And in the UK, after the 2005 London bombings, Parliament passed several Acts including the *Terrorism Act 2006*, which extended police powers to deal with encouragement of terrorism both on- and offline, the preparation of terrorist acts and terrorist training, amongst others. Additionally, the Act extended police powers to hold terrorist suspects without charge, doubling the period from 14 days to 28 days.

As both examples indicate, major terrorist attacks can lead to more and more far reaching new counterterrorism legislation. This not only holds for the US and the UK, but also happened in many other parts of the world, including India. Since its independence in 1947, the country has had a turbulent history of terrorism, having been confronted with, amongst others, separatist and Islamist groups in Kashmir, separatist movements in the Punjab and the north-eastern regions, and Communist groups in the central part of the country. In response to an attack on India's parliament building in December 2001 by members of *Lashkar-e-Taiba* and *Jaish-e-Mohammed*, both separatist and Islamist groups, the parliament of India passed the *Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA)*. Like the US PATRIOT Act and the UK *Terrorism Act 2006*, *POTA* faced substantial criticism because of its broad definition of terrorism, rigorous detention procedures, and vast investigatory powers. It should be noted that in 2004, after multiple reports of abuse (including cases of detention without charge, police misconduct, lack of judicial and administrative oversight), *POTA* was repealed by a newly elected central government.

When looking at these three cases, we see a trade-off between security and human rights. In order to try to achieve a certain level of security, state actors are increasingly willing to compromise on fundamental rights, such as the freedom of expression, the right to privacy, and the principle that a prisoner is released from detention when there is a lack of sufficient cause or evidence. While governments worldwide stress the importance and necessity of the measures that are implemented, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as *Amnesty International* and *Human Rights Watch (HRW)* have repeatedly

expressed their concern about certain draconic and disproportionate policies in the context of counterterrorism. Although they condemn terrorism and recognize the right and duty of States to protect their citizens and residents from terrorism, they have placed a priority on the question of protecting human rights in dealing with this phenomenon.

The phenomenon of terrorism and how it can best be dealt with is also on the agenda of important international organizations, ranging from the *United Nations* (UN) to the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) and other regional (security) organizations, such as the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) or the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE). In the wake of 9/11, the UN *Security Council* adopted *Resolution 1373* (see box 1.02), which obliges all UN member States to criminalize a number of terrorism-related activities, such as providing financial support for terrorists or facilitating terrorist actions. Further measures of the UN to prevent and combat terrorist attacks were defined in its 2006 *Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* and include the intensification of cooperation with regard to information exchange, strengthening the coordination and collaboration among UN member States with regard to crimes connected to terrorism (such as drug trafficking, money laundering, illicit arms trading, etc.).

Resolution 1373

The *Security Council Resolution 1373* (2001) that was adopted unanimously on September 28, 2001 in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US, requested countries to implement a number of measures intended to improve their legal and institutional ability to counter terrorist activities at home, in their regions and around the world, including taking steps to:

- Criminalize the financing of terrorism; freeze, without delay, any funds relating to persons involved in acts of terrorism; deny all forms of financial support for terrorist groups
- Suppress the provision of safe havens, sustenance or support for terrorists
- Share information with other governments on any groups practicing or planning terrorist acts
- Cooperate with other governments in the investigation, detection, arrest, extradition and prosecution of those involved in such acts; and criminalize active and passive assistance for terrorism in domestic law and bring violators to justice.
- The Resolution also calls on States to become parties, as soon as possible, to the relevant international counterterrorism legal instruments.

BOX 1.02 KEY ELEMENTS OF RESOLUTION 1373 (2001) OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

The increased attention paid to (counter)terrorism among international and transnational organizations has also resulted in the establishment of specialized bodies to deal with terrorism. The basic assumption is that terrorism is a truly global phenomenon and that it requires cooperation and coordination across borders to fight it effectively. Moreover, such bodies are needed to make sure that countries stick to the same principles when dealing with terrorism and increase inter-operability and cooperation. One such body is the *United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee*. This committee was established to monitor progress and offer technical assistance with regard to *Resolution 1373* that aimed to widen the capacity of member States to counter terrorist activities. In September 2005, the Security Council also adopted *Resolution 1624* (2005) on incitement to commit acts of terrorism. This Resolution called on UN member States to cooperate and exchange information in order to strengthen the security of their international borders. It also emphasized efforts for dialogue to broaden understanding among civilizations to prevent any indiscriminate targeting of religions and cultures. It should also be noted that, in general, the UN strongly urges states to place a priority on the question of protecting human rights in the context of counterterrorism measures.

On the level of the EU, following the 2004 Madrid train bombings, the Council of the EU also felt the need for a body that could foster closer cooperation and coordination in the field of counterterrorism. It appointed an EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator who, as the name suggests, would coordinate the work of the Council of the EU in the field of counterterrorism. The tasks of the Coordinator include maintaining an overview of all the instruments at the EU's disposal, monitoring the implementation of the EU's counterterrorism strategy, as well as fostering better communication between the EU and third countries. Basically, the Coordinator has to make sure that the EU plays an active role in the fight against terrorism and that the individual countries work together and do what they promised to do.

Much more controversial than the new legislation, agencies and coordinators are the various military interventions and operations that are linked to the struggle against terrorism. Think of the US-led intervention in Afghanistan (2001-) and more recent military interventions in or airstrikes by (coalitions of) foreign powers to counter terrorism in Somalia (2011), Mali (2013), Libya (2014), Syria and Iraq (2014), to mention just a few. Some of these operations have received not only a lot of attention, but also a lot of criticism from those that regard these measures to be disproportionate, leading to not less but more terrorism, or lacking a legal mandate. Also making headlines are the many

military operations by national forces in Colombia, Iraq, Israel, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Turkey and many other countries. These operations cause casualties, and not only among terrorists – or rebels, insurgents, or “opposing forces” – but also among innocent civilians. This brings us back to the fundamental question: what is terrorism and can, for instance, state actors that misuse their powers also be labelled terrorists?

Key points

- Terrorism is a worldwide phenomenon, but there are regional differences in terms of the nature of both terrorism itself and counterterrorism strategies
- In most parts of the world terrorism is not a daily threat, let alone a primary threat to security
- Rightly or wrongly, terrorism is considered one of the most important threats to peace and security of our era

Recommended reading

- Presidency of the European Union. (2005). *The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Prevent, protect, Pursue, Respond*
- United Nations General Assembly. (2006, September 20). *General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/288 on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*
- United Nations General Assembly. (2010, October 13). *General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/297 on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*

1.4 The use of the term terrorism

As mentioned earlier, terrorism is making headlines almost every day in many parts of the world. The words we use to describe attacks and define this phenomenon differ around the world depending on political views, languages, cultures, etc. Moreover, the way we use the term terrorism today differs from the way we talked about political violence and related groups in previous eras.

In the past, certain violent acts, which we might nowadays call acts of terrorism, were not labeled as such. The assassination of *William McKinley*, the 25th president of the United States, in 1901 is such an example. In the name of anarchism, *Leon Czolgosz* shot the US president twice at a public appearance in Buffalo. Although *McKinley* initially seemed to recover, he died as a result of gangrene. In the aftermath of the attack, newspapers used

different terms to describe the attack. The *Philadelphia Record*, a local paper, simply stated that *McKinley* was shot twice by an anarchist. It reported that “Washington was stunned by the blow” and it featured a drawing showing where the President was hit. However, the terms terrorism and terrorist were not once mentioned in the entire newspaper. This is just one example showing how different terms have been used at different times to describe violent political acts by non-state actors. Think of the term “freedom fighters” that is associated with anti-colonialism and the struggle against oppressive regimes. While these fighters were labeled “terrorist” by the authorities, the local population would oftentimes see them as honorable defenders who rebelled against an oppressor. Obviously, it depends from what side you look at it; or, as the historian *Walter Laqueur* (1987, p. 7) put it, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”. This often mentioned phrase can, of course, also be read the other way round. For a critique of the idea that the use of the label “terrorist” or “freedom fighter” is simply a matter of personal opinion, it is worth reading *Boaz Ganor*’s article (2002) “Defining Terrorism: Is One Man’s Terrorist another Man’s Freedom Fighter?”.

“The Peril in India – Fruit of Doctrinaire Policies”

“The international state of India gives cause for serious anxiety, and any reduction of the army is impossible. ... The infamous Gandhi ... is still at liberty. The distinction between his ‘civil disobedience’ campaign and open violence is purely academic. It has led to much bloodshed, and although its author has once more ‘repented’ no reliance can be placed on his promises. ... Now its spread has been so insidious that all our military forces in India might at any time be required to cope with an outbreak of violence. Seditious propaganda has been at work among our native troops, and among the civil population public lectures are openly given advocating the murder of Britishers. ... The loyal population, native as well as European, is at the mercy of gangs of terrorists and assassins.”

Quote from *the Dundee Courier*, Fruit of Doctrinaire Policies, 9 March 1922.

BOX 1.03 A BRITISH NEWSPAPER REPORTING ON GANDHI AND THE STATE OF INDIA

In order to further illustrate the notion of “terrorist versus freedom fighter”, we quoted a report of a British newspaper, *The Dundee Courier*, on *Mohandas Gandhi* and the state of India in the early 1920s (see box 1.03). The newspaper used terms such as “serious anxiety”, “open violence”, “bloodshed”, “the murder of Britishers”, and referred to *Gandhi* and his following as a “gang of terrorists”. *Gandhi*’s notion of civil disobedience was equated with “open violence” and he was considered a threat to the stability of the UK and its colonial territory. Roughly a week after the publication of this report, the authorities convicted

Gandhi of sedition and sentenced him to six years in prison. Nowadays, *Gandhi* is considered one of the world's greatest non-violent leaders and his name is mentioned in the same breath as other pioneers of civil rights campaigns, like *Dr. Martin Luther King* and *Nelson Mandela*.

As in the 1920s in the case of *Gandhi*, contemporary media play an important role in attributing the labels “terrorism” and “terrorist” to certain acts of violence and militant armed groups. By using emotional and denigrating labels, media are able to influence the perception of their audiences and (partially) shape public opinion. Often, the media are criticized for this. Reporters and editors have been blamed for being irresponsible, making the threat of terrorism or specific incidents bigger or more dramatic than they are, thereby contributing to increased levels of fear among the public. The media have also been blamed for contributing to polarization or, worse, heightened tensions between various ethnic, religious or political groups. It should, however, be noted that there are also numerous examples in which media have shown restraint. Perhaps in a reaction to the negative image of the media in relation to terrorism, some (but certainly not all) media outlets are becoming more aware of the sensitivity of using the terms “terrorist” and “terrorism”, and some try to avoid using them altogether. *Reuters*, one of the leading news agencies in the world, is fully aware of the importance of impartiality and objectivity in the news business and claims to allow its readership to make their own assessments. In the section on terrorism in *Reuters' Handbook on Terrorism Journalism* (2014), the agency advises its reporters and editors to avoid the terms “terrorism” and “terrorist” whenever possible (see box 1.04). Although seemingly solid advice, it should also be stressed that it is both difficult and problematic to demand restraint from journalists and editors. Of course, the media are attracted by terrorist acts and can and should not ignore them or play down these incidents as it is their duty to report on any major event. They are also attracted by terrorism because the dramatic and spectacular aspects of this phenomenon fascinate their audience, the general public. However, terrorists aim to influence that same audience and try to make use of the media themselves. The staging of extreme and spectacular attacks is partly done to attract maximum attention and make headlines around the globe.

The Reuters Handbook on Journalism on the subject of terrorism

“We may refer without attribution to terrorism and counter-terrorism in general but do not refer to specific events as terrorism. Nor do we use the word terrorist without attribution to qualify specific individuals, groups or events. Terrorism and terrorist must be retained when quoting someone in

direct speech. ... Terror as in terror attack or terror cell should be avoided, except in direct quotes.

Report the subjects of news stories objectively, their actions, identity and background. Aim for a dispassionate use of language so that individuals, organisations and governments can make their own judgment on the basis of facts. Seek to use more specific terms like 'bomber' or 'bombing', 'hijacker' or 'hijacking', 'attacker' or 'attacks', 'gunman' or 'gunmen' etc."

Reuters Handbook on Journalism (2014)

BOX 1.04 THE REUTERS HANDBOOK ON JOURNALISM ON THE SUBJECT OF TERRORISM (2014)

The term terrorism, in terms of its definition and connotations, has changed over the years. Some anarchists were proud to use the term terrorist to describe themselves, whereas the militants of the Anti-colonial Wave regarded themselves as freedom fighters and strongly rejected the label "terrorist". The use of the term is very subjective. While the victims of an attack or hostage taking are likely to perceive this event as an act of terrorism for which there is no justification, perpetrators often do consider their actions to be justifiable within their own system of beliefs and values, or as part of a (defensive) struggle against aggression or oppression. Finally, there is disagreement over the question whether or not States can or should be labeled as terrorists, or whether we should use a different word for States or regimes using the instrument of terror. In the next section, we will concentrate on some of the problems involved in defining terrorism.

Key points

- The use of the word terrorism has changed throughout the course of history
- In history we have seen events that we did not label as terrorism at the time, but we would now
- Yet the opposite has also happened: events and individuals we used to refer to as terrorism and terrorists are now perceived differently
- Media are important actors with regard to the framing of specific events and actors
- Some, but definitely not all, contemporary media outlets have become more aware of the subjectivity and impact of the use of the term "terrorism"

Recommended reading

- Bhatia, M. (2005). Fighting words: naming terrorists, bandits, rebels and other violent actors. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(1), 5-22

- Ganor, B. (2002), Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist another Man's Freedom Fighter? *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal*, 3(4), 287-304
- Laqueur, W. (1987). *The Age of Terrorism*. Toronto: Brown and Company

1.5 Why is there no generally accepted definition?

The changes in the use of the term and the definition of terrorism across time and language have led to disputes among both scholars and politicians. Yet why is it so difficult to agree on a functional, let alone a legal definition? This is perhaps best explained by *Alex Schmid*, one of the most renowned scholars in the field of terrorism and counterterrorism studies. In his article “Terrorism – The Definitional Problem” (2004), he gives four reasons for the fact that there is no generally accepted definition: (1) “[t]errorism is a ‘contested concept’ and political, legal, social science and popular notions of it are often diverging”; (2) “the definition question is linked to (de-)legitimation and criminalization”; (3) “there are many types of ‘terrorism’, with different forms and manifestations”; (4) “the term has undergone changes of meaning in the more than 200 years of its existence”.

Let us have a further look at each of these four reasons, starting with the notion that terrorism is a rather contested concept. According to *Schmid*, it has a strong emotional and moral undertone, which makes it difficult to apply to specific events or groups. An individual who is considered to be a terrorist by one conflict party is often considered to be a freedom fighter by the others. It is to some extent a matter of perspective whether a certain act can be regarded as an act of terrorism or as being a part of a legitimate struggle for freedom. The late *Yasser Arafat*, former President of the Palestinian National Authority, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 for his role in the Oslo Peace Accords, along with the Israeli politicians *Yitzhak Rabin* and *Shimon Peres* (see box 1.05). However, the *Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)*, of which he had been the chairman since 1969, was considered a terrorist organization by both Israel and the US at least until 1991.

Yasser Arafat

Yasser Arafat was chairman of the *PLO*, an organization founded in 1964 with the purpose of creating an independent Palestine. It tried to achieve this goal using violence against a wider variety of targets, both inside and outside Israel. This made the *PLO* one of the most renowned or infamous armed non-state organizations in the world. Its leader, *Yasser Arafat*, was, for some, the

archetypical terrorist or freedom fighter, depending on one's position vis-à-vis the PLO. *Arafat* operated from several Arab countries, such as Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia. His organization gradually transformed into a quasi-state actor that started to accept Israel's right to exist in peace and to reject the use of "violence and terrorism". In response, Israel officially recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian National Authority of which *Arafat* became the first President. Later in his career, *Arafat* engaged in a series of negotiations with the government of Israel. For his constructive role in these, he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994. The award for *Arafat* was the subject of controversy. In the eyes of most Palestinians, *Arafat* was a heroic freedom fighter for their cause, while many Israelis continued to regard him as an unabashed terrorist.

BOX 1.05 YASSER ARAFAT

Another example of the ambiguity surrounding a rebel, insurgent or "terrorist" leader when it comes to terminology is *Abdullah Öcalan*, the imprisoned leader of the *Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)*. Despite the fact that the *PKK* is listed as a terrorist organization in Turkey, the EU and the US, he is considered a hero and a freedom fighter by many people with a Kurdish background. Even with regard to *Osama bin Laden*, the late leader of *Al-Qaeda* who was held responsible for the attacks on 9/11 as well as other terrorist attacks, there is no unanimity over the use of the label terrorist. He had many followers: among them people who admired him for his stand against Western foreign policy and "infidel" and corrupt regimes in the Islamic world. In many countries in that part of the world one could buy t-shirts or posters of the leader of *Al-Qaeda*. Turning to the Western hemisphere, a similar ambiguity existed with regard to *Che Guevara*. He was an Argentinian Marxist revolutionary and a major figure of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 that overthrew the regime of the corrupt Cuban President *Fulgencio Batista*. "*Che*" became a symbol of rebellion in the 1960s and today his picture is still a frequently seen icon in popular culture. It is entirely plausible that if he had conducted his paramilitary activities today, many governments would have been quick to label him a terrorist. Another person who tried to "liberate" his people by way of an insurgency and guerrilla warfare was *Velupillai Prabhakaran*, the founder and leader of the *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers)*. His organization sought to create an independent Tamil state in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. To some, *Prabhakaran*, who was killed in fighting with the Sri Lankan army in 2009, was a typical example of a separatist nationalist terrorist, while others would identify him as a typical freedom fighter. Another example of a self-proclaimed fighter for independence is *Anders Breivik*. In 2011, he bombed a government building in Oslo, Norway,

and subsequently opened fire on members of the youth organisation of the Norwegian Labour Party on the island of Utøya, killing 77 people in cold blood. *Breivik* claimed to have acted in self-defense, calling himself a resistance fighter. He justified his crime by claiming his victims were part of a “conspiracy” that was trying to “deconstruct” the cultural identity of Norway by embracing immigration and multiculturalism.

A second reason why it is so difficult to agree on a universally accepted (legal) definition is because of its link to the (de-)legitimization and criminalization of the individual or group so labeled. Terrorist organizations are delegitimized and criminalized as they are registered on national or international lists of designated terrorist organizations. Once an organization is listed it is considered to be a criminal organization. This gives governments a number of instruments to combat it, such as freezing its assets or arresting its members. The US, as well as supra- and international organizations such as the UN and the EU, maintains such lists. Governments and international organizations are put under pressure by other governments, lobby groups or activists to list or delist certain groups. It should be noted that groups are more frequently listed than de-listed.

One organization that has been confronted with repeated calls to be put on the EU list of terrorist organizations is the Lebanese organization *Hezbollah*, a Shia Islamist militant group and political party. Advocates of listing *Hezbollah* as a terrorist organization refer to its alleged involvement in violent activities both inside and outside Lebanon, such as the terrorist attack on Israeli tourists in Bulgaria in 2012, or its involvement in conflicts in different parts of the Islamic world, such as the civil war in Syria. As a consequence of its alleged involvement, the EU blacklisted the military wing of *Hezbollah* in 2013, sixteen years after it was designated a terrorist organization by the US Department of State. Other States, such as Iran, do not regard *Hezbollah* as a terrorist organization and expressed their concerns about adding it to the list and continue to back *Hezbollah*.

The third reason *Schmid* has identified as complicating the process of finding a common legal definition is the fact that there are many types of “terrorism”, with different forms and manifestations. For example, *Europol*, the EU’s law enforcement agency, identifies five different ideological strands of terrorism: (1) religiously-inspired terrorism; (2) ethno nationalist and separatist terrorism; (3) left-wing and anarchist terrorism; (4) right-wing terrorism; and (5) single issue terrorism. To make things more complicated, one could add a sixth category, that of attacks by groups or individuals with a very

vague political idea or ideology. Perhaps a seventh category, and a politically sensitive one, could be State terrorism, also referred to as regime terrorism (see box 1.06).

Bruce Hoffman on terror by states

In this textbook, we understand terrorism to mean certain violent acts by non-state entities. Many might disagree with this limitation, claiming that a number of States also use the instrument of terror. Interestingly, the term terrorism was initially used to refer to the “*regime de la terreur*” after the French Revolution. The new regime under *Maximilien de Robespierre* aimed to consolidate its rule by terrorizing counter-revolutionaries and other dissidents. According to *Bruce Hoffman* (2006, pp. 15-16), “[c]ertainly, similar forms of state-imposed or state-directed violence and terror against a government’s own citizens continue today. The use of so-called ‘death squads’ ... in conjunction with blatant intimidation of political opponents, human rights and aid workers, student groups, labour organizers, journalists and others has been a prominent feature of the right-wing military dictatorships But these state-sanctioned or explicitly ordered acts of internal political violence directed mostly against domestic populations – that is, rule by violence and intimidation by those already in power against their own citizenry – are generally termed “terror” in order to distinguish that phenomenon from “terrorism”, which is understood to be violence committed by non-state entities.”

Recommended reading

- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside Terrorism* (revised and expanded ed.). New York: Columbia Press University

BOX 1.06 BRUCE HOFFMAN ON TERROR BY STATES

The fourth and final reason given by *Schmid* in explaining the difficulties in defining terrorism is the fact that the term terrorism has changed its semantic focus several times. Originally, terrorism referred to the phenomenon of state terror during the 1793-1794 reign of terror, initiated by the authorities when there was fear that the French Revolution might be crushed by foreign interventions (see also box 1.12). According to *Schmid* (2004) terrorism was not used to describe an anti-government use of political violence until the second half of the nineteenth century. In other words, what is meant by the term partly changed together with the methods and targets of terrorism. The nature of the phenomenon today is in many respects different from the terrorism during the “reign of terror” at the height of the French Revolution. Then the iconic object of regime terrorism was the guillotine. Today, it is the suicide bomber with sticks of explosives around his body.

Key points

- Among legal and academic scholars there is disagreement with regard to a definition that covers all aspects of terrorism
- Terrorism is a contested concept: “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”
- It is difficult to come to a generally accepted definition because of (de-) legitimization and criminalization of the phenomenon
- Another complicating factor is that there are many types of terrorism and that it comes in different forms and manifestations
- Finally, the nature of terrorism has changed through the course of history which also places limits on considering terrorism a unitary phenomenon
- Following *Bruce Hoffman*, state-sanctioned or explicitly ordered acts of violence directed against populations are generally termed “terror” in order to distinguish that phenomenon from “terrorism”, which is understood to be violence committed by non-state entities

Recommended reading

- Laqueur, W. (1987), *The Age of Terrorism*. Toronto: Brown and Company
- Merari, A. (1997), Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 5(4), pp 213-257
- McGurn, W. (1987), *Terrorist or Freedom Fighter? The Cost of Confusion*. London: Alliance Publishers, Ltd.
- Schmid, A.P (2004), Terrorism – The Definitional Problem. *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 36, No. 2-3, pp 375-419
- Schmid, A.P (2011), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. London: Routledge

1.6 The need for a definition

In the previous section we discussed some difficulties with regard to arriving at a universally accepted functional or legal definition of terrorism. This lack of consensus is problematic, as such a definition would be extremely valuable from both an academic and a societal perspective. The need to reach a common definition is manifest in three different areas: (1) the dimension of international cooperation; (2) the legal dimension; and (3) the academic dimension.

First, in order to achieve success within the international domain, States need to agree on what terrorism consists of. As we have witnessed, terrorism has become a transnational issue, which requires international cooperation

since most individual states do not have the instruments to track and deal with terrorism outside their domestic territory. However, international cooperation, for example the sharing of terrorism-related data, requires a certain level of consensus on what terrorism is. Cooperating States need to find agreement on questions such as: who are we fighting, and what is a terrorist organization or network? The previous section already highlighted some difficulties with regard to the listing of certain groups as designated terrorist organizations. To recall: while the US and Israel consider *Hezbollah* to be a terrorist organization, the EU has labeled its military wing as such only since 2013. Despite the generally strong ties between the EU, the US and Israel, all are limited in terms of legal mechanisms to fight *Hezbollah* outside their own domestic territory. A lack of cooperation due to the absence of a general definition can also result in the refusal of certain States to share information on terrorists and extradite terrorist suspects. A universal legal definition of terrorism and consensus as to which groups to label terrorist and which not would be highly beneficial to international cooperation.

Second, within the legal domain there is the need to develop a common definition on the exact nature of terrorism. According to many organizations in the field of human rights, the lack of a precise definition of terrorism is an invitation to abuse. When terrorism is not strictly defined it can open the political space for government agencies to use the term in a way which suits their special interests. It is very tempting, especially for more authoritarian regimes, to stretch the definition of terrorism in order to achieve certain goals that have nothing to do with countering terrorism. For instance, by labeling demonstrations or other types of political action as terrorism, authoritarian regimes are able to silence all kinds of opposition groups. These governments can charge these groups with terrorism-related activities and arrest and convict their leaders and supporters. Non-governmental organizations such as *HRW* have expressed their concern with regard to human right violations as the result of vaguely worded definitions of terrorism. The overly broad nature of these definitions allows the authorities to enforce them rather arbitrarily. An example which has been put forward by *HRW* in its report “*In the Name of Security: Counterterrorism Laws Worldwide since September 11*” (2012) is Saudi Arabia. That country’s 2011 draft *Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism* defines terrorist crimes, amongst other things, as actions that “insult the reputation of the state” or “disturb public order”. Due to definitions of terrorism like the Saudi one, certain political, ethnic, cultural or religious minorities are targeted more often with certain counterterrorism measures than others, according to *HRW*. Additionally, a wide range of activities are often considered terrorist activities or terrorism-related activities, with the

consequence that ordinary crimes such as murder, assault, and kidnapping are now dealt with under terrorism laws. Given these broad definitions it is easier for regimes with malicious intent to label common protestors as terrorists. A generally accepted and clear-cut definition could limit certain abuses by governments.

Third, academia would benefit from a generally recognized definition of terrorism. Researchers in the field of terrorism studies are often confronted with different definitions that, for instance, hamper comparative studies. An example that clearly illustrates this problem is the discrepancy in the number of casualties of terrorism reported by different sources, such as the US State Department, *Europol*, and the *GTD*. This discrepancy is a consequence of the different definitions adopted by these institutions. Due to this discrepancy, terrorism (and therefore the number of casualties as a result of terrorism) is operationalized and measured according to their own interpretation of the phenomenon. In practice, this entails that some cases are included in one dataset and excluded in another, which results in different representations of terrorism. Because these institutions adopt different definitions as the basis of their research, it is difficult to compare their findings and make statements on contemporary terrorism. It should be noted that definition problems are not unique to the study of terrorism and counterterrorism. In social sciences, defining whatever social phenomenon is a challenge, let alone agreeing on a single functional definition. Take, for instance, “unemployment”. There are many ways to define this phenomenon, resulting in different ways to calculate unemployment levels and different policies to deal with it.

Key points

- Although it has proven to be difficult to reach consensus on a definition of terrorism, one would be of immense value
- A definition would improve international cooperation, as States agree on who and what to fight
- A clear-cut definition would also limit the abuse of legal instruments by States under the pretence of imposing counterterrorism measures
- An academic consensus definition of terrorism could improve the quality of research, especially in the field of comparative studies

Recommended reading

- Human Rights Watch. (2012). In the Name of Security Counterterrorism Laws Worldwide since September 11. New York etc.: Human Rights Watch
- Bruce, G., (2013), Definition of Terrorism – Social and Political Effects. *Journal of Military and Veterans Health*, 21(2), p.26-30

- Herschinger, E., (2013), A Battlefield of Meanings: The Struggle for Identity in the UN Debates on a Definition of International Terrorism. *Terrorism And Political Violence*, 2013, 25(2), pp.183-201

1.7 Definition attempts

Although it has been impossible to reach consensus on a definition of terrorism, the previous section highlighted why such a consensus would be extremely valuable. The importance of a single legal definition of terrorism has not gone unnoticed, as leading public figures have made an attempt at crafting one (see box 1.07). Former Secretary General of the UN *Kofi Annan* tried to grasp what he considered to be the nature of terrorism and translate it into a viable working definition. In late 2006, UN member States agreed on a common strategy for combating terrorism, entitled *Uniting Against Terrorism – Recommendations for a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. Despite this UN strategy, an attempt to reach consensus on a definition of terrorism failed miserably. Such a definition has hitherto foundered due to some of the difficulties outlined above. The definition of the *Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* (2004) reads as follows: “[a]ny action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the Geneva Conventions and Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004), that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act”. However, in light of the conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, some Muslim States hold that under certain circumstances, in particular foreign occupation, violence is not necessarily unjustified, and therefore should not be labeled as terrorism. According to these member States, a legal definition of terrorism should include state terrorism and make allowances for the struggle for self-determination. However, accepting such conditions would impact not only on the Israel-Arab conflict but also on other contested territories.

This brings up the subject of the context in which certain “terrorist” or “terror” acts take place. Can we speak of terrorism in an ongoing war or war-like situation? Is terrorism only a peace-time phenomenon, and should we speak of insurgencies or guerrilla warfare within the context of war? The Supreme Court of India once adopted *Alex Schmid's* suggestion to choose a restricted legal definition of terrorist acts being the peacetime equivalents of war crimes.

According to *Schmid* (1993, p. 12), “Such a definition might exclude some forms of violence and coercion (such as attacks on the military, hijackings for escape and destruction of property) currently labelled ‘terrorism’ by some governments.” It should be stressed that any attempt to take this approach will run into another problem; that of defining war and answering the related crucial question of what forms of organized, politically focused violence constitute war.

Examples of definitions of terrorism

- Political theorist *Hannah Arendt*: “Terror can strike without any preliminary provocation; its victims are innocent even from the point of view of the prosecutor”. Arendt, H. (1951), *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich Inc.
- Political scientist *Martha Crenshaw*: “Terrorism is a conspiratorial style of violence calculated to alter the attitudes and behaviour of multitude audiences. It targets the few in a way that claims the attention of the many. Terrorism is not mass or collective violence but rather the direct activity of small groups”. Crenshaw, M. (1995), *Terrorism in Context*, University Park: Penn State University Press, p. 4
- Israeli Prime Minister *Benjamin Netanyahu*: “Terrorism is the deliberate and systematic assault on civilians to inspire fear for political ends”. Netanyahu, B. (1995), ‘Terrorism: How the West Can Win’, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson
- UN Secretary General *Kofi Annan*: “any action constitutes terrorism if it is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians and non-combatants, with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a Government or international organisation to do or abstain from doing an act”. United Nations News Centre. (2005)

BOX 1.07 EXAMPLES OF DEFINITIONS OF TERRORISM

While the international community is still unable to agree on a universal *legal* definition of terrorism, a somewhat higher degree of agreement has been emerging in the academic community since *Alex Schmid* made several efforts to bring academics on to the same page. In the 1980s *Schmid* identified 22 components that could be found regularly in various academic, administrative, and legal definitions of terrorism. Based on these frequently used elements, he composed, in 1988, the following definition (2004, p. 382): “[t]errorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby, in contrast to assassination, the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of

violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organisation), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main targets (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought”.

In 2011 *Schmid* revised his academic consensus definition again, based on a new round of consultation with members of academia and others, improving on the consensus definitions of 1984 and 1988. He included the most prominent elements, such as the political nature of the threat and the use or threat of use of force, but also elements such as arbitrariness of target selection (e.g. targets of opportunity, representative or symbolic nature) and mechanisms (e.g. intimidation, coercion, propaganda). What is remarkable, and of course up for debate, is the inclusion of States as potential terrorist actors. So far, this particular issue has divided academia, the UN, experts in international law, and many others.

Nonetheless, the search for a definition continues ... and continues to get lost. Or, as *Brian Jenkins* in an interview with *Lisa Stampnitzky* (2013, p. 5) put it, “[d]efinitional debates are the great Bermuda Triangle of terrorism research. I’ve seen entire conferences go off into definitional debates, never to be heard from again”. And even with a proper definition, defining certain groups and events remains difficult. For instance, as the academic consensus definition of *Schmid* shows, many regard terrorism not to be primarily or ultimately aimed at the direct victims. Instead, it is widely considered a practice or doctrine to use physical violence to instill fear in order to get a political message across. Yet what message is not always very clear (see box 1.08).

How would you label this? Attack on the Queen of the Netherlands

In 2009, the Netherlands was shaken by the live images of a car sweeping through a crowd during the festivities on “Queen’s Day” in the city of Apeldoorn. The footage of bodies flying through the air reached millions right in their living rooms. The perpetrator drove his car into the crowd in the direction of a bus with most of the members of the royal family on it. He missed the open-topped bus by only a couple of meters, and crashed into a monument. He accused the crown prince of being a fascist and a racist, just before he died in his crashed car. The question is how to label such an incident: an act of terrorism or something else? The Dutch authorities were quick to say that it was not a terrorist attack. At the press conference some four

hours after the attack, the public prosecutor stated that while he had reason to assume that the attack was premeditated, there was no reason to assume any link to terrorism. Investigations into the perpetrator did not provide many clues about why he had wanted to attack the royal family. He left no note or anything else that could link him to a certain group or movement, or political ideology. Was this a terrorist incident or not? He did target one of the ultimate symbols of politics in the Netherlands, the queen and the soon-to-be king, in other words the head of state. The *GTD* included the attack in its database as a terrorist incident. How would you have labeled the attack?

BOX 1.08 HOW WOULD YOU LABEL THIS? ATTACK ON THE QUEEN OF THE NETHERLANDS

Fear and message

Especially in countries that are not often confronted with terrorism, sometimes even small terrorist attacks can instill a great deal of fear and anxiety and result in increased attention to terrorism and the terrorist organization behind an attack. In other words, sometimes only a few indirect victims are enough to get the attention of millions. This notion is illustrated by the case of the assassination of the Dutch filmmaker *Theo van Gogh* in November 2004 by a member of a network of radical Islamists, generally referred to as the *Hofstadgroep*. The event led to a public outcry and a deputy prime minister stating that this was an act of war. As a result of the attack, the level of public fear due to terrorism increased. In the months after the attack, terrorism was identified as one of the two main national issues according to Dutch respondents in a Eurobarometer poll. In the fall of 2004, just before the attack, a mere 12 percent answered “terrorism”, when asked “what do you think are the two most important issues facing your country at the moment?”. This figure rose to 40 percent a year later. Remarkably enough, the Dutch outscored both the British and the Spanish, who had just experienced the London bombings of July 7, 2005 (which cost more than 50 lives), and the Madrid train bombings of March 11, 2004 (in which almost 200 people were killed). This raises the question what is at the root of the discrepancy in fear among the Dutch and, for example, the British, or Spanish? Possibly the attitudes and resilience of the audience might be more important than the actual level of violence or the number of victims. In the case of the Netherlands, one murder on the streets of Amsterdam was enough to have a serious impact on Dutch politics and society. We do not know for sure whether or not the perpetrator was aware of his attack’s potential to accomplish this when he set out to kill one single person in broad daylight. However, given the fact that he left a note on the body and carried a poem with him in which he verbally attacked and threatened the Dutch political system, he seems to have been aware of the very nature of terrorism as put forward by *Brian Jenkins*(1975).

As early as 1975, *Jenkins* stated that terrorism is not primarily about killing people: “[t]errorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead”. The perpetrator of the murder of *Theo van Gogh* did not want to kill any other people (although, in a note fixed to the dagger left behind in *Van Gogh*’s chest, he threatened *Ayaan Hirsi Ali*, a Dutch politician of Somali origin who had assisted *Theo van Gogh* in making a controversial movie on Islam). In fact, he hoped to be shot dead by the police. He was shot in the leg and is now serving life imprisonment without parole.

Although one could question the similarities between the terrorism of the 1970s and contemporary terrorism, the core of *Jenkins*’ assumption is still valid today. Even though it looks as if at least some of today’s terrorists “also want a lot of people dead” – as *Jenkins* noted himself after the attacks on 9/11 – the nature of terrorism is to send a message to people other than the victim. As mentioned above, the direct targets of terrorist attacks are often not the main targets. The almost 3,000 victims of the 9/11 attacks were not the prime targets of the *Al-Qaeda* terrorist cells, as the latter primarily wanted to attract a significant amount of attention. The main targets were those watching the footage and pictures of the people killed in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. In the eyes of *Al-Qaeda* their chosen locations – the “capitalist” World Trade Center and the “imperialist” Pentagon – had high symbolic value and served as a means, rather than an end, as harsh as that may sound to the families of those who died. To terrorists, the direct targets are hardly ever the main targets and the violence is aimed at the audience, rather than at the casualties directly affected. In a way, the main target is us, and the purpose of the terrorists’ strategy is to kill a few (or, as in the *Van Gogh* case, just one) in order to frighten many others.

Overcoming terrorism is easier said than done, as the impact of terrorism can be tremendous. Politicians, public figures, and the media are important actors as regards the spread of fear, whether this fear is grounded or not. The consequences of this feeling of fear are vast, as society, politics, the relations between (inter)national communities and the economy are deeply affected by it. In terrorism, killing is just a tool for achieving political goals. We will further explore this characteristic of terrorism and its consequences later in this book.

Key points

- Although there is no consensus on a universal legal definition, there appears to be some level of agreement on the idea that terrorism is a tool, a mechanism or an instrument for spreading fear by the use of violence against one group of people to impact on politics and society as a whole
- Different definitions by different analysts often show a number of overlapping characteristics, such as emphasis on violence, fear, and/or a political dimension
- The impact of a well-staged terrorist incident can be enormous as politics and societies tend to overreact to terrorist incidents

Recommended reading

- Buruma, I. (2007), *Murder in Amsterdam. The death of Theo van Gogh and the limits of tolerance*. London: Atlantic Books
- Bakker, E. (2006). Differences in Terrorist Threat Perceptions in Europe. In D. & Manchke, *International Terrorism A European Response to a Global Threat?* (pp. 47-62). Brussels: Pieter Lang
- High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004), *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*. New York: United Nations
- Jenkins, B. (1975). Will Terrorists go Nuclear? In Rand Corporation, *RAND report P-5541*. Santa Monica: RAND corporation
- For a debate on criminal law responses to terrorism after September 11, see the special issue of *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 4/5 (2006)

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked into the impact of terrorism and at the definition of the term. First we showed how terrorism makes headlines around the world, almost every day. We also gave an overview of the geographical distribution of terrorist attacks and the number of casualties. Discussing these data we learned that Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria are among the countries that are hardest hit by terrorism. Despite the fact that terrorism as a phenomenon is less common in the West, we saw that it is considered one of the most important security issues in the US and Europe, especially after 9/11. In these parts of the world and elsewhere, governments have invested in more and tougher counterterrorism measures. As a consequence, laws were designed that largely criminalized terrorism-related activities and expanded the investigatory instruments of national law enforcement agencies. While governments have generally tended to justify these changes by pointing to success stories of disasters prevented, we also noted that others have expressed

their concerns regarding violations of human rights that have further added to terrorism's negative impact on societies.

Discussing the number of attacks and victims we touched upon the issue of the definition of terrorism. What makes a certain attack a terrorist attack, and what makes a certain group a terrorist one? These are difficult questions as there is no generally accepted definition of the term. Many terms are used to describe comparable phenomena that some may label terrorism and others would give another name to. There are many reasons why defining terrorism is difficult. We described the dynamic nature of terrorism and explained how it has changed significantly throughout time and the fact that it comes in many different shapes and sizes. The subjective and politically sensitive nature of it further complicates reaching consensus on a definition. Ideally, we would arrive at a common legal definition, as it would, for instance, improve international cooperation in counterterrorism. We showed that within the academic world *Alex Schmid* has accumulated many elements of definitions by scholars and crafted a definition that is generally considered as the closest to consensus. According to *Schmid*, fear is a major component of terrorism. Moreover, rather than “simply” killing a lot of people, terrorists are seeking some type of (political) change. In order to achieve this change, terrorist actors try to instill fear in society or, as *Jenkins* put it, “[t]errorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead”. Although we could question whether this is still true and whether terrorists are truly not interested in huge numbers of casualties, it is safe to say that terrorists primarily aim to have an impact on politics and societies. Following this argument, we should do more to limit this impact, the possibilities of which we will explore in chapter 6.

Key points

- Terrorism is making headlines worldwide, though there are important differences in the geographical distribution of terrorist attacks
- It is difficult to define terrorism. In the academic world there appears to be emerging some degree of consensus regarding the fact that terrorism is a practice or an instrument for spreading fear by the use of physical violence in order to impact on various audiences both in politics and in society
- The impact of terrorism on politics, societies and the economy can be enormous. Therefore, limiting the impact should be an important part of counterterrorism efforts

Bibliography

- Arendt, H. (1951). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich Inc.
- Bakker, E. (2006). Differences in terrorist Threat Perceptions in Europe. In D. Manchke, & J. Monar (Eds.), *International Terrorism. A European Response to a Global Threat?* (pp. 47-62). Brussels: Pieter Lang.
- Bhatia, M. (2005). Fighting words: naming terrorists, bandits, rebels and other violent actors. *Third world quarterly*, 26(1), 5-22.
- Bruce, G. (2013, May). Definition of Terrorism – Social and Political Effects. *Journal of Military and Veterans Health*, 21(2), p.26-30.
- Buruma, I. (2007). *Murder in Amsterdam. The death of Theo van Gogh and the limits of tolerance*. London: Atlantic Books.
- Crenshaw, M. (1995). *Terrorism in Context*. University Park: Penn State University Press.
- Ganor, B. (2002). Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist another Man's Freedom Fighter? *Police Practice and Research*, 3(4), 287-304.
- Herschinger, E. (2013). A Battlefield of Meanings: The Struggle for Identity in the UN Debates on a Definition of International Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 25(2), 183-201.
- High-level Panel on Threats, C. a. (2004). *The Secretary-General's High-level Panel Report on Threats, Challenges and Change, A more secure world: our shared responsibility*. New York: United Nations.
- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside Terrorism* (revised and expanded ed.). New York: Columbia Press University.
- Human Rights Watch. (2012). *In the Name of Security Counterterrorism Laws Worldwide since September 11*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Jenkins, B. (1975). Will Terrorists go Nuclear? In Rand Corporation, *RAND report P-5541*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
- Journal of International Criminal Justice. (2006) Special issue Criminal Law Responses to Terrorism After September 4(5).
- Laqueur, W. (1987). *The Age of Terrorism*. Toronto: Brown and Company.
- McGurn, W. (1987). *Terrorist or Freedom Fighter? The Cost of Confusion*. London: Alliance Publishers Ltd.
- Merari, A. (1997). Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 5(4), 213-257.
- National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to terrorism (START). (2014). *Global Terrorism Database*. Retrieved June 6, 2014, from National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to terrorism (START): <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/about/>.

- Netanyahu, B. (1995). *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- Presidency of the European Union. (2005, November 30). *The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Prevent, protect, Pursue, Respond*. Retrieved June 6, 2014, from Register of the Council of the European Union: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2014469%202005%20REV%204>
- Reuters Press Agency. (2014). *Handbook of Journalism*. Retrieved June 12, 2014, from Reuters.com: <http://handbook.reuters.com/?title=Tterrorism>.
- Schmid, A. (1984). *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers Inc.
- Schmid, A. (1993). The Response Problem as Definition Problem. In A Schmid and R. Crelinsten, *Western Responses to Terrorism*, (pp. 7-13). New York etc.: Frank Cass.
- Schmid, A. (2004). Terrorism – The Definitional Problem. *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 36(2-3), 375-419.
- Schmid, A. (2011). *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. London: Routledge.
- Stampnitzky, L. (2013). *Disciplining Terror*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- United Nations General Assembly. (2006, September 20). GA resolution A/RES/60/288 on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Retrieved June 27, 2014, from The United Nations: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/60/288.
- United Nations General Assembly. (2010, October 13). *GA resolution A/RES/64/297 on the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. Retrieved June 6, 2014, from The United Nations: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/297.
- United Nations News Centre. (2005, March 10). *United Nations News Centre*. Retrieved June 16, 2014, from Annan lays out detailed five-point UN strategy to combat terrorism: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=13599&Cr=terror&Cr1=>.
- United Nations Security Council. (2001, September 28). *Resolution 1373*. Retrieved July 1, 2014, from The United Nations: [http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1373%20\(2001\)&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1373%20(2001)&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC).
- United Nations Security Council. (2005, September 14). *Resolution 1624*. Retrieved July 1, 2014, from United Nations: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1624\(2005\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1624(2005)).
- United Nations Security Council. (2014, August 15). *Resolution 2170*. Retrieved November 6, 2014, from United Nations: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2170%20\(2014\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2170%20(2014)).
- United States Department of State. (2014, April). *Country reports on terrorism 2013*. Retrieved November 6, 2014, from United States Department of State: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/>