Royal Institute of Philosophy

How to Define Terrorism

JENNY TEICHMAN

The philosophical interest of terrorism is due partly to the fact that the term is notoriously difficult to define, and partly to the fact that there is some disagreement about whether and when terrorism so-called can be justified.

This paper is mainly but not entirely concerned with problems of definition. It is not possible to consider the moral question unless some sort of rough agreement is reached about a definition or definitions.

To save time I will use the term *definition* to cover definitions proper and also longer analyses and descriptions of the way words are used. For example I will call Wittgensteinian analyses of family resemblance concepts definitions.

There are three different ways in which we might try to reach an agreed and useful description or definition.

Firstly, we could simply try to say how the word is currently used in everyday life; I will call this *ordinary language definition*.

Secondly, we can aim at a wide definition based partly on etymology and past and present usage, and partly on stipulation; I will call this *wide stipulative definition*.

Thirdly, we can aim at a narrow definition but one which like our wider definition is also based on etymology and history: I will call this *narrow stipulative definition*.

Concerning definitions C. A. J. Coady writes:

The definitional question is essentially irresolvable by appeal to ordinary language alone since terrorism as a concept is not 'ordinary' in even the way intention, guilt and dishonesty are . . . its natural home is in polemical, ideological and propagandist contexts.[1]

Following Coady I shall argue that we ought to reject attempts to arrive at a definition based on (current) ordinary language. I shall also argue that there are equally good reasons in favour of a wide definition and of a narrow definition. History and usage support a wide definition while considerations of clarity, and the 'flavour' of the word, support a narrow definition.

The ordinary current use of the word *terrorism* is much too wide. That is to say, if we list all the different phenomena which are at one

[1] C. A. J. Coady, 'Terrorism', *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Lawrence C. Becker (ed.) (New York: Garland, forthcoming).

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time or another described as terrorism in ordinary conversation, or in
ordinary newspapers, or by ordinary politicians, we will end up with a
huge rag-bag of not very similar items. What is more, the speakers and
writers of ordinary language disagree among themselves about which
phenomena should go into the list. The first difficulty is exemplified by
George Rosie's *Directory of Terrorism*.[2] This book is actually very
useful; my quarrel is with its title. It lists a huge variety of actions,
many of which merely resemble terrorism in some way, including, *inter
alia*, attacks on military and police targets, attacks on selected but non-
military targets, attacks on randomly chosen targets, attacks on real
estate and other property, assassinations and attempted assassinations
of public or private people, whether perpetrated by politically moti-
vated groups or individuals, or by madmen. It also lists many different
kinds of actions relating to embassies, such as bombings, takeovers and
sieges, and many different kinds of actions relating to aircraft, ships and
trains, for instance attacks on aerodromes, kidnapping of passengers,
and so on; also successful and unsuccessful *coups d'état*; also the
actions of states and their agents, such as shooting civil rights marchers;
also many of the activities of the British, Russian, American and
French secret services.

The disadvantages of trying to construct an ordinary-language defi-
nition based on current usage can be seen, too, in the plethora of
conflicting definitions occurring in philosophical and political litera-
ture. Thus philosophers for instance disagree about whether or not
terrorism is wrong by definition or wrong just as a matter of fact; they
disagree about whether terrorism should be defined in terms of its aims,
or its methods, or both, or neither; they disagree about whether or not
states can perpetrate terrorism; they even disagree about the import-
ance or otherwise of *terror* for a definition of *terrorism*. Thus Haig
Khatchadourian holds that there are no exceptions to the (nondefini-
tional) rule that terrorism is always wicked; whereas C. A. J. Coady
appears to argue that terrorism is *necessarily* evil. Noam Chomsky
believes that the state is the main perpetrator of terrorism today;
whereas Anthony Kenny and several others argue that terrorism must
be defined as a type of unjust rebellion.[3]

[2] George Rosie, *A Directory of International Terrorism* (Edinburgh: Main-
stream Books, 1986).
[3] Haig Khatchadourian, 'Terrorism and Morality', *Journal of Applied
Philosophy* **5** No. 2 (October 1988): C. A. J. Coady, 'The Morality of Terror-
ism', *Philosophy* **60** No. 231 (January 1985): Noam Chomsky (with E. S.
Herman) 'The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism', *The Polit-
ical Economy of Human Rights*, Noam Chomsky and E. S. Herman (eds)
(Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1979).

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As well as being very wide-ranging the ordinary current use of the word *terrorism* is excessively relativistic. The same kind of action, differentiated by behaviourial and intentional characteristics, will be described quite differently by different observers, depending on when and where it took place and whose side the observer is on. The relativistic character of ordinary current usage leads directly to the dismal slogan 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'.

More generally, if one follows current word-usage uncritically one ends up with a very impoverished concept of a *misuse*. This is true for all words, and not only for the word 'terrorism'. For if current usage is the only guide then the idea of misuse either disappears altogether, or else has to be understood as a statistical matter; yet in this realm no statistics are actually ever collected.

But if we do not rely on ordinary usage how can we define the term *terrorism* at all?

I suggest we begin by examining the history of the word, and its etymology, and then turn back to ordinary usage as a sort of check on pedantry. Yet in the end some stipulation will be necessary.

We also need to be open to the possibility that there are several kinds of terrorism; if such is the case then our definition will be disjunctive.

Let us turn now to stipulative definition. We can begin to construct a wide stipulative definition by looking at history, and at some past and current definitions. Most though not all commentators seem to hold that the definition of terrorism must be pejorative, and terrorists themselves do not like the label 'terrorist'—they prefer to describe themselves in military terms, as Red Brigades, freedom fighters, etc. Yet in my view we ought not to begin by *defining* terrorism as a bad thing. For if we take that line we cut ourselves off from certain important historical and linguistic facts.

Two hundred years ago the word *terrorism* meant a type of action carried out by governments. The *Oxford English Dictionary* still defines terrorism as

> Government by intimidation as carried out by the party in power in France between 1789–1794
>
> Generally, a policy intended to cause terror in those against whom it is adopted.

The first uses of the words listed in the *OED* date from 1795, and include a quotation from Edmund Burke.

As I have already mentioned, some contemporary philosophers, such as Chomsky, insist that governments are capable of terrorism. And the historian Walter Laqueur holds that Hitler and Stalin both practised state terrorism, which he says is made up of acts of terrorism

carried out by governments against their own people.[4] Laqueur mentions the assassination of Trotsky as an example.

On the other hand, the League of Nations defined terrorism in 1937 as criminal acts directed *against a state*.

Originally, then, terrorism was thought of as a type of behaviour perpetrated *by* governments; now it is regarded, usually though not always, as a type of behaviour directed *against* governments.

The change can perhaps be traced to the middle of the nineteenth century. After about 1848, terrorism, at least in Europe and Russia, was conceived by its exponents as comprising a kind of action directed against tyrannical rulers. Terrorism in the second half of the nineteenth century was targeted at Archdukes and Tsars and Chiefs of Police. Terrorist deeds were intended to bring about political change, but were also thought of as acts of punishment or vengeance. In short, terrorism came to mean political assassination, and specifically tyrannicide. In Europe in those days terrorism had nothing to do with mass terror, and its exponents were proud of the label 'terrorist'.

In America and Ireland, on the other hand, the target might be an anonymous group of people, or even a whole city. This was the natural result of using a nondiscriminatory weapon, viz. dynamite.

These post-1848 facets of terrorism can be seen in the writings of the time, including the following.[5]

G. Tarnowski, who belonged to a group which plotted one of the several attempts made on the life of Tsar Alexander II, distinguished popular revolution from terrorist revolution as follows:

> During a popular revolution the greatest strength of a nation, its soldiers, perish, while the perpetrators of evil calmly observe the battle and at the critical moment bolt from the rear wing, as did Louis Philippe . . . the blood of the innocent flows in rivers . . . Terrorist revolution is not like this. Even when a few innocent people suffer . . . that is a straightforward accident of war. Terrorism directs its blows against the real perpetrators of evil.

Another Russian, S. Stepniak-Kravchinski, wrote in 1883:

> The terrorist is noble, terrible, irresistibly fascinating, for he combines in himself the two sublimities of human grandeur: the martyr and the hero.

An American paper, *The Alarm*, said in 1884:

[4] Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), *passim*.
[5] Anthologized by Walter Laqueur, *The Terrorism Reader* (London: Wildwood House, 1979).

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Dynamite! Of all the good stuff, this is the stuff. Stuff several pounds of this sublime stuff into an inch pipe (gas or water-pipe), plug up both ends, insert a cap with a fuse attached, place this in the neighbourhood of a lot of rich loafers who live by the sweat of other peoples' brows, and a most gratifying result will follow.

So much for the nineteenth century. Let us now look at some recent official definitions.[6]

In the 1960s in the USA, the Departments of State, Defense, and Justice, and the FBI, defined terrorism as 'a variety of criminal activity involving the unlawful use of force'.

The British Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1974 states 'For the purposes of legislation' terrorism is to be defined as 'the use of violence for political ends including the use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear'. This definition is too wide, for as well as terrorism it covers rioting, street violence, and the legitimate punishment and deterrence of criminals.

In 1983 the US Department of Defense defined terrorism as 'the use of force by revolutionary organizations'. This excludes State terrorism.

In 1986 the Vice-President's Task Force on combating terrorism ('the Bush committee') said terrorism is 'unlawful use or threat of violence against persons or property to further political or social objectives; usually intended to coerce a government, individuals or groups to modify their behaviour or politics'.

These official definitions are perhaps somewhat unsatisfactory. But they are interesting because they refer to a very different range of actions from those envisaged by nineteenth century terrorists. Hence there is a question as to whether we want to base our definition on older or newer ideas, or on both. For example, do we want to include the original paradigm—the Reign of Terror by government—under a modern definition?

I suggest we show respect for the past, and for etymology, by allowing that there are three species of terrorism, corresponding to the three main phases in the history of the word. These are state terrorism, or reigns of terror, terrorism which consists solely in the assassination of specifically chosen victims, and modern terrorism, which roughly speaking is usually but not invariably a kind of violent nationalistic rebellion carried out in a variety of ways.

State terrorism: quite apart from historical considerations, we have to acknowledge that governments often do things, both to their own people, and against enemies in peace and war, which share the features of the worst types of revolutionary terrorism. State terrorism is charac-

[6] All quoted by Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), *passim*.

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terized by such actions as the kidnapping and assassination of political opponents of the government by the police or the secret service or the army; imprisonment without trial; torture; massacres of racial or religious minorities or of certain social classes; incarceration of citizens in concentration camps; and generally speaking government by fear. There does not seem to be much question that a reign of terror is always a bad thing, a misuse of the powers of the state. Nor is there any serious question as to which regimes deserve the title. The only problem for philosophy here is a not very interesting sorites question: *how many* killings and unjust imprisonments etc. constitute a reign of terror? Since I do not think that any analytical work needs to be done on the concept of state terrorism I shall from now on be discussing mainly non-state terror.

Assassination: respect for the history of the word means that we must count tyrannicide, and political assassination generally, as a species of terrorism.

We need to decide whether terroristic assassination is necessarily always committed for political reasons. I hold that killings carried out by social groups such as drug barons for mercenary reasons ought to count as terrorism. On the other hand the murders and attempted murders of political leaders perpetrated by lunatics are borderline cases.

What are we to say about the assassination, by madmen, of private individuals, or of public but non-political people? The attempted assassination of the Pope by a presumed madman would be called an act of terrorism by many people, whereas the successful attempt on the life of the pop-star John Lennon, carried out by another presumed madman, perhaps would not. I cannot at present see much reason for making a distinction here; either both these deeds were terroristic or neither was. Here maybe all we can do is stipulate in favour of 'both' (or of 'neither').

Next we must look at rebellion for nationalistic or other just or unjust causes. Such rebellion has often been carried out by methods that in our century at least have been labelled 'terrorist'. One of these methods, but only one, is assassination. Other characteristically terrorist methods of rebellion are more widely acknowledged to be essentially unjust: for instance, attacks on innocent or neutral targets, attacks on random targets, hijacks, kidnaps, and mutilation of the dead.

Here I shall list a number of things which seem to be true about modern terrorism.

Modern terrorism is not necessarily arbitrary in its choice of victims. Modern terrorists do not always slaughter randomly chosen persons; they sometimes attack specific victims.

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Ordinary usage, or ordinary newspaper usage, suggests that terrorism always has a bad purpose, such as the overthrow of a democratically elected government. But this is not a necessary condition of terrorism, still less of course a sufficient condition. Just as it is not self-evident that the purposes of the French Revolutionaries were bad, and not obvious that the purposes of all those opposed to the government of the Tsars were wrong, so similarly we can say that not all the people who are nowadays labelled as terrorists are always on the wrong side. A rebellion can be carried out for a right or a wrong reason and conducted in a just or an unjust way, just like war proper. My opinion is that a modern definition of terrorism ought to include rebellion which is conducted *for a good aim but in a bad way*.

Terrorists can be left-wing or right-wing: only the most relativistic usages ignore this.

Does terrorism have special military or quasi-military methods? For example, must it always involve secrecy? Must its attacks always be unpredictable? Perhaps terrorism has characteristic methods at given periods of history. Generally it is systematic to some extent, unlike mob violence. But a discussion of physical methods throws very little light on the phenomenon. Terrorism, in contradistinction to guerrilla warfare, is not a military concept; and although guerrilla warfare itself may inspire terror it does not of itself necessarily involve more terror than ordinary war. Similarly we cannot identify terrorism with commando action; a commando is a soldier trained for hit and run attacks, and the word *commando* like the word *guerrilla* is a military term. These military notions are not defined in terms of aims and intentions. Terrorism, since it is often a kind of rebellion, cannot be fully understood unless some reference is made to its aims.

Many modern accounts of terrorism emphasize etymology: terrorism is something that inspires mass terror. But if we allow that political assassination is to count we must also allow that there is at least one variety, or method, of terrorism which terrifies relatively few people.

Terrorism is not only terror-producing behaviour. If it were, almost all warfare would be terrorism, and so would a lot of other human activities. Still, we will look pretty silly if we do not mention terror in our account of terrorism. Our definitions must include the idea that causing terror is a *usual* feature even if not an *invariable* feature of central, or core cases.

Must terror be an aim of the actor, or merely a foreseen or unforeseen result? I think it must be a probable result. Usually but not invariably terror will also be an intended result. The terror need not however be mass terror.

Merely inspiring terror is not terroristic. A terrorist inspires terror by carrying out, or making serious verbal or demonstrative threats to carry out terrible deeds.

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It is possible to inspire terror as a foreseen but not intended result of one's action in cases when the terror inspired, though reasonable in the circumstances, is not justified by subsequent events. As an example: if some people were in a bus seized by hijackers who told them that they intended to set the passengers free before blowing up the vehicle I think those passengers would all feel very scared until they actually had been set free. The behaviour of these suppositious hijackers is not really terrorism, but the passengers would be in no position to know that at the time of the hijack.

Destruction of property is not terrorism unless it is a precursor of a different kind of action, i.e. part of a campaign which includes physically harming human beings. Thus the destruction of property by the suffragettes ought not to count as terrorism, whereas the destruction of glass on Kristallnacht certainly was, because of the attacks on Jews which followed.

Is mutilating the dead a form of terrorism? Well, I hold that it is.

The wide definition:

Non-state terrorism is made up of a spectrum of types of cases, including all those types which fall under the narrow definition (see below), plus a number of others. A terrorist action is carried out for political or other social purposes, including certain kinds of large-scale mercenary purposes, by individuals or relatively small groups. Its political or other aims might be either good or bad. It is normally a criminal action according to national and/or international law but is not invariably unlawful according to natural law. It includes successful or unsuccessful attempts on the lives of innocent or guilty targeted or untargeted victims; or the taking of combatant or non-combatant hostages; it includes torture of innocent or guilty people; and it usually but not necessarily has either the effect or the intention or both of causing terror and panic.

According to this definition there can be excusable or even justifiable acts of (non-state) terrorism—it all depends on which bit of the spectrum the deeds in question fall into.

This wide definition is no good as an account of state terrorism. For one thing, some of the deeds that count as terrorism on this definition would count as legitimate punishment (say) if carried out by a state. Thus to imprison a police chief (for corruption) or hang a general (for treason) would or could be acts of duty if carried out by a state, though illegal, and also terroristic in the wide sense of the word, if carried out by persons who are not agents of the state. The wide definition if applied to the state would force us to categorize all punishment, including justified punishment, as terrorism. There may be *some* reasons in favour of doing this but the reasons against it are much weightier. I

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conclude therefore that the wide definition only covers non-state terrorism.

Let us now try to construct a narrower definition. In giving a narrow definition of terrorism suitable for twentieth century situations, and one which furthermore will apply to state terrorism as well as to non-state terrorism, we should put stress on three phenomena which are typical of this century: namely, attacks on neutrals, attacks on non-combatants, and cruel and atrocious behaviour.

Under such a narrow definition it may well turn out that terrorism is never justifiable or even excusable. Or at any rate, it may well turn out that that is what most (non-terroristical) people will decide is the case.

Here I will make some points which seem to be true of terrorism narrowly conceived.

Political assassination is not invariably terrorism on a narrow defini-tion. Killing a tyrant, particularly a genocidal tyrant, can be an act of just rebellion, analogous to an act of just war. For a tyrant is not a neutral, nor is he innocent, nor is it the case that assassins need to use torture, or any other cruel means, nor do they need to mutilate the body of the tyrant after he is dead.

Taking hostages is not invariably terroristic on a narrow definition. It depends on who they are, what you do with them, and for how long you deprive them of liberty. There must be a moral difference between taking neutral hostages and taking enemy hostages. Taking combatant hostages is similar to taking POWs (there is room even so for treating them badly or well of course). But taking non-combatant hostages is more like kidnapping. Just how terroristic this kind of kidnapping is might depend on how the victims are treated. Not all kidnapping is terrorism (yet that does not mean we approve of kidnapping).

Torture is an atrocity.

Mutilating the dead counts as an atrocity in my view.

The narrow definition:

> Terrorism consists of violent actions carried out for political or other social purposes, including some large-scale mercenary purposes, by individuals or groups, having an aim which might be either good or bad, but carried out by means of either or both of the following: 1, attacks on innocent or neutral or randomly chosen people, or 2, using means which involve atrocities, e.g. torture, cruel killings, or mutila-tion of the living or the dead, committed against randomly or non-randomly chosen people who may be either innocent or not.

This definition covers state terrorism if one allows that warfare carried out by unjust means is one variety of state terrorism.

There is no need to mention terror in this definition since the kinds of action picked out are inherently terrifying anyway.

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I shall end with some brief remarks about the justification of terrorism.

Arguments between those who support terrorism and those who decry it often founder on the two slogans 'terrorism is a disputed term' and 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'. At this point the disputants throw up their hands in despair, i.e. each goes on believing whatever it was he believed in the first place.

But it ought not to be impossible to find an agreed definition, and then ask whether one wants to condemn or applaud all or some of the things that fall under *that* description.

As I have argued, you can have a wide definition or a narrow one. Each of those suggested is largely behavioural but partly intentional (i.e. it refers to aims). Both leave the moral question open, though the narrow definition is more pejorative than the wider one, because each of its disjuncts contains one or two so-called 'thick' moral concepts: *neutral, non-combatant, atrocity*.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that those who defend terrorism wish to justify all terrorism, including atrocities.

The more familiar attempts at justification include the following.

'Examples Show that Terrorism is not Necessarily Morally Unlawful'
Several authors have argued that not all acts of terrorism are violations of natural or moral law. Walter Laqueur for instance says that it is not difficult to think of circumstances in which a terrorist act is not only permissible but almost a categorical imperative—for example in defence against a tyrant responsible for imposing a reign of terror on his people. As examples he mentions the anti-communist rebels in Afghanistan, and the men who plotted against Hitler. Implicit in his thinking is the idea that terrorism is justified when its aims are good. Hence he is committed, in theory, to a defence of atrocities if these are carried out in support of a good cause. But I suspect he did not really mean that.

'Terrorism is not Unlawful According to "New" Morality'
In the 1960s and 1970s some defenders of terrorism spoke of the need for a 'new' morality. The idea itself though is not new: Prince Kropotkin ('the anarchist prince') also defended terrorism by an appeal to so-called 'new' codes. He wrote in 1880:

> There are periods in human life when . . . a new code of morality is needed . . . The morality of yesterday is recognized as revolting immorality . . . conscience rises up against crimes committed in the name of the law of the stronger.[7]

[7] Anthologized by Walter Laqueur, *The Terrorism Reader* (London: Wildwood House, 1979).

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Kropotkin seems to have thought of the 'old' morality as a purely conventional edifice, one requiring unquestioning obedience to the state; and perhaps the same is true of more recent authors. That merely shows that *his* and *their* 'old' moralities were no good.

'Nothing is morally lawful or unlawful in itself. Only consequences make an action right or wrong. The actions of terrorists are good if they are directed towards good ends and bad if directed towards bad ends.'

This kind of attempted justification, naturally, has all the intellectual defects of hard-line ethical consequentialism, not least of which is the fact that it requires the impossible, viz. an accurate prediction of future effects and causes.

Variants on the Above

Some of those who reject a purely consequentialist theory of ethics nevertheless seem to think that a consequentialist approach is possible in selected situations. Thus some will argue that anti-colonial terrorism is 'different' and even that it is all right to export this kind of terrorism to neutral countries. It seems to me, though, that such thinking has so far given us no *basis* for making a distinction between colonialism (say) and other forms of tyranny, and hence no basis for holding that consequences justify terrorism in special, i.e. colonial, situations but not in others. Even if colonialism were worse than any other kind of tyranny, some extra premises are needed before you can infer that consequentialism must suddenly come into its own when specially bad kinds of tyranny are under consideration.

'Terrorism is the Poor Man's Atom Bomb'

This slogan unpacks into the following ideas:

Struggles for national liberation are good. Both sides in the cold war recognize this in so far as they only condemn such struggles in their own colonies. Both sides in the cold war stockpile nuclear weapons, hence they are inconsistent if they say that others may not use such weapons or their moral equivalents.

Struggles of national liberation are struggles of the poor against the rich, the weak against the strong. As such they cannot succeed unless inexpensive methods are used. Terrorist techniques are relatively inexpensive. Hence it is said that they are either the *only* techniques available, or the *only effective* techniques available.

An appeal to the activities of the great nations as a standard of good behaviour seems to me to be quite misconceived. The great nations in their conduct of war and cold war probably do not have an ethical leg to

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stand on. All that shows is that those who imitate them also do not have an ethical leg to stand on.

Next, *are* terrorist techniques in fact the only ones available to the poor? Surely not. Guerrilla warfare is a method available to the poor which does not necessarily entail (narrowly defined) terrorist acts. If one adopts a wide definition, then in guerrilla warfare there may be some terrorist techniques which are not only necessary but also no worse than acts of ordinary (just) war. Furthermore, sabotage is available to the poor, general strikes are available to the poor, passive resistance is available to the poor. If all these methods of opposition are rejected it must be because they are considered *ineffective*.

But are terrorist methods *more* effective? This is a question which will ultimately be answered by the historians of the future, if at all. It cannot be reliably answered by *a priori* considerations. Nevertheless I will end this paper by setting out a few *a priori* intuitions about the effectiveness or otherwise of terrorism in various situations.

State terror is abhorred by most of the peoples and nations of the world (in theory at least), so that regimes of government terror are subject to bad publicity, cold warfare, economic attrition, consumer boycotts, and so on. Therefore it seems that terror is bound to be less effective as a method of ruling a country than the alternatives—other things being equal. However it may of course be the case that terrorism is the only effective method available to an extremely unpopular government. In that case the government itself lacks justification.

As to non-state terrorism, its effectiveness must be somewhat doubtful in the light of the fact that some campaigns have been going on for years without any noticeable progress (the Basques, the IRA).

Commonsense and history both tell us that atrocities can turn supporters against a campaign.

Finally, is it perhaps true, and maybe even true *a priori*, that hitting 'soft' targets must be less effective, overall, than hitting 'hard' ones? Is it not true *a priori* that blowing up a military station bristling with weapons must be a more effective method of fighting than blowing up (say) a holiday camp?

The answer to this is Yes and No. It depends on what one's aim is. If one's aim is to wipe out or reduce the population of a tribe or a neighbouring country, then hitting soft targets is no doubt just as effective as hitting hard ones, and perhaps more so. A government or other terrorist organization which has such an aim will hit at mass targets, which of course include soft targets, e.g. schools, hospitals, women and children and old people, etc. Atrocities on this scale are normally carried out by states, not by rebels, though according to the newspapers commercial interests also go in for population destruction, for example in Brazil.

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However it is impossible to justify terrorism on grounds of effectiveness alone: the aims of the terrorist are not irrelevant, and a moral justification of acts whose aims are genocidal is unimaginable, or imaginable only to hardline Utilitarians and suchlike philosophical fantasists.

There is no *a priori* reason to suppose that choosing soft (non-military) targets instead of hard ones is either the only effective or the most effective way of achieving justifiable aims such as self-defence or the overthrow of tyrannical colonial regimes.

But if we turn away from *a priori* intuitions and look instead at historical evidence we have to conclude, I believe, that that evidence is both ambiguous and incomplete. It never happens that (narrow) terrorism is the *only* weapon used by rebels and 'nation-builders'. Effective revolutionary movements engage in a very wide variety of activities, including sabotage and other non-terrorist commando action, strikes, sit-ins, passive resistance, appeals to the UN or other outside bodies, appeals to the citizens of the colonial power, and general propaganda. Hence the casual assumption, concerning past successes, that it was the terrorism which did the trick (as it were), is probably unsound.

New Hall, Cambridge