

TERRORISM REDEFINED: TERRORISM AS “COUNTER-HEGEMONIC POLITICAL VIOLENCE”

In the ongoing “war on terror,” few terms are as contentious as the concept of terrorism. While there are several definitions of “terrorism,” most contemporary classifications contain three primary components: (a) the threat or use of violence; (b) the furtherance of broader political objectives; and (c) the psychological effects on innocent victims. Yet, I will argue that most definitions of terrorism are meaningless because they neglect to consider the hegemonic basis of its conceptualization. As developed by Antonio Gramsci, the concept of “hegemony” encompasses not just the economic or coercive power of the dominant forces within a particular society but, more importantly, the cultural, moral, and ideological leadership exerted by such groups. Recently, the concept of hegemony has been applied to the international context, specifically to the global dominance of the United States and its Western allies, not just to indicate their military and economic preeminence, but also their cultural and ideological supremacy. An examination of the modern history of terrorism, from the French Revolution, through to the Anarchist and Third World nationalist groups of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the Islamic fundamentalist movements of today, demonstrates that the term “terrorism” has been applied solely to those movements that have challenged the position of the dominant powers or states (i.e., the “enemies” of “the status quo”). Realist theorists argue that war is endemic to the conduct of international politics and that conflict is a natural part of the interactions between states. Consequently, *all* states use violence to incite fear for some political objective. The only distinction is between the Western perception of whether that state is hegemonic or not (i.e., “us” or “them”). Consequently, I will argue that a reconstructed definition would more accurately conceptualize terrorism as “counter-hegemonic political violence.”

DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

There are arguably numerous definitions of “terrorism.” By some accounts, there could be in excess of one hundred distinct definitions.¹ In addition, because of its contentious nature, some would argue that: “There is no agreement on the definition [of terrorism], no systematic analysis of fragmented data, no applicable game models ... in fact, we cannot even say with any certainty whether the phenomenon is on the rise.”²

While there is undeniably a great deal of controversy surrounding the definition of what is a highly contentious and emotionally charged issue, especially in the post 9-11 environment, there does seem to be a general understanding regarding particular components central to all definitions of “terrorism.” According to Brian Jenkins: “Terrorism is violence or the threat of violence calculated to create an atmosphere of fear and alarm – in a word, to terrorize – and thereby bring about some social or political change.”³ Gregory Raymond concurs by stating: “Political terrorism entails the deliberate use or threat of violence against non-combatants, calculated to instill fear, alarm, and ultimately a feeling of helplessness in an audience beyond the immediate victims.”⁴ Finally, David Whittaker, in spite of the numerous definitions, still succinctly contends that “it ought to be possible to secure some fundamental definition that regards the work of terrorists as intentional use of violence against non-combatant civilians aimed at reaching certain political ends.”⁵

¹. See David J. Whittaker, *Terrorists and Terrorism in the Contemporary World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

². Pavel K. Baev, “Examining the ‘Terrorism-War’ Dichotomy in the ‘Russian-Chechnya’ Case,” *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (August 2003), p. 29.

³. Brian M. Jenkins, “International Terrorism: The Other World War,” in Charles W. Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, and Controls* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), p. 16.

⁴. Gregory A. Raymond, “The Evolving Strategies of Political Terrorism,” in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism*, p. 72.

⁵. Whittaker, *Terrorists and Terrorism in the Contemporary World*, p. 6. Others who provide a very similar definition of “terrorism” include: Charles W. Kegley, Jr. “Characteristics, Causes, and Controls of the New Global Terrorism: An Introduction, in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism*, p. 1; Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New*

While there are subtle distinctions presented in each of these definitions of “terrorism,” it can be confidently stated that all contain at least three common characteristics. First, inherent to each of these definitions is the component of the use of violence or, at the very minimal, its threatened use. According to J. Angelo Corlett: “[A] definition of ‘terrorism’ best captures what is essential to terrorism: it need not be violent, but pose only a threat of violence.”⁶ In addition, to separate terrorism from other violence, or simply criminal acts such as murder or assault, there must be explicit political aims involved in such actions or threats of violence. Hence, the furtherance of broader political objectives is the second characteristic common to most definitions of terrorism. According to Gus Martin: “These groups or agents engage in this behaviour intending the purposeful intimidation of governments or people to affect policy or behaviour with an underlying political objective.”⁷ Third, and probably the one feature of “terrorism” that is expressed as its most definitive component, is the threats or the harms it directs towards innocent civilians. Consequently, since violence only needs to be threatened, and not actually only acted upon - an example is a terrorist who threatens to unleash a nuclear weapon, “dirty bomb,” or some other type of WMD unless his/her demands are met - it is this generation of fear and the psychological effects against innocent victims which may be “terrorism” most definable element.⁸ In examining the roots of modern terrorism during the outbreak of the French Revolution, and the ensuing “Reign of Terror,” Andrew Sinclair argues that:

Global Terrorism, p. 92; and Albert J. Bergesen and Omar Lizardo, “International Terrorism and the World-System,” *Sociological Theory* 22:1 (March 2004), p. 38.

⁶. J. Angelo Corlett, *Terrorism: A Philosophical Analysis* (Dodrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), p. 118.

⁷. Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 2003), p. 33.

⁸. See Kegley, Jr. “Characteristics, Causes, and Controls of the New Global Terrorism,” p. 1.

The object of these sacred acts of violence is to terrify. The Latin word *terrere* originally meant 'to make tremble,' both governments and whole peoples rather as a minor earthquake.⁹

Therefore, if the act of terrorism can be reduced to a single dominant characteristic, it is clearly the harm that such terrorist actions do to innocent peoples. Whether random or intended, such "terrorist" actions are specifically directed at what we would term non-combatants or non-state officials.¹⁰ Thus, according to Martha Crenshaw: "[T]errorism means socially and politically unacceptable violence aimed at an innocent target."¹¹ Once more, Jenkins focuses on this key and overarching element of terrorism by examining its first modern utilization. "Since that era [French Revolution] the word terrorism has commonly come to mean violent acts carried out randomly against nonmilitary, civilian targets, with the aim of inspiring fear in the wider population."¹² Whether the terrorist actions are direct or indirect, kill, maim, harm psychologically or physically, or merely coerce and intimidate, it is the impact that such actions have on those perceived as innocent that to many experts of terrorism remain its central characteristic. Some liberal writers, such as Michael Walzer, have argued that such a component may be *the only relevant* aspect in identifying both a "terrorist" and a "terrorist" act. Thus, according to Walzer, in a not so subtle and objective manner:

The practice [of terrorism] is indefensible now that it has been recognized, like rape and murder, as an attack upon the innocent... It

⁹. Andrew Sinclair, *An Anatomy of Terror: A History of Terrorism* (London, Basingstoke, and Oxford: Macmillan, 2003), p. 327.

¹⁰. Of course, such a definition would seem to exclude such individuals as the military, police, or other government agents (i.e., "legitimate" targets).

¹¹. Martha Crenshaw, as quoted in White. Jonathan R. White, *Terrorism 2002 Update: An Introduction* 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), p. 9. James Johnson makes a similar argument when he states that: "It [terrorism] deliberately chooses to kill the innocent rather than seeking to avoid harm to them." James Turner Johnson, "Just War Theory: Responding Morally to Global Terrorism," in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism*, p. 224.

¹². Philip Jenkins, *Images of Terror: What We Can and Can't Know About Terrorism* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, Inc. 2003), p. 27.

aims at general vulnerability: Kill these people in order to terrify those.¹³

In other words, it is because terrorist actions kill innocent civilians that both defines “terrorism” and, consequently, makes it illegitimate.¹⁴

Still, it may be argued that even within the theory of “Just War” and the practice of International Law, it is not always clear what the exact distinction is between combatants and non-combatants, between legitimate and illegitimate targets, or whether innocence can be conceptualized in an absolute form, or in more specific terms, such as moral innocence vs. material innocence. This is especially true when certain individuals contribute to policies that can be conceived as ‘oppressive” and “exploitative” by others. Corlett makes an interesting point regarding the possible duplicity of American citizens in the actions leading up to 9-11, and the government’s response: “If this is true [i.e., implicit responsibility for a state’s policies], then U.S. citizens who are significantly morally liable (for whatever reason) for harms caused to others by their own government are in no moral position to complain to terrorists or others who harm them for what turns out to be a morally justified terrorist response to such harms that generate such terrorism.”¹⁵ Consequently, not only is it very difficult to define who exactly is “innocent,” but just because “innocent” civilians are killed, does not necessarily make an action “terrorist” or “immoral.”

One further point must be emphasized. It is clear that in all of the definitions provided here, and the various components and characteristics that comprise these definitions, whether the state or a substate actor is the perpetrator of a “terrorist” action is clearly irrelevant (i.e., state-sponsored or a non-state actor). This is true in spite of the fact that some terrorism experts have focused on

¹³. Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), p. 51.

¹⁴ In direct response to individuals like Walzer, Corlett argues: “It is unsurprising, then, that such thinkers do not even consider the possible (positive) role of terrorism. For on their accounts, terrorism essentially involves harming innocent persons.” Corlett, *Terrorism*, p. 115.

¹⁵. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

terrorism as employed solely by non-state or substate actors.¹⁶ Yet, such a definition is problematic, in the sense that it does not seem to reflect the reality or the actual nature of terrorist activity throughout history. In the West, while our common conception of a terrorist organization has tended to be personified by groups like Al-Qaeda, even they receive assistance from one of the pariah or “rogue” states, such as Iran or Syria, which have also overtly supported groups deemed “terrorist” by the West, such as Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon or Hamas in the occupied territories.

Of course, it is clear that not only state’s sponsor specific organizations considered to be “terrorist,” but states themselves have been the actors most willing and capable to use violence and force in the history of the modern international system.¹⁷ The obvious frame of reference for such terrorist actions, both domestically, to control and intimidate populations and potential political opponents, and in terms of foreign policy, regarding the actions of the state in the name of security and survival, has been totalitarian states, such as the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin and Nazi Germany under Adolph Hitler. Most succinctly, Wilkinson states:

If we are to gain an adequate understanding of the broader historical and international trends in use of terror violence, we need to recognize that throughout history it is regimes and states, with their overwhelming preponderance of coercive power, which have shown the greatest propensity for terror on a mass scale, both as an instrument of internal repression and as a weapon of external aggression and subjugation.¹⁸

The use of state terror should not be surprising, since the concept of “terrorism” originally applied to the Jacobin state in France, which was specifically state-oriented terrorism. This point is made very clearly by Richard Falk:

¹⁶. One example is Walter Laqueur. According to Laqueur, terrorism is specifically defined “as the substate application of violence or threatened violence intended to sow panic in a society, to weaken or even overthrow the incumbents and to bring about political change.” Walter Laqueur, “Postmodern Terrorism,” in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism*, p. 151.

¹⁷. According to Stohl, in spite of certain misconceptions, throughout history “terrorism is most frequently used by governments to maintain power.” Michael Stohl, as quoted in White. White, *Terrorism 2002 Update*, p. 9.

¹⁸. Paul Wilkinson, “Why Modern Terrorism? Differentiating Types and Distinguishing Ideological Motivations,” in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism*, p. 107.

The confusion arises because the essence of terrorism, going back to its origins in the French Revolution, is the calculated use of violence for political ends against civil society to induce widespread and intense fear. Governments are as likely as their adversaries to rely on such tactics.¹⁹

However, more important for our purposes in examining the various components which help to arrive at an objective and scientific definition of “terrorism,” is to dispel with preconceived and *a priori* notions of who or what groups constitute a “terrorist” or “terrorist organization,” and which do not. In addressing the three main aspects of “terrorism,” it would appear that there are many other perpetrators of such “terrorist” actions than generally recognized. In a system in which “Realist” theory is the dominant approach to international relations and conceives of the world as existing in a permanent state of Hobbesian anarchy (i.e., “a war of all against all”) - where war is the norm and peace is the exception - it seems undeniable that *all* states use violence to incite fear for some political objective. This is true whether or not it can be argued that such violence is simply a by-product of a particular action, or is the deliberate aim of general military policy. In fact, it would appear that the dominant states are more, not less, guilty of such types of actions. Falk makes this point, especially in terms of the current hegemonic power within the international system: the United States.

Such a one-eyed definition [of terrorism] is also politically incoherent. It overlooks the degree to which the United States itself has backed anti-state political violence, as in relation to contra opposition to the established government in Nicaragua during the 1980s and with respect to Cuban exiles operating with thinly disguised official support from their base in Miami.²⁰

In a more contemporary sense, whether examining recent American policy in Afghanistan and Iraq, especially major offensives in Fallujah and Western Iraq that assumed a great toll on innocent human life, or Israeli actions in the occupied territories, especially missile attacks in densely populated refugee

¹⁹. Richard A. Falk, “A Dual Reality: Terrorism against the State and Terrorism by the State,” in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism*, p. 53.

²⁰. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

camps in the Gaza Strip or the full scale offensive into the West Bank in 2002, such actions have clearly claimed many “innocent” lives. Or perhaps most devastating of all, our new allies in the “war on terror,” Vladimir Putin and the Russian offensive into Chechnya. In this case, two wars have left the Chechnyans devastated and their capital of Grozny leveled. If we follow the standard definition and objective components of “terrorism,” these three particular cases, and many similar examples especially emanating from the West, seem like obvious instances of “terrorism” according to the aforementioned definition. Yet, since many would deny that such actions constitute “terrorism,” there must be some key elements omitted from contemporary perspectives on “terrorism” that render current definitions meaningless. It is here where one must turn to Antonio Gramsci and his conceptualization of the term “hegemony” and its application to the international system to establish a reconstructed, and more accurate, definition of “terrorism.”

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF HEGEMONY

In terms of an alternative definition of terrorism - since it has been argued that *all* states use violence to achieve broad political objectives and that many times innocent civilians are killed in such actions – it is necessary to examine the concept of “hegemony.” First, as developed by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, the original intention was to utilize the term specifically at the domestic level. Yet, more recently, the notion of hegemony has been applied to the international state system by neo-Gramscian theorists, such as Robert Cox, Stephen Gill, and Mark Rupert.

The concept of “hegemony,” as conceived and developed by Antonio Gramsci, while still an extremely contentious term, has certain broad traits that can be utilized in the examination of “terrorism.” Gramsci’s main intention in conceptualizing the term “hegemony” was to demonstrate that brute force or coercion alone was not the only, or even the primary, instrument used by the State in maintaining its power and control over the masses. While force,

especially employed through coercive agents like the military, police, and judicial system, along with the economic structure, certainly performed a crucial role in preserving the elites' grasp on power, it was the so-called "consensual" elements of this rule that were in fact more important to Gramsci. Gramsci did make clear that the dominant powers within the State retained power over the masses through both coercion and consent. The first element corresponds to the State's coercive agents but, more importantly, the second is rooted in the State's intellectual, moral, and cultural power as represented by its ability to promote the types of values, beliefs, and ideas that help to maintain the rule of the dominant elite.²¹ According to Gramsci: "[T]he supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'."²² Consequently, for Gramsci, the State could no longer be viewed as the "nightwatchman" or neo-Liberal state of Marxist's time, supervising the bourgeoisie and administering capitalist production, but now acquired a specifically moral or ethical function. As Gramsci makes clear: "[E]very State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes."²³

Several writers address this crucial role now performed by the contemporary State. Once more, the key focus is that the modern State has expanded beyond its traditional political and economic role to play a central function in the dissemination of ideas, values, and practices that are unquestionably linked to its overall rule. According to Carl Boggs: "Gramsci's definition of ideological hegemony ... encompassed the whole range of values, attitudes, beliefs, cultural norms, legal precepts, etc. that to one degree or another permeated civil society,

²¹. This is what Gramsci would refer to as "common sense" or "ideological hegemony." See *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.) (New York: International Publishers, 1971), especially pp. 419-25.

²². *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²³. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

that solidified the class structure and the multiple forms of domination that pass through it."²⁴ In terms of specific concrete historical examples, Boggs states: "Gramsci most often conceived of hegemony as an historically-defined system of beliefs and values – nationalism, Catholicism, liberalism, cultural traditions, and so forth – which mediate the class struggle in various ways."²⁵ Chantal Mouffe expands on Boggs' earlier discussion by stating that:

Hegemony, therefore, becomes, in its typically gramscian formulation, 'political, intellectual, and moral leadership over allied groups'... it is no longer a question of a simple political alliance but of a complete fusion of economic, political, intellectual, and moral objectives which will be brought about by one fundamental group and groups allied to it through the intermediary of ideology when an ideology manages to 'spread throughout the whole of society determining not only united economic and political objectives but also intellectual and moral unity.'²⁶

Therefore, whether expressed as "ideological hegemony," or as Gramsci refers to on numerous occasions as "common sense," "hegemony" was a central component for Gramsci and a more complex manner in which to conceptualize the modern State. Instead of a solely coercive agent,²⁷ it broadened the view of the contemporary State to include an increased and perhaps more definable function as an educator in terms of the values, beliefs, and morals it sought to impart to the subjugated masses.

In Gramsci's own writings, the concept of "hegemony" was strictly used to examine the domestic realm of various Western countries, especially the Italian context and, thus, was never specifically applied to the overall international system. Yet, since Robert Cox's pioneering work in 1983, in which he transferred Gramscian notions and concepts to the global stage, "hegemony" has been

²⁴. Carl Boggs, *The Two Revolutions: Antonio Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), p. 160.

²⁵. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

²⁶. Chantal Mouffe, "Introduction: Gramsci Today," in Chantal Mouffe (ed.) *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan, Paul, 1979) p. 10.

²⁷. In other words, beyond Max Weber's more standard and accepted definition of the state as: "The possessor of a monopoly over the use of force within a given territory."

increasingly employed to the study of international relations.²⁸ Some important contributors, such as Stephen Gill and Mark Rupert,²⁹ have forcefully argued that as much as its application domestically demonstrated a clear hegemonic force in terms of a specific ruling elite that employs coercive force, but is always more willingly to utilize consensual means, such a perspective is now equally valid in terms of an international system in which one can clearly detect a growing Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC). To many, the Davos Group that currently meets annually at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland most visibly personifies this class.³⁰ While such a group can rely on the military and coercive instruments of the major Western powers to support their economic and financial interests, it has been the spread of the Western ideas of liberalism, democracy, free trade, and “consumerism,” that have allotted them most of their success in establishing their hegemonic control over the system. In turn, this control is most specifically linked to their ability to shape the very wants of these dominated/exploited groups. In a general sense, Gill argues:

For world hegemony (and thus peaceful relations between advanced capitalist states) to occur there must be a congruence between major social forces at the domestic and international levels. This implies the need for conscious political action and the pursuit of consent and legitimation as necessary to the development and maintenance of hegemony, since at any point in its evolution, a successful hegemony is one where consensual aspects of the system come to the forefront although coercion is always potentially in the background.³¹

²⁸. Robert Cox, “Gramsci, Hegemony, and International Relations: An Essay in Method,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 1983):162-175.

²⁹. For some example see: Stephen Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Mark Rupert, *Producing Hegemony: The Politics of Mass Production and American Global Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Mark Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization: Contending Visions of a New World Order* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

³⁰. Gill’s work here is especially insightful regarding “The Trilateral Commission” in *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*. Also see Leslie Sklair, “Social Movements for Global Capitalism: The Transnational Capitalist Class in Action,” *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Autumn 1997):514-538.

³¹. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, p. 55.

In examining the hegemonic nature of the international system, the West preserves their dominant position, not only through constructing and entrenching their views within the system of states, but by equating Western morals and culture with “civilization” itself. In this sense, Robert Cox is most forceful in his conceptualization of the international system when he states: “World hegemony is expressed in universal norms, institutions, and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behaviour for states and for those forces of civil society that act across national boundaries.”³² Thus, hegemonic control derives predominantly from the Western creation, implementation, and enforcement of the ideas and actions embodied through institutions such as the WTO, IMF, or even the United Nations.

However, for these neo-Gramscian theorists, it is the “hegemonic” ideas espoused by the dominant states that are most significant in both controlling and maintaining current global arrangements, since they promote values and beliefs that create the impression that the structure benefits all, when in fact it works in the primary interest of the leading powers themselves. It is this focus on ideas that is key to both Rupert and Gill in their conceptualization of the current international system, especially in the context of the post World War II era. While Rupert argues how “Liberal anti-communism was the ideological cement,”³³ Gill focuses on the role of ideas by stating that:

This [historic] bloc became part of the nucleus of postwar Atlantic hegemony (in the Gramscian sense). They fused corporate liberalism, Fordism, Keynesianism, welfarism, and a permanent arms economy rationalized through cold war ideology.³⁴

In a contemporary sense, as reflected in the 1990s thrust of “globalization,” Gill once more demonstrates the central role performed by ideas and culture in the “consensual” and hegemonic expansion of both the West and the capitalist system in general during this period when he states that: “This outward

³². Cox, “Gramsci, Hegemony, and International Relations,” p 172.

³³. Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization*, p. 26.

³⁴. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, p. 128.

expansion of the U.S. has also served to foster the values of consumerism and possessive individualism, so that increasing proportions of the populations of, for example, Third World states have come to identify with American cultural values.”³⁵ In all of these cases, while economic interests are important and even crucial, and military and other coercive agents are never completely rejected (or as in the case of Iraq, they will be relied upon when consent fails), the key contribution of hegemony is to produce and reproduce the necessary ideas, beliefs, values, and even culture to expand the Western dominance and hegemonic control over the international system.

A BRIEF HISTORY

In this section, a historical analysis will assist in linking the phenomenon of “terrorism” with the broader concept of hegemony. Throughout the modern historical age, commencing with the first contemporary usage of “terrorism” during the French Revolution, the term has been solely applied to those states, groups, organizations, or individuals who have refused to consent to the “common sense” views or hegemony of the dominant powers within the international system. Perhaps Beril Dedeoglu is most succinct in creating this link when he states: “In other words, actors capable of defining the international system rules can define certain facts that seem in opposition to their way of existence as manifestations of ‘terror’ and thus identify them as ‘other’.”³⁶ It is through this hegemony that the principal powers have been able to designate as “terrorists” their specific enemies or opponents within the international system. Once more, Dedeoglu argues:

As each state’s ‘terror criminal’ (its enemy) is different, its perception of crime or enemy is also different. This difference is based on the various interests of the states in the international system.”³⁷

³⁵. Ibid., p. 86.

³⁶. Beril Dedeoglu, “Bermuda Triangle: Comparing Official Definitions of Terrorist Activity,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Autumn 2003), p. 82.

³⁷. Ibid., p. 103.

Of course, it is only when a particular power is dominant and hegemonic, such as the United States, that such a classification can be internationalized and accepted, either coercively or consensually, by all the constituent parts of the system (i.e., the weaker powers).

Historically, while these variously deemed “terrorist” groups have sought to challenge the Western dominance or hegemony of the international system or, perhaps more accurately, have been *perceived* to be the primary threat to the contemporary entrenched status quo powers, such challenges have exhibited a number of distinct, but similar, characteristics. Overall, whether “terrorists” have been perceived as anti-capitalist, anti-democratic, anti-Christian (or even worse secular / atheists / anti-God), anti-Western, or anti-American – in each case, from the radicals of the French Revolution to the Communist threat, to Third World nationalists, or even the Islamic fundamentalists of today – all were seen as posing a significant danger to the hegemonic powers of their time. While the characteristics demonstrated by each of these “terrorist” groups may exhibit a partial component of this more general threat,³⁸ in all cases, since it is the West that conceptualizes what is meant by the “civilized” world, these “terrorists” are perceived as nothing less than a threat to civilization itself. In one specific case, General Videla of Argentina in the 1970s broadly defined as a terrorist “not just someone with a gun or a bomb, but anyone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian civilization.”³⁹ Such a view is still common among both pundits and policy-makers and it is clear that current American President George W. Bush has employed such language in describing Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as constituting an “axis of evil.”

The employment of such language, though, is not novel in defining the type of threat posed by “terrorists” and other challengers to the status quo or hegemonic powers. On the one hand, in the context of the tragedy of September 11, 2001,

³⁸. An example is Islamic fundamentalism, which is clearly anti-Western, anti-democratic, and anti-Christian in nature.

³⁹. Charles Townsend, *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 47.

the strike against America was not seen as simply an attack on the U.S., or even the “West,” but on the entire civilized world. Yet, even on the other hand, as David Rapoport makes clear:

Exactly 100 years ago, we heard a similar appeal. An anarchist assassinated President William McKinley in September 1901, moving the new president – Theodore Roosevelt – to summon a worldwide crusade to exterminate terrorism everywhere... President Theodore Roosevelt seized the opportunity to call for the first international crusade to safeguard civilization. ‘Anarchy is a crime against the whole human race, and all mankind should band together against the Anarchist. His crimes should be made a crime against the law of nations ... declared by treaties among all civilized powers.’⁴⁰

George W. Bush could have uttered the exact same words in the challenges of the post 9-11 world and the current “war on terror.”⁴¹

In examining the key aspects of terrorism over the past two hundred years, those commonly portrayed as “terrorists” have not only challenged Western dominance and hegemony over the system and, hence, the civilized world, but by extension have been commonly portrayed as the principal obstacles to “peace,” “prosperity,” and the very foundations of “liberal democracy.” In the present context, President Bush has focused on both the Al Qaeda terrorists behind 9-11 and even the insurgents in Iraq as being enemies of “freedom.” Yet, what really unites all these disparate “terrorist” groups throughout history is that they have refused to accept the status quo dominance of Western/American hegemony. In all cases, since these groups are perceived to challenge the dominant powers, all are anti-“something,” threats to “civilization” and, hence, a “terrorist” threat to be eliminated. In a contemporary sense, Pavel Baev makes this connection between two of the dominant powers within the international system – the United States and Russia. He perceives the especially paradoxical nature of such a link after so many years locked in hegemonic confrontation

⁴⁰. David C. Rapoport, “The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11,” in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism*, p. 36 and 46.

⁴¹. Rapoport’s views are not alone in paralleling the similarities between these two periods. According to Laqueur: “If in the year 1900 the leaders of the main industrial [i.e., hegemonic] powers had assembled, most of them would have insisted on giving terrorism top priority on their agenda, as President Clinton did at the Group of Seven meeting after the June bombing of the U.S. military compound in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.” Laqueur, “Postmodern Terrorism,” p. 151.

during the Cold War, since they now find a convergence of interests in their current “war on terror.” According to Baev: “It appears pretty obvious that ‘hegemony’ has well-developed interfaces with ‘crime’ and ‘Islam’ or, in other words, that the ‘civilized West’ is facing – and mobilizing against - security challenges from international crime and radicalized political Islam.”⁴² For both the U.S. and Russia, since these threats provide the most significant challenge to their hegemonic control, they (i.e., radical Islam and international criminal networks) are brandished as the principal “terrorists” of the contemporary world. Yet, while such a challenge essentially deals with issues of security and the maintenance of the economic interests of the dominant elites of these countries, terrorism must be conceptualized primarily as a moral and ethical concern, and as a danger to the ideas that maintain peace, prosperity, and stability in the “free” world.

In terms of a more detailed historical overview of “terrorism” and the perpetrators of terror, a specific pattern can be established regarding a conceptualization of the type of threat they have presented towards the hegemonic powers. Beginning with the French Revolution and through to the early and mid-part of the twentieth century, the principal challenge to the hegemonic powers originated from within or inside the Western states themselves. The French Revolution initiated this period because it signified a radical departure from the Monarchical and conservative status quo political structures of the previous centuries. Edmund Burke’s denunciations of the French Revolution and the ensuing “Reign of Terror” were not just ideological in nature, but what he perceived as the greater threat that such mass and populist ideas would present towards the nobles, upper classes, and hegemonic powers of Europe.⁴³ Consequently, the French Revolution was a watershed or defining moment in modern terrorism not just because of its scale (history was replete with larger and more indiscriminate massacres), but primarily because it

⁴². Baev, “Examining the ‘Terrorism-War’ Dichotomy in the ‘Russian-Chechnya’ Case,” p. 32.

⁴³. White, *Terrorism 2002 Update*, p. 67. Perhaps what Burke would refer to as “the natural, governing elite.”

dramatically challenged and threatened the entrenched interests of the hegemonic elites of the time.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, radical democrats and other members of the liberal middle class would assume the mantle as the “terrorists” of their age. Rooted in the actions of the French Revolution, the radical bourgeoisie were now perceived as the new “anti-status quo” challengers of the conservative ruling class, while internationally, the so-called Holy Alliance, was designed to maintain the power of the elites, especially in the more undemocratic states, such as Prussia, Austria, and Russia. In conceptualizing this period and the motives of the new “terrorists,” White argues:

The process of democratization was slow, however, and some of the radical democrats began to feel violent revolution was the only possible course of action... They became popularly known as “terrorists” because they hoped to achieve social revolution by terrorizing the capitalist class and its supporters.⁴⁴

In fact, Noel O’Sullivan states that it was during this period that political violence and, hence, “terrorism” became a “respectable” and even “admirable” form of asserting demands on the political system.⁴⁵ This challenge of the radicalized bourgeoisie reached its climax in the “Great Revolutions” that erupted across Europe in 1848. It is arguable that nationalist aspirations played as significant a role in these uprisings as the desires of the liberal or “radical” middle class. Yet, most importantly, in the end, the hegemonic powers were able to successfully defeat these movements and integrate the dissatisfied middle class into the political process, while tempering their revolutionary or “terrorist” zeal.

The third, and most prolonged of the internal threats that would captivate the hegemonic elites for almost a century, derived from the working class and the burgeoning labour unions, which adamantly, and sometimes violently, expressed a desire for increased economic power and greater political participation. Such individuals and groups were most tangibly manifested through the Anarchist

⁴⁴. Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁵. Noel O’Sullivan, “Terrorism, Ideology, and Democracy,” in Noel O’Sullivan (ed.) *Terrorism, Ideology, and Democracy* (Worcester: Harvester Press, 1986), p. 10.

movements, specifically in Russia, and the Socialist/Labour organizations that proliferated throughout Europe, eventually culminating in the world Communist movement. It was now these groups that would be deemed to be the greatest threat to civilization and the Western world and, hence, remain the principal “terrorists” of the age.

Internally, the Anarchist movement, which led to the whole re-conceptualization of “terrorism,” received its greatest impetus from the growth and challenges it presented to the Russian Tsarist state. While hardly a friend of the other Western powers, the growing Anarchist threat soon posed significant risks to the other hegemonic states, culminating in the assassination of American President William McKinley in Buffalo in 1901. When it began in the late 1860s and early 1870s, under influential Anarchist figures like Segar Nechaev and Mikhail Bakunin, few in the West had much sympathy for the overly repressive Tsarist regime. However, events began to change when the Tsar was assassinated in 1881. Subsequently, it became clear that such an organization no longer constituted a problem solely for the Tsar and his ministers. According to Townsend: “The Russian revolutionary organization *Narodnaya Volya* (People’s Will) struck at both [Russia and the other Western powers], most famously the Tsar Alexander II; and so launched a fashion that seemed, in the last couple of decades of the 19th century, to threaten (in bourgeois eyes) the whole civilized world.”⁴⁶ In a similar vein, White argues that:

Anarchism was an international movement and leaders from several countries were assassinated by terrorist followers. This caused some opponents to believe an international anarchist conspiracy was threatening to topple world order.⁴⁷

As previously mentioned, after McKinley’s assassination, President Roosevelt called a conference to address these individuals and groups now seen to be challenging “all civilized powers.” In terms of the threat it posed to the Western hegemonic powers, the Anarchist movement appeared to exhibit all the worst traits of the earlier “terrorist” movements. Yet, in addition, not only were they

⁴⁶. Townsend, *Terrorism*, p. 21.

⁴⁷. White, *Terrorism 2002 Update*, p. 70.

challenging the position of the dominant powers, but they were clearly anti-democratic, anti-Christian, and most importantly for these elites, explicitly anti-capitalist.⁴⁸

The threat from the radical “left” did not disappear after the decline of the Anarchist movement, as the Russian Revolution of 1917 simply transformed terrorism from primarily an “internal” threat to the dominant powers to an “external” and global challenge against their entire hegemonic control of the international system. After 1917, and especially in the post World War II era and the height of the Cold War, communism remained the single biggest threat to the continued dominance of the Western World. Anti-capitalist, anti-democratic, anti-Christian (or specifically anti-God), and whether specifically oriented from Moscow or one of its proxies in China, Cuba, or beyond, “the Kremlin” was now perceived as directly responsible for all “terrorism” in the world. This view became even more pronounced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as “terrorist” activity appeared to be increasing. In 1983, with President Ronald Reagan’s declarations of the “Evil Empire,” and the Cold War heating up, it is not surprising, as White argues, that for many terrorism and communism became synonymous.⁴⁹ Townsend makes a similar claim regarding the parallel growth in terrorism in the 1980s and the sole responsibility now placed on the Soviet Union.

In the 1980s a new spectre haunted the Western world: ‘international terrorism.’ Its shape was signaled above all by one book, Claire Sterling’s *The Terror Network*, published in 1982, which traced a vast, unified global organization not only inspired, but directly controlled by the USSR. This awe-inspiring perception chimed with the political rhetoric of the Thatcher-Reagan period: the struggle against the ‘evil empire.’⁵⁰

For most, the dramatic events that culminated in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the final dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991

⁴⁸. This point – anti-capitalist - was clearly something that could not be claimed of the earlier “terrorist” threat and challenge of the radicalized bourgeoisie.

⁴⁹. White, *Terrorism 2002 Update*, p. 73.

⁵⁰. Townsend, *Terrorism*, p. 27.

appeared to signal the end of both the threat of communism and its singular association with terrorism.⁵¹ Of course, it should be added that one of the three members of George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" is the Stalinist and communist regime of Kim Jung Il in North Korea. Still, in spite of what most perceive as the declining threat from the "left," the Anarchist/Communist movements did have the distinction of not only providing the most enduring challenge to Western capitalist hegemony for nearly a century and a half, but also having been transformed from primarily an internal or First World threat, to a Second World competitor, to eventually a Third World and external challenge to continued Western dominance and hegemony.

At the same time the worldwide communist threat was raging, its challenge was specifically linked to the general nationalist and decolonization movements that arose in the Third World after the World War II. While most in these movements were attempting to bring what they perceived as legitimate self-determination to the former colonies, in many cases, primarily nationalist aspirations were linked to the overall communist movement, either for reasons of strategic support from the Soviet Union, or various indigenous factors, as in the cases of China, Cuba, and Vietnam. Yet, many Third World nationalists still took great pains to distinguish their movements and aims from the previous internal "terrorist" threats that had arose within Europe. According to White:

Nationalist groups did not view themselves as terrorists. They believed anarchists were fighting for ideas. Nationalists believed they were fighting for their countries.⁵²

However, in spite of what many, even in the West, perceived as understandable aspirations for self-determination, others still claimed that all these groups, regardless of the their aims, were "terrorists" and, hence, painted with the same brush as the "terrorists" who had plagued Europe over the

⁵¹. One exception to this trend is Wilkinson, who argues that in spite of such wishful thinking: "Communist-inspired terrorism, is, sadly, still very much alive in many areas of the Third World." Wilkinson, "Why Modern Terrorism?" p. 119. In addition, others would specifically point to the communist-influenced regimes that remain in Cuba, China, and Vietnam.

⁵². White, *Terrorism 2002 Update*, p. 70.

preceding 150 years. In reflecting such a view, O'Sullivan argues that: "These same decades ... witnessed an extension of the same theory beyond the state to the international order, and more especially to the justification of terrorism in the cause of emancipation of the Third World."⁵³ It was clear, as O'Sullivan infers in terms of the "international order," that these new upstart nationalist (i.e., "terrorist") groups were now perceived as a threat to the hegemonic dominance of the West, either indirectly, or directly as in the case of Algerian resistance to French rule.⁵⁴

In the contemporary world, pockets of communist "terrorism" remain (Cuba and North Korea continue to be on the list of state-sponsors of terrorism), while nationalist "terrorists" still exist throughout the world.⁵⁵ Yet, the most cataclysmic development since the fall of the Soviet Union and the lessening of the worldwide Communist threat has been its replacement by radical Islam, or Islamic fundamentalism, as the principal "counter" to Western hegemony at the global level. In the context of past "terrorist" challenges, it represents all the worst aspects in opposition to Western hegemony – not just their threats to peace, prosperity, and freedom - but their adamantly anti-Western/anti-American stance, their "anti" or non-Christian embodiment, and even anti-modern/anti-capitalist orientation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Samuel Huntington's idea of a "clash of civilizations" has been accepted and promoted by those who perceive the seriousness of the threat posed by the Islamists. A number of scholars emphasize, not just the growth of radical Islam, but its propitious substitution for the worldwide Communist terrorist threat that had all but dissipated by the 1990s. According to Townsend:

⁵³. O'Sullivan, "Terrorism, Ideology, and Democracy," p. 23.

⁵⁴. It is interesting to note, not only O'Sullivan's selective memory – for was not the American Revolution and the Revolutionaries use of political violence (i.e., "terrorism") not a case of justifiable self-determination from non-consensual oppression - but even the United Nations for much of its post World War II history seemed to exclude legitimate self-determination from its designation of "terrorism." For a more detailed examination of this latter issue see Halberstam's discussion of the United Nations below.

⁵⁵. In this sense, one can differentiate between "internal," groups (within Europe), with examples including the IRA and the Basques, and "external" organizations (outside Europe), such as the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka and the PLO.

Before 1989 it was common to see such broad-brush estimates as, for instance, that '80 percent of terrorist groups in the world are at least superficially Marxist ... and claim the right to support from the Soviet Union.' The sudden and unexpected disappearance of the Evil Empire seems to have impelled the State Department to allow (in 2001) that state sponsorship has decreased over the last several decades,' but again nothing like a qualitative estimate has been offered. A world in which 80 per cent of terrorists were not Marxists but Muslims might present a totally different kind of issue.⁵⁶

While various authors present contrasting figures regarding the percentage that Islamist groups now comprise in terms of the overall "terrorist" phenomenon,⁵⁷ to all, a specific and dramatic change – Communist to radical Islam – has definitely occurred.

Whether the transformation was coincidental or a deliberate need to emphasize and construct a new "enemy," it is clear that Islamic fundamentalism now poses the most significant challenge to Western hegemony. Currently, five of the seven states that are on the list of "state sponsors of terrorism" are Islamic countries – Libya, Sudan, Syria, Iran, and Iraq.⁵⁸ In addition to their designation as "terrorist" states, the other common characteristic these states share is their committed refusal to accept U.S. hegemony or to allow themselves to be subservient to American/Western domination of the international system. It is not exactly clear if such a rejection, and the corresponding "terrorist" label, are rooted solely in their anti-democratic and anti-Western nature, or more directly linked to their unwillingness to toe the American line. Whatever the factors, it is obvious that radical Islam represents the very embodiment of the contemporary "terrorist" phenomenon. As Dedeoglu succinctly states:

⁵⁶. Townsend, *Terrorism*, p. 131.

⁵⁷. Sinclair asserts that: "By 1998 .. more than half of the thirty most dangerous groups in the world were connected to religion." Sinclair, *An Anatomy of Terror*, p. 327. Wilkinson adds: "By the end of the 1990s no less than a third of all currently active international terrorist groups were religiously motivated, the majority espousing Islamist beliefs." Wilkinson, "Why Modern Terrorism?" p. 11.

⁵⁸. Afghanistan was only recently removed with the overthrow of the Taliban and the installing of the pro-American government of Hamid Karzai, while the other two states, as previously mentioned, are the communist states of North Korea and Cuba. In addition, though Libya and Qaddafi have demonstrated far less willingness to confront and challenge the Western powers, especially the United States and Britain, at this current time, it still remains on the list.

A similar pattern can be observed on the lists of names [the U.S. list of global terrorist organizations] where there are only 20 non-Arab names (e.g., ETA) out of 300... Consequently, the main enemy of the United States is 'Islamic terrorism.'⁵⁹

In terms of a more systematic approach, while historically it is clear who has tended to be branded or designated a “terrorist” or “terrorist” organization, an attempt must be conducted to link this discussion with earlier comments regarding the definition and categorization of “terrorism” and elements of “hegemony.” It seems evident from the above examination that “terrorists” and “terrorist” organizations cannot be objectively defined and classified – since many non-terrorists utilize political violence to achieve broad political objectives in which innocent civilians are killed. Consequently, it is only the dominant and hegemonic powers that have both the intellectual/moral ability and coercive might to create, construct, or label “others” within the global system by conceptualizing their enemy or the opposing entity as “terrorist.”⁶⁰ This can be achieved either by the individual policies of the dominant states or through the assistance of international institutions, such as the United Nations. According to Philip Jenkins: “Based on this example [Iraq], we have to ask whether the labeling of a particular country as a terrorist state reflects its true activities, or merely suits the political convenience of those nations with the power to undertake such labeling with all their diplomatic authority, and their vast media establishment.”⁶¹ In this case, Jenkins is specifically referring to the United States; a state whose overwhelming power to classify its own particular enemies as “terrorists” only increased politically and morally in the subsequent period following the 9-11 attacks.

While the U.S. under President Bush have pursued a decidedly unilateralist approach in the “war on terror,” they have sought the assistance of the United

⁵⁹. Dedeoglu, “Bermuda Triangle,” p. 93.

⁶⁰. The issue of labelling and “constructivism” will be addressed more specifically in the next section.

⁶¹. Jenkins, *Images of Terror*, p. 166

Nations in helping to designate what constitutes a global “terrorist” group.⁶² Malvina Halberstam does an excellent job in demonstrating how the United Nations’ definition of “terrorism” has developed over time to more closely reflect the goals and views of the United States. Overall, according to Halberstam: “The United Nations position on terrorism has changed over the last three decades from one that, at least arguably, permitted terrorism in support of the struggle for self-determination, to one that unequivocally condemns terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable wherever and by whomever committed.”⁶³ More specifically, he roots these changes in the early 1980s when “terrorist” activities, both those believed to be orchestrated from Moscow, and events such as the suicide bombings in Lebanon in 1983, appeared to be increasing.⁶⁴ Finally, he argues that by January and February 2002 (i.e., post 9-11) the complete rejection of terrorism under any circumstances was complete. “This [Draft Convention] marks a significant change from early U.N. resolutions that condemned acts of terrorism in one paragraph and reaffirmed the right to self-determination in another, leaving room for the argument that the prohibition against terrorism did not apply to national liberation movements.”⁶⁵ Clearly, no terrorist activity, even ones in the name of “legitimate” self-determination, was now justifiable. It would appear that only in the shadow of 9-11 and the worldwide sympathy the United States now enjoyed, would it have been able to commandeer what was a fundamental shift in the international definition of “terrorism.” In the end, perhaps Dedeoglu is most concise when he argues: “Although the UN Security Council resolutions have serious shortcomings with regard to the definitions of the concepts ‘terrorism-terrorist-terrorist organization,’ these resolutions allow part of the enemies of the

⁶². As in the case of going to war in Iraq, this would appear more a moral exercise than an actual desire for any tangible assistance.

⁶³. Malvina Halberstam, “The Evolution of the United Nations Position on Terrorism: From Exempting National Liberation Movements to Criminalizing Terrorism Wherever and Whomever Committed,” *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, 41 (2002-2003), p. 573.

⁶⁴. *Ibid.*, p. 575.

⁶⁵. *Ibid.*, p. 581.

dominant actors in the system to be considered as everyone's enemy."⁶⁶ Once more, in considering the inherently subjective or relativist nature of terrorism, it is hard to deny the explicit link that exists between the designation of terrorism - hence, the very definition of what is a "terrorist" or "terrorist act" - and the ability of the dominant and hegemonic powers, especially the world's lone superpower, to solely and singularly denote such a categorization.

THE PERSPECTIVES

While "terrorism" has been an academic subject of increasing interest over the past twenty to thirty years, experiencing an especially large growth in the early 1980s, since 9-11 there is probably no other issue that has been examined as extensively as "terrorism." Therefore, what does this paper have to contribute to a debate in which seemingly everything possible has already been addressed? This section examines what could be considered the four principal perspectives on "terrorism," and how a "counter" hegemonic definition of "terrorism" contributes to such a debate, both in terms of its conceptualization and the possible alternative responses to the current "war on terror." It is hoped that such an investigation will not only illuminate the shortcomings and pitfalls of the practical components of the other perspectives, but address some key philosophical questions involved in this debate, since it is arguably the moral dimension that is both the most important, and the most often neglected, in examining this "war." In this context, the four specific perspectives are: the Standard, Radical, Relativist, and Constructivist positions.

The first perspective is the "standard" position (i.e., *they are, we aren't*). This view, though never really questioned by the hegemonic, Western powers, became more pronounced after the 9-11 attacks. When it comes to the use of political violence to attain broad objectives, even when innocent civilians are harmed, when they use violence they are "terrorists," when we do, we are employing appropriate "counterterrorist" measures; or in the cases of American

⁶⁶. Dedeoglu, "Bermuda Triangle," p. 104.

policy in Iraq, Israeli actions towards the Palestinians, and even Russian activities in Chechnya, these dominant actors are simply utilizing legitimate self-defense in the name of state security. This standard or absolutist position became the norm, and perhaps only acceptable view after 9-11. It was reflected in all the major media outlets, newspapers, television, and radio; while pundits, security experts, and various think tanks of all ideological stripes assumed this unquestioned and one may argue “objective” perspective after the World Trade Centre bombings. In fact, to dissent from such a view invited a neo-McCarthyist type of reaction. Gramsci would argue that such “organic intellectuals”⁶⁷ were simply presenting the “common sense” views reflected by the ideological hegemony of the dominant powers. White and Hellerich address the rationale behind this standard and absolutist stance, and especially how such views that dissented from this “common sense” perspective were summarily dismissed.

In the United States, it took only a few hours after the 11 September attacks for some journalists and academics to announce that ‘postmodernism is over’ since relativism was now defunct and the distinction between good and evil was absolutely clear. To what we might call The New Absolutist, the fall of the Twin Towers and the partial ruination of the Pentagon rendered postmodernism moribund, to be replaced by a set of unequivocal values, since we now knew after all, who was ‘good’ and who was ‘evil.’⁶⁸

Yet, such a view was not only accepted by the academic community and the media as “truth,” but also by the political leaders of the United States. According to White and Hellerich:

This is arguably, the strategy of President George W. Bush’s controversial ‘Axis of Evil’ language. Hence also arises the constant repetition by the Bush Administration of ‘terror,’ ‘terrorist,’ terrorism,’ in every context, at every opportunity, to sell policies that have no reasonable connections with terror at all.⁶⁹

⁶⁷. For a more detailed examination of this issue in the context in which Gramsci related its greater meaning to the maintenance of “hegemony” by the dominant powers, see Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, especially, pp. 5-16.

⁶⁸. Daniel White and Gert Hellerich, “Nietzsche and the Communicative Ecology of Terror: Part I,” *The European Legacy*, Vol. 8, No. 6 (2003), p. 718.

⁶⁹. *Ibid.*, p. 728.

Of course, in reply to those who argue that 9-11 signaled a fundamentally new epoch in the age of terrorism,⁷⁰ the identical language of “good” vs. “evil” and the “evil empire” was employed by Ronald Reagan to refer to the Soviet Union only a few years before.⁷¹ The only distinction is then the Soviets were the source of all “evil” and, hence, “terrorism” in the world.

The second perspective, or “radical” position (i.e., *we are, they aren't*), held by a select number of academics, scholars, and politicians over the years, has been much more difficult to assume in the highly charged atmosphere of post 9-11 America. This view is specifically represented by academics such as Noam Chomsky and Frederick Gareau and, to a lesser degree, Richard Falk. They argue that while the events of 9-11 are tragic and unfortunate, the United States has been and remains the biggest terrorist state in the world. Accordingly, from Latin America to the Middle East – if “terrorism” is most succinctly defined as the killing of innocent civilians - no other country has as much innocent blood on its hands than the United States. Not surprisingly, these individuals continue to be vilified in the American press, most vehemently through accusations of anti-Americanism. Yet, in questioning the so-called “common sense” views of the standard position, Chomsky argues:

It is common practice that allows for the conventional thesis that terror is a weapon of the weak. That is true, by definition, if terror is restricted to their terrorism. If the doctrinal requirement is lifted, however, we find that, like most weapons, terror is primarily a weapon of the powerful.⁷²

⁷⁰. Laqueur argues that groups, such as the Al Qaeda network, represent what he terms as “the new terrorism.” Walter Laqueur, *No End To War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York and London: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2003). Others who assert a similar position include both Mark Juergensmeyer, “The Religious Roots of Contemporary Terrorism,” in Kegley, Jr. (ed.) *The New Global Terrorism*; and Wilkinson, “Why Modern Terrorism?”

⁷¹. This is what White and Hellerich refer to it as a type of “metaphysical absolutism.” Daniel White and Gert Hellerich, “Nietzsche and the Communicative Ecology of Terror: Part II,” *The European Legacy*, Vol. 8, No. 6 (2003), p. 751.

⁷². Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Global Quest for Global Dominance* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), p. 189.

Most succinctly, the crux of his argument is that it is the powerful, with their modern weaponry and more sophisticated technology, that can do much greater harm than the weak. Therefore, in each case - the United States in Iraq, Israel and the Palestinians, or the Russians towards Chechnya - the weak are the “terrorists,” though unquestionably it is the powerful that have taken significantly more innocent lives.⁷³ Of course, many would passionately ridicule such a view as absurd at best and, at worst, as potentially treasonous.

There are elements of the second perspective contained in what is arguably the more popular of the dissenting views, the “relativist” position (i.e., *both are or both aren't, so what can you do?*). Philip Jenkins, Falk, and others encompass this view by asserting that *all* countries use violence to achieve political aims and, in turn, some times innocent civilians are killed. Consequently, if all states and many non-state actors, terrorist and non-terrorist alike, employ the same means, how can one reach an objective conclusion regarding the morality or ethical nature of one’s political violence vis-à-vis their opponents. One could argue that such a perspective is “subjective” “ambivalent” or simply “postmodern.”⁷⁴ Yet, there is nothing modern about this position as reflected in the now famous euphemism: “One man’s terrorist, is another man’s freedom fighter.” Falk is especially critical of modern definitions of “terrorism” that claim to be objective, neutral, and scientific, when in fact they represent the self interests and narrowly-defined security concerns of those conceptualizing them (i.e., the dominant powers).⁷⁵ While Falk refers specifically to the problems inherent in conceptualizing “terrorism” during the Cold War era and the confrontation

⁷³. In the end, Chomsky summarizes his views by stating that the “problem with the official definitions of terror is that it follows from them that the U.S. is a leading terrorist state.” *Ibid.*, p. 189. Frederick Gareau arrives at much the same conclusion in his examination of United States’ policy in Latin America, specifically through the infamous “School of the Americas.” See Frederick H. Gareau, *State Terrorism and the United States: From Counterinsurgency to the War on Terrorism* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, Inc., 2004).

⁷⁴. Or perhaps as Corlett argues: “‘Terrorism’ is used by most people in a rather unfortunately hypocritical manner. It appears that politicians of various countries condemn as ‘terrorism’ acts of political violence (of whatever variety) against their own countries, or those of their allies, while they fail to admit that their own governments sponsor actual terrorism.” Corlett, *Terrorism*, p. 48.

⁷⁵. Falk, “A Dual Reality,” p. 58.

between the United States and Soviet Union, such comments could just as easily apply to the current “war on terror,” especially since questionably “just”⁷⁶ U.S. actions in Iraq have led to substantially more deaths than the September 11 attacks that initiated the original military response.

There are several other more mainstream academics and terrorist specialists that comprehend the clearly subjective nature of attempting to define and conceptualize “terrorism.” According to Jenkins:

However impartially we try to define terrorism, the meaning of the word will fluctuate enormously in practice, and over a surprisingly brief time span... These rapid shifts indicate the intensity of controversies over terrorism, and the critical ideological importance of the concept.⁷⁷

Even Charles Kegley, who is far from a “radical” American scholar, states:

To instill paralyzing fear – to terrorize – has unfortunately become a common way of expressing grievances and attempting to realize political objectives... Because the concept of terrorism is inherently subjective, not scientific, this ambiguity invites ambivalence about observed individual acts of violence, an ambivalence that paradoxically increases terrorism’s popularity as an instrument for propaganda.⁷⁸

Finally, Townsend provides an example from one of the bloodiest “terrorist” conflicts, or conversely, legitimate wars of “self-determination,” of the post World War II era: the French War in Algeria from 1954-1962. He quotes Ramdane Abane of the FLN who insisted that the morality of terrorism simply paralleled that of government repression. “I [Abane] see little difference between the girl who places a bomb in the Milk-Bar and the aviator who bombs a village or drops napalm in a zone interdite.”⁷⁹ Even today, it is hard to quantify or even morally distinguish between certain types of political violence beyond the fact that theirs is “terrorism,” while ours is “legitimate self defense.”

⁷⁶. “Just” in this context refers to the “justness” regarding the actual reasons and grounds for going to war.

⁷⁷. Jenkins, *Images of Terror*, p. 60. He goes on to conclude, therefore, that: “Defining terrorism is in large measure a subjective process.” *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁷⁸. Kegley, Jr. “Characteristics, Causes, and Controls of the New Global Terrorism,” pp. 7-8.

⁷⁹. Townsend, *Terrorism*, p. 94.

The final position, clearly related to the subjective perspective, is the one that probably most approximates with the position presented in this paper (i.e., linking definitions of “terrorism” with those groups or states that possess the power to do the defining: “the hegemonic”). It is the “constructivist” position, which assumes the view that definitions, conceptions, and classifications of “terrorism” are constructed. Since terrorism is socially and politically constructed, it is a process of communication rooted in language itself and, thus, involves creating or imposing a bridge of shared meanings. In this sense, the actual act of defining “terrorism” has as its ultimate function a general and overall process of delegitimization. In conceptualizing his views, Jenkins argues:

We need to appreciate the interests that groups have in presenting this image, and the rhetorical means by which they establish this picture as the correct one, how in fact the issue achieves the status of social reality. Terrorism offers a model case study for what I have called the constructionist approach to social problems. Above all, we see how very flexible the problem has been over time, and how useful to a striking variety of political causes and interest groups... When we look at the terrorism issue this way, we see the process by which bureaucratic interests create and sustain the image presented in the media and popular culture.⁸⁰

Jenkins’ view clearly links the application of the “terrorist” label to those groups, interests, or states which possess an ability to define such actions (i.e., those who are “hegemonic,” both inside the state and within the international system). Joseph Tuman, a communications professor, assumes a similar approach in his views towards “terrorism,” as not an objective fact or universal phenomenon, but as one that is subjectively communicated and constructed. According to Tuman:

In the end, all these factors regarding mass media combine with official rhetoric of our leaders, ideas about terror as rhetorical symbols, and the rhetorical choices that are made in defining an event as terrorism or an individual as terrorist. The combination allows us to see how terrorism truly is best understood as a communication process between terrorist and audience(s), the meaning for which is socially

⁸⁰. Jenkins, *Images of Terror*, p. 189. At another point in his examination, he more succinctly states: “Central to my approach is the notion that terrorism, like any problem, is socially constructed... The concept is shaped by social and political processes, by bureaucratic needs and media structures.” *Ibid.*, p. ix.

constructed in the public discourse and the dialogue we have about the subject.⁸¹

Throughout this examination, it has been steadfastly maintained that according to contemporary definitions of “terrorism,” and its three crucial components, no objective definition or conceptualization of terrorism is possible. Consequently, since “terrorism” is linked to those who have the capability to utilize and impose such terminology (i.e., the hegemon), the concept has been employed primarily as a label to discredit one’s opponents and specifically the grievances and challenges they pose to the continued dominance of the hegemonic powers. In fact, Tuman astutely observes that this was the primary purpose behind the initial labeling of a “terrorist” in the modern age. Returning to its original usage – by Burke in the French Revolution – Tuman argues:

In Burke’s view, a terrorist was a fanatic; therefore, it could be inferred that a terrorist does not follow any means of logic or reason to justify his or her actions. Moreover, a terrorist was an assassin - a murderer – and a thief, and a fraud – not to mention an oppressor... Burke had begun a process of defining terror and terrorists and delegitimizing their behaviour; but, as the reader may have noticed, the words terror and terrorism as Burke employed them were perhaps more labels than definitions.⁸²

In Tuman’s opinion, such a process of “delegitimization” is as valid today as it was over two hundred years ago, since the label of terrorism “marginalizes the terrorists/aggressors, [and] precludes any possibility of legitimacy for their cause or sympathy for their actions.”⁸³

⁸¹. Joseph S. Tuman, *Communicating Terror: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 2003), p. 145.

⁸². Ibid., p. 3.

⁸³. Ibid., p. 40. A similar development can be observed today regarding the Al Qaeda “terrorist” network. By arguing that Al Qaeda are essentially “nihilists,” as many terrorist experts and academics have, it infers that they have no actual political objectives. Since their sole aim is destructive, such a conceptualization means that their grievances are neither legitimate nor rational. For an example of this type of discussion see Michael Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially Chapter 5 “The Temptations of Nihilism.” In the end, such a view makes it both easier to delegitimize the entire movement and, consequently, to respond with military and dramatic counterterrorist operations rather than peaceful, political negotiations.

In transferring such views to the international system, Jenkins concurs with Tuman regarding the construction and labeling of “terrorism” and its common utilization by the dominant and hegemonic powers. According to Jenkins: “Here again, the charge is that “terrorism” is just a convenient label used by the strong against the weak, by established states against their enemies... in order to delegitimize you, suddenly you are accused of being a terrorist.”⁸⁴ Consequently, it is evident that such a process of labeling or “construction” has been employed against “terrorist” organizations throughout the modern era, from the radicals of the French Revolution, through the “leftist” movements of Anarchism, Socialism, and Communism, to the Islamic fundamentalist groups of today. The names may have changed, but “terrorism” and “terrorists” have always been, and remain today, the major individuals, organizations, and states that have dared to challenge the dominant position of the hegemonic powers.

CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

According to the dominant theory of international relations, the Realist approach, international relations are in a permanent state of anarchy. Hence, according to this view, war is endemic to the process and conflict is a natural part of the interactions between states. Consequently, *all* states, especially the most powerful, use violence to incite fear for some political objective, and more often than not, innocent civilians are killed. In addition, the death of innocents/civilians/non-combatants are not always simply an unfortunate by-product of war or political violence, but are many times a main, though usually unstated, goal. Townsend is quite clear on the practical and moral ambiguity involved in the ubiquitous use of political violence when he argues:

Clearly war and terrorism are intimately related. It is hard to imagine a war that did not generate extreme fear among many people, and sometimes this is more than a by-product of violence – it is a primary objective.⁸⁵

⁸⁴. Jenkins, *Images of Terror*, p. 22.

⁸⁵. Townsend, *Terrorism*, p. 6. In an attempt to distinguish their actions (i.e., the “terrorist’s”) from ours (i.e., “legitimate “self defense”), Martin tries to present a clear distinction by righteously

Once more, one needs to return to one of the most respected scholars of international relations, Richard Falk, when he points out what may seem embarrassingly obvious, yet hypocritical nonetheless.

Terrorism is deployed (more or less intelligently and successfully) as a *rational instrument by policymakers on all sides of the political equation...* We condemn the political adversary who engages in indiscriminate violence as a barbarian and outlaw and reward our own officials with accolades for their 'statecraft' even conferring a Nobel Peace Prize from time to time on those who oversee this ... type of terrorism.⁸⁶

In the end, what is the aim of yet another examination of terrorism in terms of its more practical implications and contributions? In its current context, it is clear that contemporary definitions of "terrorism" are inadequate, because they fail to take into consideration, not "terrorism's" defining characteristics, but what is truly the only relevant issue: whether those who employ political violence in pursuit of broader political objectives in which innocent civilians are killed are hegemonic or counter-hegemonic (i.e., "us" or "them"). As Falk makes clear:

My argument is that it is futile and hypocritical self-deception to suppose that we can use the word terrorism to establish a double standard pertaining to the use of political violence. Unless we are consistent and self-critical in our use of language we invite the very violence we deplore... Terrorism, then, is used here to designate any type of political violence that lacks an adequate moral and legal justification, regardless of whether the actor is a revolutionary group or government.⁸⁷

insisting that: "Some acts of political violence are clearly acts of terrorism. Most people would agree that politically motivated planting of bombs in marketplaces, massacres of 'enemy' civilians, and the routine use of torture by governments are terrorist acts." Martin, *Understanding Terrorism*, p. 3. Yet, the large number of civilian deaths in Iraq, whether intentional or not, and certainly the revelations of widespread torture used in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and possibly even among detainees in Guantanamo Bay, tend to dampen some of the objective standards and moral indignation that Martin attempts to reflect.

⁸⁶. Falk, "A Dual Reality," p. 58. (emphasis added).

⁸⁷. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Chomsky concurs with the blatant hypocrisy contained in contemporary definitions and usages of the term “terrorism.” As he succinctly states, it is now time “[t]o apply to ourselves the standards we impose on others.”⁸⁸

Obviously, many will want to discard out of hand any suggestion that our “political violence” and their “terrorism” are in any manner identical phenomenon. For those, no amount of discussion could dissuade them from the righteousness of their views. For others, the argument could be that the hegemonic have always dominated the weaker powers – economically and militarily – and, consequently, they should be permitted to create and construct the morals, values, and beliefs of the “civilized” world. Therefore, such a position reflected in this paper may be accused of idealism and naivety at best while, at worst, dangerous and irresponsible for greater state security and even overall international stability. Perhaps this is true, but the overall aim should be to try and recognize that an inconsistency does exist and attempt to concretely decrease the general usage of unjustifiable political violence. The desire is that if a “war on terror” must be waged, it should acknowledge that moral limits are applicably to all civilized states. In other words, what we do is terrorism, not just them! With a war in Iraq that has killed, by some estimates, anywhere up to 100,000 innocent civilians, for much of the world, the moral component of the “war on terrorism” and the good will the United States experienced after 9-11 has already dissipated. Sometimes actions can just be morally wrong – like the killing of innocent civilians - even if they are “them” and not “us.” More practically, if to some it is “terrorism” that breeds terrorism, today “counterterrorism” seems to be having the exact same effect.

⁸⁸. Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, p. 216.