

1 WRITING THE HISTORY OF TERRORISM

This book is an effort to understand the phenomenon of terrorism in a historical perspective. Because of the global breadth this necessarily entails, there is no dominating geographic center to my inquiry. By following the primary chronological pathways, we begin in the Biblical Near East and extend to Europe, the US, Latin America and Africa. The narrative and analysis of the historical evolution of terrorism as approached here will seek to clarify the conditions which have given rise to terrorism, the goals sought by those relying on its violent tactics, and the dynamics that evolved over time, leading to its becoming a permanent force in the politics of the modern world.

Terrorism is one of a number of genres of political violence, which also include war, genocide and ethnic cleansing among its main categories. All of these forms make use of violence for political reasons, but terrorism is distinguished from the others in several ways. First, it involves repeated acts of violence that create an atmosphere of fear, insecurity and mistrust in civilian society; second, it involves a dynamic interaction between groups or individuals in both government and society who choose it as a means of accomplishing specific political objectives; and third, terrorism is a response to the contestation over what constitutes legitimate authority within a territorial nation state in periods of political vulnerability.

We have become accustomed to conceptualizing “terrorism” as an illegitimate effort by subnational, clandestine factions to sabotage existing governing systems and do great harm to innocent civilians in the process. In addition, the word “terror” is conventionally

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understood as a signifier for extremely violent regimes, such as the state terror of the Soviet Union under Stalin, Hitler's Third Reich, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, Idi Amin's Uganda, and Mao's Cultural Revolution in China, to mention some of the more notorious. Indeed, much of the vast literature on the subject has reflected these divisions for many decades, and the distinction has only been enhanced by the global response to the attacks in the US on September 11, 2001.

The interpretation presented here is a departure from this separation of struggles over power. Rather than emphasizing one perspective over the other, I will be integrating the violence of governments and insurgencies into a single narrative format as a way of understanding terrorism in its broadest historical representation. To demonstrate this approach, I have selected a number of historical moments from a variety of countries, while proceeding chronologically across the last two centuries. I have chosen them because I believe they best reveal and reflect the characteristics and variations that illuminate the essence of terrorist realities in historical perspective. In each example, the antagonistic interplay between state officials and insurgent leaders proves to be the decisive factor in understanding why violence is so vital to the realization of their intentions. They are deeply linked with one another, and neither can easily move to non-violent alternatives, once committed to the path defined by the conditions of terror.

The dominant problematic that gives rise to the resort to terrorist violence is the ongoing contestation found in the conflicts over the legitimacy of state power. The watershed moment in which terrorism entered the politics of modern Europe was during the French Revolution, when ordinary citizens claimed the right to govern. The traditional notion of state legitimacy was forever altered as a result of this upheaval. Among the many consequences resulting from the establishment of a democratic republic in the wake of the overthrown monarchy was the opening of the doorway to a multitude of potential forms of governance. No single form had the hegemonic authority that divine right monarchies once possessed, thereby creating the opportunity for a wide spectrum of proposals to justify the format and functions of the successor. Further, at least in principle, any individual or group in this competitive atmosphere could make a claim to realize a future social order governed by rulers and leaders truly responsive to the needs and desires of the citizens under their authority.

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This combination of new political space in an elected legislature with unprecedented levels of popular participation in state functioning led to the need to redefine the tactics and strategy of governance. Activism took precedence over passive complicity. Theories that were formerly the preserve of educated, if not learned, men, now were open to transformation into policies to be implemented by newly empowered citizens. In the midst of these heightened expectations and tumultuous experiences, the tactics of violence proved to be an attractive alternative as the means to achieve certain political ends and positions of power in the evolving contestation over post-monarchical, political legitimacy. Would *Ancien Régime* loyalists accept their status in a republic without the privileges of their estate? Was the church to have a place in this new secular constellation of power? Was there a compromise possible in which the authority of the sovereign could be limited, rather than absolute? In the absence of clear answers, political violence with secular justification would assume a huge role in seeking resolution to these questions.

Terrorism, from the French Revolutionary era onward, was positioned as an evolving complex of forces in civilian zones of violent combat over control of state power between officials in government and insurgents in society. There is no uniform model that explains either the nature of the varying contexts in which the violence becomes pronounced, or predicts the many sites in which terrorism can occur. There are periods of terror that break out because of specific antagonisms in contestations over power that the parties have decided cannot be resolved by peaceful negotiated means. There are no terrorist states, but there are *states of terror* in which regimes utilize policies of political violence to end perceived threats to their authority. Similarly, there are no permanent insurgent terrorist organizations, but rather such organizations are mobilized in certain historical situations with the intention of violently contesting a government's authority. The interpretive framework in this book departs from the tendency to focus on one side or the other, but rather seeks to demonstrate that both of these agents are necessary in order for terrorism to function over a period of time. To do otherwise obscures the fact that both are, however incommensurately, in some way responsible.

Securing consent, cooperation and, ultimately, the active participation of a constituency is crucial for the endurance of terrorism as a dynamic, either in the hands of governments or insurgencies, though

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it does not guarantee success. Promises are made: force from below will end the abusive government's reign; force from above against the state's (and, according to the logic, society's) enemies will end the fearful violence that they conduct. The disputes lying at the center of terrorist situations are frequently focused on the right to use violence and control over access to advanced weaponry to accomplish their particular goals. States have traditionally reserved this as an exclusive right in order to enforce their legitimacy in power when it is questioned. Insurgencies have sought this right for themselves precisely because they no longer accept that legitimacy and exclusivity. The resulting violent combat between the two in the competitive civilian space of the social order is the driving component in the dynamic of terrorism.

Perhaps because those in power are inherently suspicious of claims challenging the legitimacy of their authority, and because those who are without political power covet it so desperately, all the parties involved in the violence are vulnerable to exaggerating their roles in creating what they imagine will be a more ameliorative political future order in which relentless conflicts and unanswered demands will at last be resolved. These heartfelt aspirations are dominated by powerful expectations that are expressed in a milieu of heightened vulnerability and anxiety precisely because of the palpable political instability created when daily life is so affected by these divisive issues. At such moments, political goals often come to be understood as unrealizable without terror. Entire groups are then conceptualized as threatening, whether in government or in the underground, and are targeted for repression or elimination. Governments declare states of emergency and alter laws to accomplish their ends, while insurgents invent new moral codes to transcend the existing legal system and, in the process, transform themselves into permanent outlaws in order to realize their grandiose plans. Both sides nonetheless feel the need to reach out to convince the larger society to accept their perspectives on the crisis at hand and the necessity of resolution by violence. In this process, both sides often create victims in sectors of the civilian population, which, at different times and sites, is either intentional or unintentional. From the state's point of view, those who are targeted are meant to be harmed in order to defuse their role as a threat to existing authority. For the insurgents, the objects of attack are chosen because of the positions they occupy in the state system of perceived repression and injustice. The other casualties are what strategists coldly refer to as collateral damage.

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The centrality of the terror rests in those assumptions. For the state, its officials come to believe that they must have extensive control to exorcise the demons that lurk secretly within the gates of the civil order, while the insurgents are convinced they can foment widespread discontent against the brutalizing state to fatally wound it. Both must create this structure of belief in which terror is conceptualized as the solution to the resolution of its discontents. Both tend to invest enormous, even excessive power, in imagining the capacities of violence of which their enemies are capable. Leaders emerge, whether elected or selected, endowed with qualities approaching charismatic significance by their opponents as well as their followers and supporters; this then entitles or grants them the authority to command and justify the tactics of violence to be used against one another.

There are, of course, many forms of violence, both political and otherwise, that have not been included here. Violence that is fundamentally non-political, such as the domestic abuse of spouses and children, horrible and criminal as this is, does not really qualify as terrorism as conceptualized in this study. Mass violence that is political, such as civil and transnational wars, ethnic cleansing and cases of genocide, are not examined in detail only because they are violent by nature and often occur within the framework of organized or declared warfare between governments. Moreover, these episodes of violence are frequently the consequence of ongoing violent events, rather than being part of the foundational structure of terrorism. We can learn much about the forms of brutality from these instances of extreme violence, but much less about the essence of terrorism.

Terrorism is also a way of seeing the world, of understanding (or, in many cases, misunderstanding) the dominant political paradigm of the particular historical moment. It involves public commitments based on specific perspectives rooted in deeply felt responses to, and interpretations of, social and political problems. The salient motivations range from perceptions of survival and conquest, to imaginaries of eschatological dimensions that are experienced as desperately needed and attainable only through violence. Terrorism as a phenomenon and dynamic also includes acceptance of the hermetically enclosed, secretive universe that defines the quotidian of both the state's clandestine security agencies and the equally furtive radical insurgency centers and operations at such times. In a sense, both sides come to accept the need to live

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with an alternative morality from which, once committed, exiting back into public space becomes virtually impossible.

Terrorism is also a way of life. Living so intensely in such a guarded, secretive world produces the tendency to imitate each other's behavior and tactics, a phenomenon I refer to in this study as "mirroring." There are many examples referenced in the pages that follow, but in general, this term refers to the close and, at times, intimate connection that security counter-terrorism has with its antagonists. Among the characteristics of this experience one finds the employment of surveillance techniques, the presence of spies and agents pretending loyalties to one side while reporting to the other, and provoking acts while undercover that permit the opposing forces to act with repressive violence during the periods of terror. In other cases, such as the culture of lynching in the American South, and the spasmodic anti-Semitic pogroms in tsarist Russia, a shared set of beliefs and justifications mirrored and unified ordinary citizens with forces of authority in terrorizing the targeted population.

Moreover, the attitudes toward declared enemies fostered during terrorist periods frequently remain fixed. Whether the danger was communism in power or communism threatening power, categories of defining exactly who was dangerous, and assessing how valid the evidence was, proved very expansive and elastic. Similarly, in cases of aroused racial, religious or ethnic fears, citizens can be convinced of the danger posed by the threatening "other," and thus have been relatively easy to mobilize and recruit to become participants in the violent path to find solace and solutions. At such vulnerable moments, notions of state (il)legitimacy and feelings of individual (in)security mesh together and can become virtually indistinguishable.

Further, terrorism involves adopting an idiom, a language and a collective identity. Codes become expressions of words that cannot, for security reasons, be communicated directly. Concepts of danger posed by threatening forces become dominant patterns of understanding and processing information. Becoming so exclusively involved in the adrenalin-heightened clandestine activities of terrorism, whether for government security agencies or underground insurgencies, provides a sense of belonging to a larger community with a grand purpose, devoted to rectifying what are perceived to be unacceptable and menacing conditions in quotidian existence. In this way, nuances and avenues for compromise are lost, the

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extraordinary becomes the ordinary, and what should be understood as abnormal is transformed into the normative.

Despite the appalling tragedy of lost and mangled lives, terrorism has rarely succeeded in achieving its goals. Regimes of terror have always, in the end, proved transient, though the damage they have wrought while in power has certainly been significant. Hitler did not manage to annihilate every Jew, Stalin never created his classless utopia no matter how many enemies of the state he did away with, Pinochet could not “disappear” every suspected participant in the opposition, and neither Catholics nor Protestants in Northern Ireland found a way to completely disentangle themselves from one another’s living space.

Similarly, insurgencies of terror have been responsible for enormous damage to life and property, but have usually fallen short of their intentions. Russian populists and European anarchists killed many rulers and their subordinates in their rampages against governments in the decades before the First World War, but could not achieve through assassinations their desired political goals. Rulers and systems of government, they learned, were endlessly replaceable. So too, the Ku Klux Klan never succeeded in its quest to literally strangle the efforts by former slaves to become fully empowered and equal citizens as promised to all citizens by the 15th amendment of the US constitution.

That said, there clearly have been historical moments when terrorism was nonetheless an important ingredient in the achievement of intended political goals. Outlaw parties advocating violence did come to power in Russia in 1917, Italy in 1921, and Germany in 1933. Violence was instrumental in the eventual victory over the French colonial regime by the FLN in Algeria in 1962.

This is not to say that forms of terrorism must be the sole alternative in seeking the amelioration of the social order. With regard to states, the South African apartheid regime fell without mass, insurrectionary violence. The Soviet Union came to an end through peaceful negotiations. Chile’s military terrorism under President Augusto Pinochet collapsed through a non-violent referendum. On the insurgent side, the Red Brigades in Italy and the Weather Underground in the US, both of which espoused violence, came to an end in the 1970s without government-legislated states of emergency that would have included an excessive reliance on police terror over protracted periods of time.

Terrorist periods are dominated by proclamations, denunciations and demands from insurgents, by decrees and legislation from

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parliaments and executive offices, and by a multitude of voices from the expansive media ranging from state controlled sources to those run by the illegal underground and their exiled comrades in the global diasporas. All will have positions to propound with regard to the problems of the day. The agents of violence in power and in the groups seeking it will state repeatedly that they are acting in the name of the people, and that they know how to solve the problems gnawing at the bodies and souls of their constituencies. More often than not, however, these problems of injustice, abuse, poverty and the desire for political liberty, which have existed from time immemorial, are neither the causes of the violence nor is the violence a solution to correct them. Blinded by grandiose intentions, terrorists frequently use these issues for their own purposes of enforcement, repression or revolution as well as to gain the support of the people to strengthen their own agenda.

The chapters that follow begin with a prelude that discusses the pre-modern religious origins of political violence in Europe, and continues in greater depth with an examination of the French Revolutionary era when the representative, constitutional nation state was established. Further chapters trace the history of terrorism in the Restoration years in Europe, and the political violence in nineteenth-century Russia in which revolutionaries and state security forces engaged in brutal combat that had far-reaching international influences. I also consider the role of terrorism in the US, particularly with regard to the violent expulsion of Native Americans from their tribal lands in flagrant violation of negotiated treaties, and the astonishing success of the Ku Klux Klan and its offshoots in their long campaign of victimizing African Americans over issues of political empowerment. Further chapters consider the conflict between governments and anarchists before the First World War, the violence imposed by Europeans on Africans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the authoritarian state terror in Germany during the Third Reich and in the Soviet Union under Stalin's rule, the "dirty wars" in Latin America, and the clashes of political cultures during the 1960s and 1970s, "from Berkeley to Berlin." The narrative closes with the end of the Cold War in 1991.

This book is not designed to provide a comprehensive history of terrorism in the Western world. There are many other instances of terrorism that deserve to be included. My approach and selection of events, however, are intended to illustrate the historical conditions for the emergence of the terrorist dynamic, and its evolving development

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over the last two centuries by focusing on specific crisis situations. Much of this material is not necessarily new, and all of it deserves far greater attention than given here, but if I have advanced the conversation about terrorism at all, it is because of the manner in which I have placed the forces of state and insurgent violence in historical and synchronic dialogue with each other. One of the reasons for this is that nations have buried, repressed or sanitized much of their violent pasts. It is my view that until every country can open its national closet and honestly confront the skeletons of its own history, which may reveal some of the most atrocious excesses committed by individuals or groups in the name of either patriotism or revolution, we shall continue to live with the ingredients of terrorism. These ingredients can, unfortunately, be stoked from quietly burning embers to violent conflagrations once the appropriate conditions emerge. If there is a message in this historical narrative, it is that we should not have to repeat it.

2 THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE PRE-MODERN ERA

In the minds of many, all things political begin either with God or Aristotle. In the case of political violence, both originators are relevant. The complex dynamic between the forces of authority on the one hand, and the society over which it presides on the other, has been at work since time immemorial. Violence has always been a necessary part of the contestation over the legitimacy of that authority, and aspirations to power have perpetually suffered from the temptation to seek consequences beyond the realistic possibilities at hand. Rulers, whether religious or secular, who seek to enforce authority and insurgents who contest that power have been drawn to violence across the centuries.

This chapter examines a huge swath of chronological time, from Biblical and classical Greco-Roman cultures through the medieval and early modern eras of European history. Although my survey through these periods is of necessity far too brief, the intention is to present the emergence of some of the characteristics of terrorism that would much later coalesce into a functioning and integral part of the contentious relationship between the governments of the modern nation state and their challenging antagonists. The violence of these earlier centuries was presented in both religious and secular frameworks; indeed, often the two were merged so as to be almost indistinguishable. These frameworks include two formats. One focuses on the intellectual products written by the prominent and influential theorists of violence, who felt it necessary to justify their critique, whether of a threatening minority in society or an abusive ruler in government. The