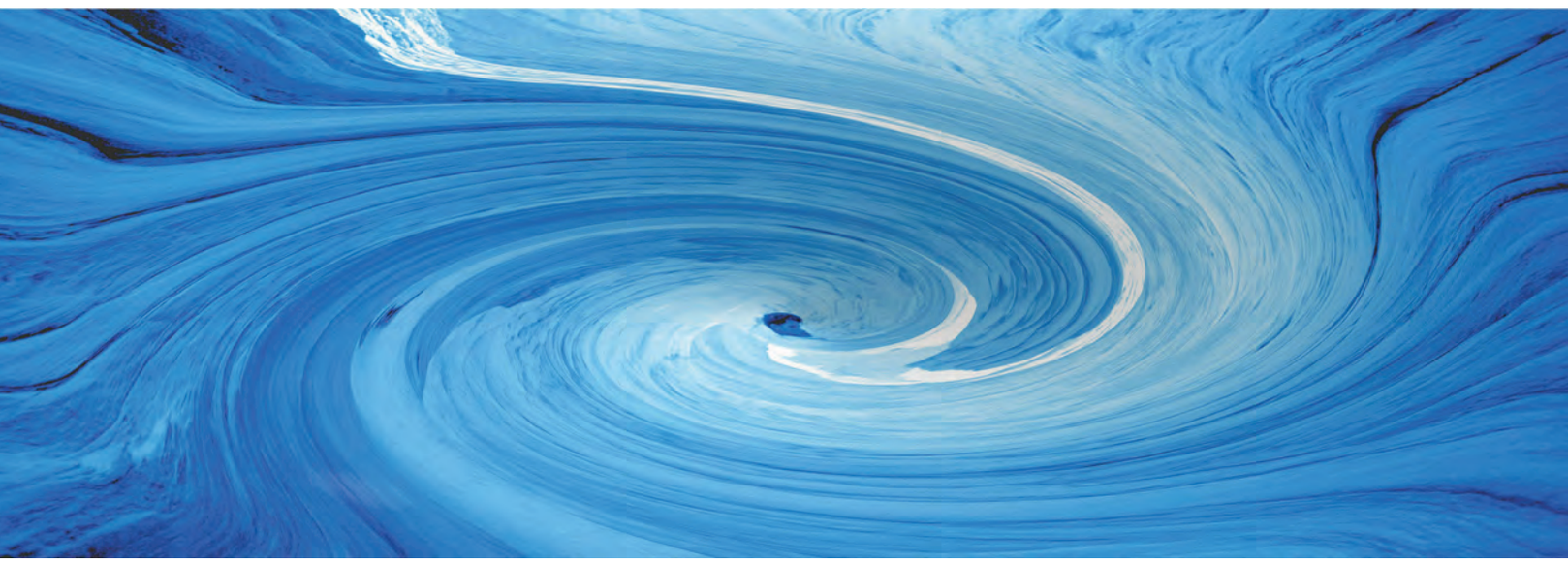

Terrorism: Undefinable and Out-of-Context?

Reconceptionalizing Terrorism as a Context-Specific Tactical Tool

Jochen Hippler

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism studies have developed since the 1970s. But the research field still suffers from several weaknesses: the inability to formulate a consensus on what exactly "terrorism" is; the vagueness and arbitrariness of the practical usage of the term "terrorism"; its politicization and the habit to use it as a moral label instead as an analytical tool; and the tendency to use the term outside of any political context. This study firstly reconsiders these conceptual weaknesses, and proposes how to deal with them. Secondly, it suggests to focus terrorism studies more on the political contexts, which produce domestic and international terrorism, by using the key example of terrorism resulting from a context of civil wars and insurgencies. The study argues that terrorism is not an ideology, not a type of warfare, rarely a strategy, but mostly a tactical instrument, which has to be analyzed in the respective political contexts.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die wissenschaftliche Forschung zu und die Diskussion über "Terrorismus" leiden immer noch an dem mangelnden Konsens darüber, wie der Begriff und damit das Forschungsfeld überhaupt definiert werden sollten, an der oft vagen und widersprüchlichen praktischen Begriffsverwendung, an der Politisierung des Begriffs und seiner Verwendung als politische Diskreditierungsfloskel und daran, den Terrorismusbegriff aus den politischen Kontexten zu lösen, die terroristische Praktiken hervorbringen. Der Report untersucht diese konzeptionellen Schwächen der Terrorismusforschung und formuliert im ersten Teil einige Vorschläge, wie mit ihnen umgegangen werden sollte. Eine wesentliche Erkenntnis ist, dass bei der Analyse von Terrorismus die politischen Kontexte in Mittelpunkt stehen sollten, die ihn hervorbringen. Dies wird am Beispiel von Bürgerkriegen und gewaltsamen Aufständen illustriert, die dafür von besonderer Bedeutung sind. Die Studie kommt zum Schluss, dass Terrorismus keine Ideologie ist, keine Kategorie der Kriegführung, nur selten eine Strategie, sondern in der Regel ein taktisches Instrument, das im jeweiligen politischen Kontext analysiert werden muss.

Content

1. Introduction

Terrorism research began in the early 1970s, as an academic reaction to terrorist campaigns in the US, Germany, Italy and Japan, and to terrorist activities resulting from the Palestinian conflict, among others. Initially, individual authors such as Paul Wilkinson (1986, 2011), Walter Laqueur (1999, 2004) and others introduced the study of terrorism, and over time it developed into a broad range of formal Terrorism Studies as an academic discipline (Crenshaw 2014). While this broadening and deepening of the study of terrorism has produced an impressive amount of research of an often equally impressive quality, many aspects of terrorism remain unclear, contradictory or vague. This applies to both the contextualization and conceptualization of terrorism, but it starts with the basic need to define the term terrorism and distinguish it from other forms of violence. Also, "Terrorism Studies" as an academic discipline is still less developed compared to others (Stampnitzky 2013).

Terrorism and the "war against terrorism" have dominated public policy debates on international relations and security policy at least since September 11, 2001. The discussion of terrorism has not focused exclusively on the struggle against al-Qaida and related groups as well as more recently against the "Islamic State" (abbreviated ISIS, ISIL, or IS), but also on the "war against terrorism". This discussion has included the military interventions and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, drone attacks in Pakistan and Yemen, a closer political cooperation with selected repressive dictatorships in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and beyond, as well as infringements on human rights in Western countries by their own governments (such as the "Patriot Act", or the electronic spying of the National Security Agency (NSA) and other agencies on their own citizens and against governments of friendly countries including the European Union, the United Nations and others). It is quite obvious that the term terrorism has been utilized far beyond its meaning to justify a diverse set of domestic and external policies which had nothing or very little to do with it. Many dictatorships did not resist the temptation to call anybody opposing their rule a "terrorist". At the same time, this political instrumentalization of the term does not imply that there would not have been a serious problem with terrorism or that it should have been tolerated. But the discourses on terrorism and the war against terrorism have taken on a life of their own, which has influenced not just public policy, but also the academic debate. Also, the current trend is to focus discussion of international terrorism on "black swan" attacks, which are rare and spectacular, but not typical of terrorism, as Gary LaFree, Laura Dugan and Erin Miller recently observed (LaFree/Dugan/Miller 2015: 226).

This report will return to the debate on international terrorism that had developed before and after September 11, 2001, but try to free it from political instrumentalization. It will try to determine whether, to what degree and how the term terrorism can be saved as an analytical tool for international relations and for security policy. This will require at least four steps: First, "international terrorism" will be distinguished from other forms of violence in order to reduce the vagueness of the term. Without at least a partial re-clarification of what we mean by the term, we cannot take any further analytical steps. Secondly, the

paper will try to reconstruct some key interpretations of different forms of terrorism, to allow for a critical review of our political and academic thinking after 9/11, and because they have been closely linked to the instrumentalization mentioned before. Thirdly, the paper will offer a few suggestions on how to re-conceptualize the term "international terrorism" to purge it of the political rhetoric and make it useful as a tool of international relations and security policy. And finally, it will attempt to make the term and concept more usable by firmly re-rooting it in the political contexts from which it develops. This will be done by linking the term "terrorism" to contexts such as civil war and insurgency.

The report will argue that terrorism is not an ideology, not a type of warfare, rarely a strategy, but mostly a tactical instrument which has to be analyzed in the respective political contexts. The most relevant of those are insurgencies and counterinsurgencies.

2. Terrorism – Clarifying the Concept

2.1 A Rough History of the Terrorism Discourse

Although most books on terrorism start by mentioning that this form of human behavior is very old and can be traced from antiquity (like: "Terrorism has been with us for several Millennia") (Mills 2003: XI), and that the *term* "terrorism" has existed since the 18th century, *terrorism research* is not much more than forty years old. It started in the early and middle 1970s, as Alex Schmid recently reminded us:

> "By 1970, but especially after the (pro-)Palestinian attacks on the Munich Olympic Games and Israel's Lod Airport in 1972, the terrorism discourse took off. Terrorism also became more frequent in the Northern Hemisphere [...], and modest government funding was provided for research on international/transnational/urban terrorism by sub-state actors in a few countries. More academics (e.g. Rapoport, Wilkinson, Crenshaw, Bell) and professionals with a military or intelligence background (e.g. Jenkins, Mickolus) began to specialize in terrorism. [...] (B)y the late 1970s Terrorism Studies as something like a distinct interdisciplinary field appeared to have taken shape, with its own conferences and journals" (Schmid 2013a: 458-459).

Though "terrorist" acts had been committed well before the 1970s, they had generally been perceived in a different and more restricted way, as criminality, murder, airplane hijackings, political extremism or similar. Until then there was no desire to bring all these and other highly diverse acts of political violence under a common heading and establish them as a common category. This has changed dramatically since 1972 and in subsequent years, although several authors still tended to avoid the term "terrorism" when discussing terrorist acts (Porta 2013).

The result of introducing the category of "terrorism" was not just that politicians and journalists began using this term regularly and alarmingly, but also that the academic community joined in. In 2013 Lisa Stampnitzky published a fascinating study reconstructing the academic terrorism discourse and the institutionalization of terrorism studies in universities, from their beginnings to today. With regard to academic publications she remarks:

> "Within the space of a few years terrorism was transformed from a problem with almost nothing written on it to a topic around which entire institutes, journals, and conferences were organized. One early bibliographic study of the field identifies 1973 as the year when the "systematic study of international terrorism began to develop", noting that virtually nothing was published on the subject prior to 1960, and only a handful of publications appeared before the middle of the 1970s, while 113 books appeared on the topic in 1976 and 161 in 1977" (Stampnitzky 2013: 30).

She has demonstrated convincingly that the new interest of the US Government, especially the State Department, since 1972 had a highly stimulating effect on academic interest in terrorism.

After the new discipline of terrorism studies prepared the ground for systematic research in the 1970s by trying to define its topic, by systematizing the research field, and by creating networks of terrorism scholars, the 1980s brought both a significant expansion of the field, and a major setback for the academic discourse. This again was the result of US Government's priorities. The Reagan Presidency brought the first "War against Terrorism", which created great interest – and funding – for terrorism research. But it also propagated a specific theory of terrorism: Key officials of the Reagan Administration, including the President himself, the Foreign Minister, but also think tanks close to the Administration, put forward the idea that the Soviet Union and its allies were behind international terrorism (Carr 2006: 223-236). The favorite think tank of the Reagan Administration, the Heritage Foundation, provided the ideological justifications for such an approach. In 1981 it published a booklet "The Soviet Strategy of Terror" (Francis 1981), which portrayed international terrorism basically as a Soviet tool of aggression.

The discourse of making the Soviet Union responsible for most of global terrorism had little merit in academic terms, and even its most fervent propagandists had very little to back it up: One such example is Ray S. Cline (terrorism expert at the *Center for Strategic and International Studies*), while being mercilessly grilled by Senator Clairborne Pell at a terrorism hearing of the US Senate in 1985 (US Senate 1985: 37-38). But still, during most of the 1980s the academic discourse on terrorism was heavily influenced by this form of political propaganda. The established "terrorism mafia" of prominent scholars (Stampnitzky 2013) voiced skepticism, but generally in an understated and subdued tone, so as not to endanger its link and access to the governmental security institutions, and possible funding opportunities. The politicization of the academic discourse on terrorism did not end with the Reagan presidency. Alan M. Dershowitz, for instance, after the 9/11 attacks, in the same book in which he suggested a legal mechanism to torture terrorism suspects, writes: "We must commit ourselves *never to try to understand or eliminate its* [terrorism's; JH] *alleged root causes*, but rather to place it beyond the pale of dialogue and negotiations" (Dershowitz 2002: 24, emphasis in the original). It is certainly surprising to have an academic emphatically demand that we *not even try* to understand the basic causes of an evil or crime, given that explaining social phenomena by analyzing and finally understanding their causes is at the very core of academic work. But then manipulative rhetoric makes it very clear Alan M. Dershowitz is not interested in academics here, but in politics: His alternative to understanding the causes of terrorism is not to negotiate or enter into dialogue with terrorists. This

obviously is a political not academic decision, and cannot be regarded as a plausible alternative to academic research.

Once the Reagan Administration had toned down its noisy rhetoric and was then succeeded by the Presidencies of Bush Senior and Clinton (and after it became clear that the demise of the Soviet Union would not lead to a demise or reduction of terrorism), it was obvious that a fresh conceptual start for terrorism research would be needed for the 1990s. This consisted of the idea of a newly emerged "New Terrorism", which could unite the hardliners from the Reagan period with the established, more academic terrorism experts and a group of newcomers trying to develop their own academic trademark.

The first books featuring "New Terrorism" in their titles had been published in 1983 and 1986 (Harris 1983; Gutteridge 1986). (We might remind ourselves that a "War on Terrorism" had already been declared in the 1980s by US President Ronald Reagan.) But the "New Terrorism" debate actually took off in the 1990s, with quite a few publications appearing at the end of this decade – just before 9/11 (Laqueur 1999; Lesser et al. 1999 or Juergensmeyer 2000).

The consensus of the authors proposing a New Terrorism paradigm can be condensed into these points: (a) a "bloodier" or more lethal terrorism than before; (b) different organizational structures, which moved from centralized to more networked ones; (c) an international, transnational or global character of terrorism; (d) use of the most recent technologies, mostly in regard to internet-based communication; (e) the potential use of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons; and, (f) the religious/Islamist character of the New Terrorism, often coupled with the assumption of its "irrational" quality (Jenkins 2005: 117-118; Laqueur 1999: 81-82, 95, 231; Morgan 2004: 34; McCauley 2007; Juergensmeyer 2003; Carter/Deutch/Zelikow 1998; Stern 1999: 1, 127; for an early criticism compare: Claridge 2000).

All these core arguments of a New Terrorism had been presented during the 1990s and gained currency after 9/11. The "increased lethality" of New Terrorism became much more plausible because of the attack on the Twin Towers. Briefly after the attack, Thomas Copeland remarked that "the language of the 'new' terrorism is evident everywhere in the aftermath of 11 September" (Copeland 2001). It should be noted here that the paradigm of a "New Terrorism" hardly ever referred to domestic terrorism, but was overwhelmingly applied to the international variant, and specifically developed to highlight a new threat to Western countries originating abroad.

Several of the key assumptions of the New Terrorism discourse were, and still are, of dubious value. Weapons of mass destruction have not been used in any "catastrophic" way by any international terrorist organization. At the same time, using chemical and biological substances as weapons is hardly new, as the "New Terrorism" discourse seems to assume. Gary LaFree, Laura Dugan and Erin Miller remind us: "Given that history and literature are full of examples of politically motivated attacks involving chemicals and poisons, it is fair to say that this 'innovation' has existed for millennia" (LaFree/Dugan/Miller 2015: 189).

Also, there is no evidence of any "greater lethality" of *international* terrorism, with the exception of the truly exceptional attack of 9/11, and relatively few other "black swan" attacks in Madrid, London, Beirut, Paris or Nice. Whether the

increase in terrorist attacks in 2015/2016 is an indication of a new trend remains to be seen.

However, while the most modern technology (especially IT technology) is obviously used routinely and expertly by terrorist organizations, the terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s also used the most modern technology available at that time. If today most teenagers are highly capable of using internet-based social networks, it would be very surprising if violent groups were not also using the same technology. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of victims of terrorist attacks are still a result of attacks using firearms and explosives, which were quite traditional weapons even fifty years ago.

The destruction of the Twin Towers had definitely introduced new elements into terrorism, such as the number of victims (nearly 3000 killed in one single attack) and the tools of violence (airplanes as weapons). On the other hand, the validity of many arguments for a new character of terrorism even after 9/11 remains dubious (see also Zimmermann 2003). Ariel Merari remarked: "Terrorism, however, has not changed much in the course of a century, and virtually not at all during the last 25 years" (Merari 2000: 54). While he might have overstated his point, he is probably closer to reality than many proponents of a "New Terrorism".

The New Terrorism paradigm, despite its wide and sometimes noisy presentation, was not universally accepted. Some authors have provided quite substantive and excellent criticisms of it. Among them was Doron Zimmermann, who with good reason summarized the discussion by judging that "the distinction between the older terrorism and the "New Terrorism" is artificial at best" (Zimmermann 2003: 7). Though many other authors could be mentioned as well, probably the best critique has been written by Martha Crenshaw, one of the first academic terrorism scholars and among the most nuanced. She ends her lengthy paper on New Terrorism as follows:

> "In sum, then, a close look at the objectives, methods, and organizational structures of what is said to be "new" and what is said to be "old" terrorism reveals numerous similarities rather than firm differences. It cannot really be said that there are two types of terrorism. The question should be reframed in broader terms, to ask why some groups cause large numbers of civilian casualties and others do not, rather than assuming that religious beliefs are the explanation for lethality" (Crenshaw 2007: 34).

The New Terrorism debate raised awareness of several aspects of terrorism, which might not have been new but were still important: The increasing use of latest technology (in this case, the internet); the increasing emphasis on network-type forms of organization; and a gradual shift from nationalist or left-wing to Islamist ideologies as the main justification for terrorist campaigns. At the same time, these changes were gradual not "new", and they were not overlooked by scholars who objected to the New Terrorism paradigm. Other elements of the discourse were questionable or highly dubious, including the speculative over-emphasis on nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons of mass destruction as means of terrorism, expected to occur before the end of the 20th century, or the supposed de-politicization of terrorism by religious (mainly Islamist) extremism.

The strength of the New Terrorism paradigm was not its analytical value, but its political effect. It included a strong alarmist and sensationalist streak which would be instrumentalized by the Bush Administration after the 9/11 attacks to

justify its "war against terrorism", including the Iraq war, which was justified as necessary to destroy Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation to terrorist groups, even though these weapons did not exist.

The first decade of the new century brought forward a lively discourse on the "War on Terrorism", proclaimed by President George W. Bush. Key aspects were the interrelated debates on the US "anti-terror wars" in both Afghanistan and Iraq, on Muslim jihadism, on "homeland security" (including infringements on human rights and civil liberties), and finally on "cyber terrorism". Obviously, these lines of discussion often were interconnected.

After 2010, with the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, the reduction of foreign troops in Afghanistan and the absence of major terrorist attacks on US territory comparable to 9/11, the terrorism discourse in the US and globally seemed to subside for some time, only to be suddenly and dramatically reinvigorated in 2014. The main reasons were the strengthening of jihadi militias in the Syrian civil war and the dramatic rise of the "Islamic State", especially after it had suddenly conquered large parts of Northwestern Iraq (Lister 2015; Cockburn 2015; Atwan 2015; Warrick 2015; Weiss/Hassan 2015). The escalation of the Syrian civil war, the rise of ISIS and also spectacular terrorist acts in several European cities (Madrid, London, Paris, Brussels, Nice) triggered an increased interest in Western, especially European jihadist activists and fighters (Byman/Shapiro 2014; Barrett 2014; Neumann 2015; Rabasa/Benard 2015; Soufan Group 2015; Mullins 2016). The extraordinary competence of ISIS with regard to internet-based media led to an intensified interest and research into jihadist use of social media for propaganda and recruitment (e.g. Stern/Berger 2015). The rise of ISIS, its foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq and their implications for Western security became a dominant feature of the terrorism discourse. The more general and basic questions of terrorism, both international and domestic, receded somewhat into the background in recent years (despite a few exceptions, like Wight 2015), leaving many conceptional questions and problems unresolved.

2.2 Terminology and a Preliminary Definition

The term "terrorism" is less than clearly defined, both politically and academically. It is emotionally charged and often used not as an analytical category, but as a label to discredit political enemies. Former US President Ronald Reagan put this succinctly when he famously exclaimed that "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" (United State Information Agency 1986: 18). Even the UN Secretary General in official documents of the United Nations used strong emotional terms when discussing terrorism, for instance: "Terrorism is an attack against humankind and a heinous tactic adopted by cowards" which is psychologically understandable but not exactly analytical, and at least partly wrong as there is no evidence that terrorists are necessarily cowards. Other examples of terminological confusion have little to do with emotion, but still demonstrate the lack of clarity. Michael Morell for instance, former Deputy Director of the CIA and very much involved in counterterrorism, mentions in his book that the terms "*extremist* and *terrorist* are synonyms to terrorism analysts" (Morell 2015: 218, 242, emphasis in the original). Inasmuch as this may be true, such an unclear use of language would indicate less an

analytical but either a political or at least an imprecise use of the term "terrorist". This will be examined in greater detail in Sections 2.4.1. and 2.4.2.

Joel Beinin displays a certain amount of skepticism in using the term "terrorism" when he asks: "Can the term terrorism be rescued from its imbrication in (…) a web of propaganda? Is it worth doing so?" He is "not absolutely opposed to using the term", but in his view "it does not seem very useful in furthering understanding of the events" in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Beinin 2003: 12-23). Abir Taha characterizes the current status of the term's definition as "chaos, confusion and controversy" (Taha 2014: 8). She stresses the existence of several UN resolutions condemning terrorism, none of which managed to define the meaning of it. This has also been mentioned by the United Nations *High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* which deplored "the inability of Member States to agree on an anti-terrorism convention including a definition of terrorism" (UN General Assembly 2004: 48).

Even the *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* is not seriously trying to define the term and uses only a few lines in its 500 pages to deal with the definition: "There are as many definitions for the word terrorism as there are methods of executing it; the term means different things to different people, and trying to define or classify terrorism to everybody's satisfaction proves impossible" (Kushner 2003: XXIII). This is followed by a one-sentence, quite general summary of previous definitions. The opposite extreme is the *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, which spends 60 pages on discussing the definitions of terrorism, and then takes a further 60 pages to add more than 250 additional definitions (Schmid 2013b: 38-157). This discussion is highly sophisticated while the resulting definition at the end is less than satisfactory (Schmid 2013b: 86). Peter R. Neumann summarizes the situation succinctly: "(T)here is no agreed definition in international law, nor is there a consensus among scholars" (Neumann 2009: 6).

Accordingly, in the academic discourse there are very many and diverse definitions, which can broadly be grouped into six overlapping categories: (1) nearly all definitions emphasize *violence* (or the threat of violence) as a key element; (2) most definitions include the aspect that such violence has to be *committed against non-combatants or civilians;* (3) an overwhelming majority emphasizes a *political purpose* of the violent acts. These three elements generally constitute a mainstream in regard to most attempts to define terrorism. In addition there are defining criteria which (4) include an *emotional aspect* (like frightening a target audience or "terrorizing" it emotionally); (5) refer to the *means* of violence (e.g. bomb attacks and suicide bombings as terrorist, air bombardment as non-terrorist); and (6) provide definitions which implicate the *actors* of violence (e.g. non-state actors as terrorist, state agencies or military organizations as non-terrorist). A somewhat different summary is provided by Harvey W. Kushner (2003: XXIII). Obviously, given the huge number of definitions of terrorism using a diverse set of criteria, these six criteria are not a comprehensive list, but still cover the vast majority.

This is not the place to go into the details of definitions, but a few remarks are in order: Firstly, the last two of these categories generally seem to be based in politics and not academia since they tend to reinforce the use of the term "terrorism" as a political label: Strong actors, especially states and their intelligence agencies and armed forces, would by definition not commit terrorist

acts in these cases, even if their violent activities are directed against civilians for political reasons. Secondly, to make "fear" part of the definition is not convincing. If fear were the sole or key *aim* of the perpetrators it would make the terrorist act non-political, thereby eliminating one of the key components of most definitions. If creating fear, on the other hand, is utilized as a means to achieve political goals (and it often is), there is no need to include it in the definition, because the political dimension generally is a part of the definition anyway. Also, the creation of fear to achieve political goals is not specific to terrorism. It was, for example, no coincidence that the US war against Iraq in 2003 was based on a strategy which US military planners called "shock and awe". Actually, creating fear to paralyze an enemy or its population has been a time-honored tactic in war since at least the Roman Empire. Clausewitz has emphasized that the final goal in war is to render the enemy helpless. And obviously, being paralyzed by fear is a form of helplessness. Scott Gerwehr and Kirk Hubbard portray terrorism as a violent way of delivering a message, and as a form of "social influence", utilizing "extranormal violence [...] to influence a target population's emotions, motives, objective reasoning, perceptions, and ultimately, behavior". They point out that "any form of violence may be pressed into the service of social influence so long as the goal is to manipulate an audience's perceptions, cognitions, and actions. Terrorism fits this description" (Gerwehr/Hubbard 2007: 87). This is exactly the point. Terrorism often aims at manipulating and instrumentalizing fear for political gain, but so do many other kinds of violence and even non-violent (e.g. discursive) policies. This renders the fear-inducing aspect of terrorism useless for defining terrorism, since it is not a distinguishing factor. Colin Wight also reminds us that "(a)ll violence inevitably induces terror [, which obviously is an extreme form of fear; JH] but the production of terror is not always terrorism" (Wight 2015: 10).

Finally, we should be aware that some authors tend to use the term terrorism consistently or occasionally for all or most forms of political violence by non-state groups, such as Assaf Moghadam or in some cases even Robert A. Pape (Moghadam 2006: 36-37; Pape 2006: 9). This is not a useful approach, since in this case the important distinctions between terrorist and other forms of political violence are obscured.

Generally, definitions of terrorism are quite broad and all-encompassing, such as the official definition of the US Department of Defense: "The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological" (US Army TRADOC 2005: 3). In this case, the only specific criterion for "terrorism" is its "unlawful" character, because the rest of this definition can apply to very many, including quite legitimate forms or threats of violence. All military forces obviously have been established to use or threaten the use of violence for political purposes. Such a definition would make the military interventions against Serbia in regard to Kosovo and against Saddam Hussein's Iraq cases of terrorism, since they were undertaken against international law[1] to achieve political goals. Such definitional

[1] International law permits the use of inter-state violence only in two cases: In self-defense, or when mandated by the UN Security Council to re-establish international peace, according to the UN Charter.

problems are quite common. In this paper the preliminary definition of terrorism is largely borrowed from the US State Department: "The term terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience" (US Department of State 2004: XII).

The State Department provides a useful definition of the term here since it is not overburdening the definition but keeps it simple. However, it still has two weaknesses: Firstly, it again excludes state perpetrators from the definition, if they are not "clandestine agents", which obviously is a self-serving use of language; secondly, it emphasizes the intention "to influence an audience" – which is definitely correct in most cases but is not required as part of a definition, since this intention is already a necessary element of the *political* aspect of terrorism. "Political" intentions always aim at "influencing an audience", since this is their main objective.

In the first parts of this paper, we will simply use the term terrorism as *any form of politically intended violence against non-combatants or civilians*. In the final part we will suggest a narrower definitional approach, taking into account the analysis of the paper, and attempt to increase the precision with which this tentative definition is used.

For this paper it is important to distinguish between domestic and international terrorism. While domestic terrorism takes place in one society or country, and the actors and victims both originate there, *international* terrorism is characterized by cross-border operations in which violent organizations from one or more countries operate abroad. "Global" (or transnational) terrorism should also be highlighted as this implies that both the perpetrating organizations and the area of their activities are of multi-national character.

2.3 State Terrorism?

A highly controversial question in both political and academic debates is whether state activities under specific conditions should be defined as terrorism or whether the term should be reserved for private actors or groups. Some writers insist on including state actors into the definition of terrorism if their activities fulfill the general criteria of terrorism. This set of authors can be divided into two groups. The first is more politically driven, insofar as it aims at placing (at least some) "terrorist groups" and states or governments on the same political or moral plane. This can lead to intellectual shortcuts, such as those taken by Lebanese academic and diplomat Abir Taha when she proclaims "occupation as a form of state terrorism [because] they constitute aggressive acts firmly condemned by international law as well as threats to international peace and security" (Taha 2014: 43). It should not be necessary to remind ourselves that not everything which is wrong, illegal and against peace is necessarily a terrorist act.

Sometimes the argument of state terrorism is even used to exculpate terrorist practices of a non-state actor by referring to the terrorist activities of a state or government. The "true terrorists" would then be the respective government/state, while the violent non-state group would be seen as mostly defensive. Obviously, this can be considered as one of the many ways to instrumentalize the term terrorism for political reasons as many governments do

as well. But there are also quite serious academic reasons for not excluding state institutions by definition from the possibility of committing terrorist acts. These discussions generally began with reference to violent practices of the Soviet Union (see for instance Weber 2007: 11-41), Nazi Germany (Johnson 2000) and other "totalitarian" regimes, and were later broadened to include certain violent acts by right-wing authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, for instance in Latin America in the 1970s-1990s.[2]

Their general assumption is that any actor whose activities will fit the definitions of terrorism (whatever it may be, depending on the author), should be termed terrorist, no matter how big or small, or who it might be. At the same time, state actors, with their almost unlimited resources, power, and degree of organization, have proven much more lethal towards their own citizens than violent and terrorist non-state groups (Jackson et al. 2011: 175). To exclude them from the study of terrorism, when they indulge in such practices would therefore ignore the greater part of the problem. State and regime terrorism (i.e., political violence against non-combatants/civilians by state agencies) can adopt different forms and qualities: (1) individual terrorist acts, such as the 1985 bombing and sinking of the Greenpeace ship "Rainbow Warrior" in New Zealand by the French Foreign Intelligence Agency DGSE in their *Opération Satanique*, killing a Portuguese photographer; (2) sporadic or systematic campaigns of assassinations, abductions or torture of journalists, members of the political opposition or similar targets, abroad or at home, by state institutions or state agents – such as the assassination of former Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier by the Chilean Intelligence Agency DINA in Washington in 1976; (3) use or support of non-state militias, violent groups, criminal gangs, death-squads, retired military or police officers by state agencies for extra-juridical political violence abroad or at home – like the use of "Carlos" group of terrorists by several Middle Eastern governments in the 1970s and 1980s, or the use of the "Contras" against Nicaragua by the US in the 1980s; (4) systematic mass killings, massacres, or even sociocide or genocide against specific ethnic, religious or political groups of non-combatants, if politically intended e.g. in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Rwanda, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia; (5) military or paramilitary violence against individuals or groups of civilians in a context of war or civil war, if intentionally and politically motivated (such as intimidating a hostile population by major acts of violence); and (6) systematic and direct use of violence against sectors of a population to intimidate a society for the purpose of assuring political control (Lutz/Lutz 2013: 230-256).

Obviously, some of these categories can overlap. The key criteria to distinguish them are

(a) The actors committing the violence (regular state institutions, such as police, the military, intelligence agencies, or specifically designed sub-units of those; or non-state groups acting on behalf of a government);

(b) The degree of permanent and systematic *versus* occasional acts of violence;

[2] Authors include Dallin/Breslauer (1970); Byman (2005), and others. A useful overview and discussion is provided by Bradley McAllister and Alex P. Schmid (2013: 203-211).

(c) The question of whether the violence is intended to achieve a specific political goal or is a key element of rule; and

(d) The scale of violence, ranging from individual cases of torture or assassination to genocide.

Bradley McAllister and Alex P. Schmid, who do not object to this field of research, have pointed out the academic and non-academic problems of researching state terrorism and emphasized some of the obvious difficulties:

> "State or regime terrorism [...] is decidedly the less well researched of the two major categories of terrorism [that is, compared to "insurgent terrorism"; JH]. […] In part, this is due to the fact that as politicized a process as defining insurgent terrorism is, defining what qualifies as state terrorism is even more difficult. [...] Many young scholars new to the field [of terrorism research; JH] tended to be attracted by a high-profile topic with ample media coverage and the availability of government research funds. Research into regime terrorism has proven much harder to fund than anti-state violence. Local scholars living in oppressive societies or under highly repressive regimes are, for obvious reasons, less likely to pursue studies of internal regime terror" (McAllister/Schmid 2013: 203).

Some analysts object to use of the term "terrorism" when describing government or state activities. A concise and typical expression of this position has been articulated by Paul R. Pillar, a former US Army and CIA officer: "An attack by a Government's duly uniformed or otherwise identifiable armed forces is not terrorism; it is war" (Pillar 2003: 14). On the other hand, in 2008, the US Congress declared "Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization" (US Congress 2008: Section 1258) (see also Wright 2007). Iran retaliated by labeling the CIA and the US Army "terrorist organizations" as well (CNN 2007). Ian Williams called both "fundamentally onanistic – satisfying but meaningless" (Williams 2007) which in academic terms was definitely correct.

The main argument of some scholars for the exclusion of state activities from their definition of terrorism is the different characteristics of state and private violence. State violence is seen as a separate category to violence by non-state actors. While it is true that these differences are relevant and important, they do not require an exclusion of state activities from the term terrorism. Obviously state terrorism is different from the terrorism of private groups, but we should not forget that nationalist terrorism is different from religious terrorism and that assassinations are very different from suicide bombings, abductions, or from potential nuclear terrorism. If some forms of state (or state-sponsored) violence fit the definition of terrorism (political violence against non-combatants or civilians) there is no reason to avoid the term terrorism. This does not dilute or weaken an otherwise neat and clean concept, but only adds another subcategory to an already complex one. Jackson et al. have discussed the various objections to the concept of state-based terrorism in detail and there is no need to repeat this here at length. It is sufficient to mention one example they provide in comparing two bombings of commercial airliners: "In effect, maintaining this position [that state activities should not be conceptualized as terrorism; JH] entails arguing that the 1988 Lockerbie bombing was not an act of terrorism because it was undertaken by state agents [of Libya; JH], while the bombing of an Air India flight in 1985 was an act of terrorism because it was undertaken by Sikh militants" (Jackson et al. 2011: 178).

To exclude such practices of political violence from the concept of terrorism would be to base its definition on a double standard.

2.4 Beyond Definitions – Problems with the Practical Usage of the Term "Terrorism"

The difficulty in defining the term "terrorism" is not the only problem when using it analytically. There is also the problem that no matter how carefully authors try to define "terrorism", the term is often used either colloquially or imprecisely, even by academics. A third problem, which has already been mentioned, but which is of less relevance for this paper, is the political instrumentalization or even manipulative use of the term, which will often influence the academic discourse as well. For the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to complement previous discussions of the definitional problems of terrorism with some examples highlighting the problems resulting from its less than precise use.

2.4.1 Inflating the Term

The term terrorism is often used in quite broad ways. It might refer to *a way of war* (or armed conflict in general), or a *strategy*. Obviously this is very different from using the term for specific acts of behavior. Thirdly, there are many cases in which "terrorism" is used to describe a *violent mentality*, a *way of life* or even an *ideology*, which brings in a cultural dimension. Fourthly, and sometimes in conjunction with this, "terrorism" is occasionally juxtaposed to categories such as "democracy", "liberalism" or "freedom", and is thus interpreted as an alternative political organization of societies. We will briefly discuss these points below. Finally, the term terrorism is being used as a *systematical, analytical concept*, as suggested by the "ism" in terrorism. There are many other different ways of using the term, for instance as a *tool for labeling* potentially undesirable categories of violence. Differentiating between such aspects can often fulfill useful analytical functions, *but using the same term for all of them* makes clarity and analysis much more difficult and invites misunderstanding and confusion. This would even be the case if the term "terrorism" could be clearly defined, but since all attempts to do so over the last five decades have failed, it creates much deeper problems.

A case in point is the use of the term "terrorism" to characterize a mentality, political culture or ideology. In recent years the term terrorism has been closely connected or even used synonymously for terms such as extremism, Salafism, or jihadism, to name a few examples. Some authors broaden the term terrorism to include a specific mentality, or ideological or very lofty cultural concepts, turning terrorism, for instance, into a "way of life", which is compared to that in the West. On a political level, then-President George W. Bush has provided many examples. When talking about al-Qaida, he proclaimed "a great divide in our time [...] between civilization and barbarism". He continued: "*Terrorism is a movement, an ideology* that respects no boundary of nationality or decency. [...] The terrorists are the heirs to fascism" (Bush 2003, 85-86; emphasis JH). While Salafism and jihadism definitely are ideologies, and while it might be fruitful to discuss their similarities to and differences from fascism seriously, making

terrorism into an ideology or into fascism might be tempting rhetorically, but has no analytical significance and it contradicts practically all of the many serious definitions of terrorism. Michael Morell, for instance, equated terrorism and extremism (Morell 2015: 218, 242). There is very little argument to support this synonymy, and it should be obvious that every "terrorist" would be an extremist, but not every extremist a terrorist. It becomes very difficult to analyze the relationship between extremism and terrorism if both terms are seen as identical. A part of culturalizing terrorism is to moralize it – to perceive it less as a political problem but primarily a "moral" one. Fathali M. Moghaddam is a case in point when he writes: "Ultimately, terrorism is a moral problem with psychological underpinnings; the challenge is to prevent disaffected youth and others from becoming engaged in the morality of terrorist organizations" (Moghaddam 2007: 77).

Terrorism – Basic Problems in Terminology

- difficulties in defining the term, lack of a common definition
- usage of the term outside any definition, ignoring own definitions, general imprecision usage
- applying the term "terrorism" and "terrorist" to actors, acts, ideologies, strategies, tactics, and other phenomena at the same time
- selective framing and linking of the term to other concepts, e.g. irrationality, religion, weapons of mass destruction
- reification of the term, using it disconnected from its diverse political contexts
- emotional charge of the term, alarmism
- labeling and political instrumentalization, manipulative use of the term

Richards has recently pointed out that public discourse on terrorism in recent years has more often mixed ideology with activity: "[...] it appears that 'terrorism', 'radicalization' and 'extremism' have increasingly become merged into a single discursive framework; one consequence of this process has been to blur the important distinction between 'extremism' of thought and 'extremism' of method [ ]. [...] Terrorism has often been classified according to the ideology or belief-system of its perpetrators—hence nationalist/separatist terrorism, left-wing terrorism, right-wing terrorism, religious terrorism, single-issue terrorism and so on. [...] It has certainly not, however, been the case that all of these ideologies themselves have some intrinsic doctrinal connection to terrorism (even if they were sometimes called 'terrorist ideologies' or the 'ideologies of terrorism')—for terrorism has been used in the cause of a wide range of ideologies, many of which are not inherently violent or 'terroristic'" (Richards 2015: 371, 375).

When using the term terrorism, instead of culturalizing it, we should not forget that it is "a type of activity not a particular ideology or political organization" (Weinberg/Pedahzur 2003: 15). If we therefore restrict the use of the term terrorism to a specific *type of activity* (political violence against non-combatants) and avoid confusing it with categories of actors, mentalities or ideologies, the definitional problem may not be solved, but we will at least rescue the term for analytical use. In this case the connected ideologies/mentalities, actors/organizations, strategies and links to other kinds of political violence (such as war, civil war and insurgencies) will not be included in the term terrorism but

their inter-connections are valid and important research questions. Overburdening the term will confuse it and open the door to its political instrumentalization and manipulation.

2.4.2 Circular Definitions – The Relationship of the Terms Terrorism, Terrorists, and Terrorist Acts

We have referred to the notorious ambiguity in the definition and use of the term "terrorism" several times before. "Terrorism" is part of a terminological family which also includes "terrorists" (and other actors, like "terrorist groups", movements or organizations), and "terrorist acts" (or "terrorist attacks" or "terrorist crimes"). While on the surface these terms seem to complement each other neatly without raising any terminological difficulties, the reality is more complex. Actually, the relationship between these terms lacks clarity and can seriously impede terrorism analysis. One of the traps is circular thinking.

Surprisingly often, authors use the terms "terrorism", "terrorist(s)" (group, actor, etc.) and "terrorist acts" in very arbitrary ways. Typical is an implicit or explicit view that "terrorism is what terrorists do", or "a person (or group) which commits terrorist acts is a terrorist". This seems clear and neat but its superficial plausibility tends to hide a deeper conceptual ambiguity. It is also often tautological. The US Joint Chiefs of Staff, for instance, define a terrorist actor like this: "The term 'terrorist' refers to those who conduct terrorist acts" (US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 2006: 3). So, when convenient, terrorism is defined by the actor ("terrorists"), while when is suits an argument better, the terrorist actors are defined by committing terrorist acts – a circular reasoning which in the end defines nothing, but provides ammunition for labeling according to institutional or personal preferences.

Circular Definitions:

- "Terrorism is what terrorists do."
- "Terrorists are people who practice terrorism."

While it is unsatisfactory that the key terms "terrorism" and "terrorists" (or "terrorist group/organization/movement") are often not defined directly but only by implication and therefore remain vague (they are *somehow* connected to terrorist acts – but *how exactly*?), a second problem complicates terminology even further: The term "terrorist" (or terrorist group, organization) can take on a life of its own, in the sense that terror*ism* is defined based on this actor category. Alex Schmid raised a valid criticism: "(O)nce a group has been designated 'terrorist', all acts of violence by members of that group are 'terrorist'", and calls this intellectual mechanism "faulty circular reasoning" (Schmid 2013b: 64). Ian Williams caricatured this way of thinking, in regard to a statement by a former top US diplomat, as follows: "Terrorists are people who practice terrorism. Terrorism is what terrorists do. And I decide who they are" (Williams 2007). The discussion of terrorism is full of such tautologies and circular thinking.

When terrorism is understood as a form of violence which is committed by a specific category of perpetrators, "the terrorists", this perspective produces concepts such as "terrorist organizations" in contrast to other forms of

organizations, e.g. military, paramilitary or violent political organizations. (e.g.: "Terrorist groups differ from ordinary political organizations, [...] in their belief that violence is the main method or strategy to see that their political goals are met" (Moghadam 2006: 36-37; see also Pape 2006: 36). This might often be true, but it also can be of dubious analytical value and actually misleading when it implies a neat separation between terrorist and non-terrorist organizations thus ignoring the important gray areas in between. In this paper, we will argue that the terms terrorism, terrorists, and terrorist acts, while obviously related, should be used cautiously and without assuming or implying a conceptual identity without first proving it.

It should be noted that terrorist acts can be (and often are) committed by actors which should not necessarily be categorized as "terrorist" including political parties, social movements, religiously or ethnically based organizations, military forces and intelligence agencies. On the other hand, terrorist actors (in the sense of actors committing terrorist acts), as mentioned before, often undertake a broad range of activities which are clearly not "terrorist", but which have an economic, political, propagandist or social welfare dimension. This is one of the reasons that "terrorism" will never be a neat concept and that using it too sweepingly will contribute to the confusion in terminology and produce a confused analysis. Clearly distinguishing between acts, actors, and the general category (and motivations, ideologies, goals, instruments, etc.) is a precondition for any analytical use of the terms connected to "terrorism".

In the best cases, definitions of terrorism allow us to determine whether a specific act of violence is of terrorist character, but they hardly ever allow judgment about which actors are "terrorists" and what distinguishes a terrorist *act* from terrorism in general. However, these distinctions are of key importance: Is anybody who has *once* committed a terrorist act automatically a terrorist, and forever? This would make many actors "terrorists", including Western governments (compare the well documented bomb attack by the French Foreign Intelligence Agency against the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior in 1985, which killed one person). It would broaden the term terrorism to a degree that makes it analytically useless. On the other hand: Is a group or organization only "terrorist" when it *exclusively commits terrorist acts*, and does nothing (or hardly anything) else? This would mean that hardly anybody would qualify for being a terrorist, and again, the term would lose its usefulness. Or are there thresholds separating actors who rarely or occasionally commit terrorist acts from others who are "terrorists"? In this case, would an actor cross the threshold of terrorism when he spends 50 per cent of his time, activities or resources on terrorism, or would it be sufficient or necessary to cross the threshold to terrorism if, for example, 20 or 70 per cent of the activities are terrorist acts?

Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur are quite aware of these definitional problems, which result from the fact that a clean separation between terrorist and non-terrorist (often called "political") actors is rarely possible. They argue:

> "For our purposes, it is important to stress that terrorism is not an ideology but an activity. Presumably, then, it is an activity that a variety of political groups and organizations may engage in full-time or sporadically. We believe it makes sense to think of any human *group that relies on terrorist violence as its primary means of political expression* as a terrorist group or terrorist organization. On some occasions terrorist activity may be sustained over long periods of time and then suspended or displaced by other forms of political activity. On

> others, terrorist violence may be used by a group or organization for a brief period and then abandoned, only to be employed at some later time as the presumed need for its use arises again. Furthermore, terrorism, [...] may not be the exclusive arrow in a political group's quiver. In some instances, the group may employ terrorism in conjunction with other forms of political activity. The latter may range from making non-violent propaganda to more intense types of violence, as in a civil war" (Weinberg/Pedahzur 2003: 3, emphasis by JH).

This indeed is one of the main problems in defining terrorism: That groups which we consider non-terrorist (or political) can commit terrorist acts, while on the other hand groups which most observers consider terrorist might spend most of their time, energy and resources on non-terrorist activities and that their behavior in regard to using terrorist violence might fluctuate over time.

We propose to follow Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur and apply the term "terrorist group" (or "terrorist movement/organization", etc.) only to such organizations which rely on terrorist violence "as its primary means of political expression" or as its key strategy (as opposed to a tactical tool). While this does not solve the problem of how to measure when apolitical means is the "primary" one, it still helps to avoid too sweeping use of terminology.

2.4.3 Terrorism – Stand-alone Concept or Part of Something Bigger?

One factor makes analysis even more complicated. Often, when violent acts are committed which fit the definitions of "terrorism", subsuming them under this term is not always helpful and can even be confusing. For instance, there can be little doubt that the systematic killing of approximately one million of Armenians, the massacre in Srebrenica, the show trials in the Stalinist or Nazi courts, the Holocaust, or the bombings in Dresden and Hiroshima at the end of the Second World War were all uses of violence for political purposes against non-combatants and civilians, which fulfills the definitional requirements to call them "terrorist". But this would not clarify anything, but instead lead to confusion in regard to such acts and debase the term terrorism. Any genocide, for instance, is by definition a violent act against civilians (or at least overwhelmingly aimed at them) and will most likely be committed for political purposes; but what would be the advantage of subsuming it under the category of "terrorism", instead of calling a genocide a genocide? Other cases of violence raise similar questions. Pete Lentini remarks that "applying the term terrorism to such acts may be somewhat redundant" (Lentini 2013: 10).

If we can use comparatively clearer concepts and terms such as "massacre", "ethnic cleansing", "genocide", why should we use a term which is notoriously hard to define such as "terrorism" which puts the acts in question in the same category as assassinations, bombings or kidnappings? While such acts generally are clearly of a "terrorist" character, if we accept the most common definitions of the term, they are not necessarily the result of "terrorism" in the sense of a systematic category of behavior. "Terrorist acts" ***may*** be the result of terrorism as such, committed by "terrorists" (as defined by committing terrorist acts as their core activity); but ***they may also be the result of other contexts***, such as insurgency, counterinsurgency, war, civil war, social engineering or sustaining dictatorship, as we will discuss below. Violent acts which fulfill the requirements of the definition of terrorism can be committed outside the context of "terrorism":

they would then be "terrorist acts" but should not primarily be seen in the context of terrorism. Dictators, politicians, or generals who order or commit genocide or nuclear mass murder for political reasons should primarily be defined as being genocidal or mass murderers. The terrorist aspects of their acts (which are quite real) are only parts of something much bigger and more relevant than "terrorism" such as war or genocide. In these contexts they should be understood as a tactical tool, not as the defining characteristic or strategy of struggle.

This raises the question of whether the terrorist acts of "terrorists" (persons whose core activities are to commit such acts, instead of committing them in a different context and who mostly act as administrators, politicians, military officer or insurgents) should not be treated in a similar way. Would it be advisable to call bomb attacks, assassinations, airplane kidnappings and similar things not just what they are: politically motivated bomb attacks, assassinations, airplane kidnappings? Is it necessary or useful to call them "terrorist" as well? It could be argued that this would not necessarily be wrong, but that it would not produce any analytical advantage. It is interesting that until the early 1970s acts of political violence were generally called by their specific characteristics (e.g. airplane hijacking, bomb attack), while the term terrorism was hardly ever used in this context (Stampnitzky 2013: 1-3). Often it is not clear what the descriptive or analytical advantage has been to now call a politically motivated assassination or airplane hijacking an "act of terrorism". They are still assassinations and hijackings but are now linked to a broad concept, which is good for labeling, but lacks clarity. As long as the main consensus in regard to "terrorism" is that there cannot be a consensus on its definition, the term should be used with caution. It can often be avoided by using more clear and precise terms – and whenever possible, it should. Use of the word "terrorism" can only offer an advantage in cases where other terms are insufficient to communicate the specific character of an act of political violence, for example when perpetrated by actors who commit such acts not opportunistically or sporadically but out of strategic choice and as their core activity.

3. Contextualizing Political Violence and Terrorist Practices

3.1 General Political Contexts

Given the broadness and diversity of the academic literature on terrorism it is surprising that there has been relatively little published systematic analysis of the political or socio-economic contexts of terrorist violence in a strict sense. Terrorism is very frequently linked to the civil wars and insurgencies in Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq, but is rarely analyzed seriously in the context of wars and insurgencies. A typical example is Malcolm W. Nance's book "The Terrorists of Iraq" which features the subtitle "Inside the Strategy and Tactics of the Iraq Insurgency, 2003-2014" (Nance 2015). It is difficult to link terrorism and insurgency more strongly in a book title. But while the book provides a detailed account of the diverse violent actors in Iraq and their respective tactics, organization and weapons, nowhere does it discuss the relevance of terrorist

violence for insurgency or the relationship between them. Instead of analyzing the link between terrorism and insurgency, both terms are frequently used synonymously (for instance: Nance 2015: xxvi).

This is no exception as Natasha Underhill's book "Countering Global Terrorism and Insurgency – Calculating the Risk of State Failure in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq" shows: while discussing insurgency at the beginning (without actually systematically linking it to terrorism), the author suddenly drops the topic and focuses exclusively on the connection between terrorism and state failure (Underhill 2014).

Similarly, Peter Calvert's book "Terrorism, Civil War, and Revolution" (2010) discusses terrorism more in passing and does not systematically analyze it in the context of either civil war or revolution. And Virginia Comolli's research on the Nigerian *Boko Haram*, which often is portrayed as a quintessential terrorist organization, treats Boko Haram as an insurgent movement, which is reflected in the title of her book (Comolli 2015). While the term terrorism is mentioned occasionally, it does not even merit an entry in the book's index.

A similar gap in the research can be observed in the links between terrorism and political non-violent activities of actors using terrorist violence. The exceptions are Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur (2003) and recently Benedetta Berti (2013) who deal with the relationships of terrorist groups and political parties, and with armed political organizations, respectively. In these cases the authors make a close link between terrorist violence and the political intentions of social movements and political parties. Since terrorism is generally defined as political violence against non-combatants for political purposes, this approach should be quite common. But it is not. Terrorism research and publications focus very much on the violent acts and often the ideology while ignoring the political framework.

To analyze terrorism it is advisable not to start with these aspects, important and spectacular as they often are, but with the political context. Since one of the few agreed key criteria of terrorism is its political character, the political context should be the main starting point when endeavoring to understand it.

It can be roughly structured into three distinct categories, each of which produces different dynamics:

(1) Governments or state-institutions which use violence to intimidate as a tool of governance or to repress a potential or real opposition;

(2) Relatively small groups or organizations from less than a dozen to several hundred (or occasionally more) members, which are more or less politically and/or socially isolated from their societies;

(3) Groups or organizations ranging in the hundreds or thousands, which are either themselves insurgent movements, non-state-militias or connected to them. Generally they are expressions of major dissatisfaction with political and/or socioeconomic conditions or are connected to members of the socio-political elite confronting such movements. In both cases, these groups are expressions of societal contradictions, and have roots and a social base in the relevant sectors of their societies. They might or might not be connected

to transnational movements, either ideologically or organizationally, or both.

In all these cases the respective groups or organizations have decided to use violence for political purposes but have not necessarily crossed the border to its terrorist forms, meaning systematically victimizing civilians and non-combatants. They key question for terrorism research is, why and when do they cross this threshold? The answer to this question again depends on several factors and will differ according to the three types of political context.

3.1.1 Violence and Terrorism by Governments and State Institutions

The first type is political violence and terrorism committed by state institutions.

René Värk distinguishes four kinds of "state involvement" in terrorism:

(1) "State direction – a state actively controls or directs terrorists and uses terrorism as an alternative to conventional military methods in order to avoid responsibility and disregard the law of armed conflict";

(2) "State support – a state does not control the terrorists, but it encourages their activities and provides active support such as money, equipment, training and transport";

(3) "State toleration – a state does not actively support or direct terrorists, but it makes no effort either to arrest or suppress them"; and

(4) "State inaction – a state is simply unable to deal effectively with terrorists due to political factors or inherent weakness" (Värk 2011: 82-83)

In some of these cases, states or governments are not acting directly and themselves, but use non-state actors as instruments. While such cases are important, it should also be noted that in other instances a state or government might very well act through state institutions and directly.

> "National governments can become involved in terrorism or utilize terror to accomplish the objectives of governments or individual rulers. Most often, terrorism is equated with non-state actors or groups that are not responsible to a sovereign government. However, internal security forces can use terror to aid in repressing dissent, and intelligence or military organizations can perform acts of terror designed to further a state's policy or diplomatic efforts abroad."
>
> (US Army TRADOC 2007: Section IV: State Sponsored Terror)

Violence by state agents – legitimate and illegitimate, legal and illegal – happens in all societies, including democratic ones. Police and military forces are armed, which by itself implies the readiness and an implicit threat to use violence. Illegitimate or outright illegal use of violence might not generally be ordered or even tolerated by the higher authorities, though cover-ups for institutional reasons are not uncommon. But the problem of violence by the state takes on a very different quality if governance is not based on the consent of its citizens but the state has acquired a significant degree of independence from society. In this

case a government can in principle base its rule on coercion, at least temporarily. Even if it does, it will try to complement force and intimidation by gaining a measure of legitimacy. In most cases, it will use specific ideological discourses, sometimes purely political, sometimes nationalist, ethnic, religious or otherwise. However, as Max Weber has shown, legitimacy can also be produced by procedure, charisma or tradition, and generally it is the result of a combination of several of those factors. Even under coercive rule, backed up by the threat and use of violence, force is not the only means of rule but is complemented by "cultural" hegemony which allows its use to be minimized. For the cultural (e.g. ideological, traditional) pillars of rule to continue to function, at least to some degree, they should be complemented by "output legitimacy". In other words, the behavior of the rulers should not systematically contradict its own ideological commandments over longer periods and the population (or at least power-related sectors) should receive some benefits which could be material, social infrastructure, security, stability or hope for a better future. For the purpose of this paper, it is important that the governments in question utilize a mixture of force (implicit and explicit violence), ideology and incentives for at least parts of the population. Generally, outright violence of a government, regime or state will be used more and more intensively in the formative phase of a new system of rule or a new ruling elite (e.g. the French Revolution). For this reason, Rosemary H. T. O'Kane focused on terrorism by revolutionary regimes (O'Kane 1991). It will also be used more excessively when a ruling elite decides to change dramatically the character of rule (e.g. in 1930s Stalinism, in the Chinese "Cultural Revolution") or when the existing power structure is perceived to be under serious internal or external threat. Obviously, in many cases there will be overlap, as in the final phase of Ottoman rule, when attempts to transfer it into a homogeneous Turkish Nation State coincided with internal and external threats during the First World War, a combination which triggered the Armenian genocide.

As Figure 1 shows, state violence can take many different forms, from the employment of autonomous non-state groups by a government, the organization of "self-defense groups", death squads or militias armed and led by the military or other state institutions, by the police, military or the intelligence agencies directly. In other cases, the judicial system can be the means of violence, e.g. in show trials organized by dictatorships, when the purpose is not justice but public humiliation, intimidation and judicial murder, generally all preceded by torture.

The purposes of such diverse forms of political state violence are usually the assassination of key opposition figures, the establishment of a new system of rule (sometimes connected to "social engineering", such as the liquidation of specific social classes or ethnic groups), countering an expected or ongoing insurgency, or the intimidation of large parts of society to stabilize the rule of a political elite. William D. Perdue emphasized the use of state terrorism to organize "domination through fear", a term elevated to the sub-title of his book on state terrorism (Perdue 1989: esp. chapter 2).

3.1.2 Violence and Terrorism by Small and Isolated Groups

While many organizations using political violence start out as small groups, some of them evolve into broad movements, while others remain weak and of limited size and relevance. Generally the difference depends on several connected factors: Whether the grievances of the respective group are shared by relevant sectors of the population and whether the group succeeds in being accepted as a legitimate expression of these grievances. Both questions are closely linked to the character of the socio-political framework, especially of the state or system of governance. Colin Wight has recently devoted a book to this topic (Wight 2015).

If a political group using terrorist or non-terrorist violent means remains small, it generally implies that the political system is perceived as not bad enough to justify violence, usually because other means of political change exist, or that the political system is even seen as legitimate by major sectors of the population. In such cases the prospect of a violent group significantly broadening its support in society will remain limited because the potential benefits of joining or supporting it are small, while the costs of backing such a group can be considerable. The respective group then might just wither away, reintegrate into the mainstream of politics, be repressed, or radicalize further.

The decision to (also) select non-combatants as targets of violence might be taken at an earlier stage if ideologically the group does not differentiate between combatants and civilians, or if attacking civilians creates political advantages (media attention, less risk than attacking soldiers, etc.). However, if the group is radicalizing after failing to acquire broader support in society, there is a likelihood that the emphasis on terrorist violence will increase. Such groups will generally never be a serious threat to the existing power structure because of their limited size and strength and because of a lack of support, but they can still develop into a political nuisance if the government is not able to repress it. The only chance of long-term success for these groups arises if the government and security apparatus overreact to the challenge and initiate a campaign of heavy-handed repression beyond the specific group. In this situation, parts of the population might turn against the government and consider the group as the lesser of two evils, and later even as a positive force of change. But if the government avoids this mistake and remains the better political option (or, again, the lesser evil), these groups will eventually lose all impetus. The important point here is that these small groups are the quintessential "terrorist organization" as far as they exist: Due to their political isolation, their weakness and lack of social base and limited size and resources, terrorist attacks often are their main activity. The *Red Army Faction* (RAF) in Germany, *Action Directe* (France), the *Weathermen* (or *Weather Underground Organization*, WUO) in the US or the *Japanese Red Army* of the 1970s and 1980s are classical examples. Other countries and regions have experienced similar phenomena.

3.1.3 Violence and Terrorism by Insurgent Movements and Non-State Militias

The political context changes drastically if non-state groups using violence acquire support from relevant sectors of the population. This can apply to insurgent movements, such as mass movements, which develop an armed wing in an attempt to overthrow a government or political system, and to guerrilla forces which are connected to a broader political movement but more militarized and partly or fully independent of this movement organizationally. A third type would be militias controlled by warlords or similar political actors, including drug cartels and comparable organizations, or armed groups organized or controlled by local power brokers or by tribal or ethnic groups. These groups generally or to some degree are of a political character as well but often operate inside a (weak) political framework which they are not necessarily opposed to. They might be satisfied with a greater degree of autonomy, material benefits, symbolic or cultural concessions, or they might even benefit from the existing political framework. In all these cases, the monopoly of legitimate violence by the state in the Weberian sense would be seriously eroded or even broken. Again, the question of these groups using terrorism presupposes two assumptions, which are not always a given: (a) the decision to use violence as a political tool; and (b) the targeting of this violence against non-combatants or civilians.

Whether and which kinds of violence are used depends on a broad range of factors. Firstly, the degree and kind of government repression is important, as is the degree of possible non-violent means of expressing dissent and working for change. Secondly, the distribution of means of violence between the government and non-governmental forces will influence decisions concerning whether to use violence and by which means. Thirdly, what are the actual aims of using violence? Are they just to gain attention for the perpetrating group or their causes? Should it be restricted to assassinations of key political functionaries (such as murdering a dictator, or symbolic killings of officials responsible for grave repression)? Is its aim to acquire resources for the future political or armed struggle or to intimidate the political antagonists or major parts of the population? Should it weaken the political or material capacity of the antagonists? These and other goals will play an important role in choosing the kind of violence deemed appropriate. Fourthly, what will be the effect of violence and its specific forms on the group's own supporters, on the media, on the general population, and on the different groups of antagonists? Here, the material effects (e.g. destroying electrical or medical infrastructure vs. killing the dictator or attacking a military base) and political-psychological effects both matter. Fifthly, the potential risk in violent operations for the perpetrators, their group and their social support base will also be considered. Cost-benefit considerations in general play important roles. Sixthly, with all this in mind, the (potential) targets of violence matter: Should it be directed against key politicians, against symbolic locations or infrastructure, against military or police personnel or installations, against economic targets or important businessmen, against members of an ethnic, confessional or similar group? All these considerations will decide which means and types of violence will be employed in regard to operational (e.g. handgun, IED, smart missiles) and tactical questions (e.g. ambush/hit-and-run, suicide attack, military operation, kidnapping, torture)

as well as to strategic factors (e.g. conventional war, guerrilla war, symbolic attacks against property or infrastructure, targeting the economy, terrorism). Also, ideological preferences of the group or organization considering or using violence will influence decisions: Ethno-nationalist, religious or left-wing actors might select different targets and pursue different goals which might translate into different choices in regard to the use of violence. However, the proponents of different ideologies or world-views manage to integrate the practical considerations regarding the use of violence into their respective ideologies to a surprising degree. Generally, what promises comparative advantages will be tried and, if useful, integrated into the respective ideology and systematized.

Figure 1: Factors Determining the Character of Political Violence

Source: Author's own graphics

One of the most important aspects of such violent conflicts (especially of insurgent character) is that they are very rarely decided by military force or violence in general. In contrast to conventional war, which generally is being decided by factors such as firepower, the mobility and the size of the armed forces, and military superiority in context of failing states, insurgencies and non-conventional civil war is hardly ever decisive. On the one hand, an insurgent movement or guerrilla army rarely has the chance to win an outright military victory due to its relative military inferiority compared to the government and its armed forces. On the other hand, military success will not necessarily come

easily to the armed forces either: Since the insurgents are supported by at least significant sectors of the population and mostly operate in their midst, the military forces of the government cannot utilize their military superiority without inflicting significant casualties on the civilian population which would antagonize it further and politically strengthen the insurgents (Smith 2006: 272). In this sense the military superiority of the government and its armed forces is not necessarily an advantage but a potential Achilles' heel. In a violent conflict it is tempting to rely on military superiority but to do so poses the risk of undermining inherent legitimacy and public support. Despite the fact that violent conflicts in societies are obviously *violent*, the conflicts are basically struggles over legitimacy and violence is just one tool amongst many and not the most important one. The governments and the insurgent movements or guerrillas, though fighting each other by force (and politically), are fundamentally trying to win the loyalty of the population, to win its "hearts and minds". Both sides are competing to be accepted as more legitimate. To be precise: The goal is to broaden the protagonist's own base of support, to gain sympathy in the neutral sectors of the population, and to intimidate or politically paralyze the supporters of the opponents. In this struggle it is not necessary to be wholeheartedly supported by all or the majority of the population, but it is sufficient to be accepted as the lesser evil by the majority while maintaining strong support from the group's own social base (Hippler 2011).

In this context the application of violence fulfills (does not fulfill) its political function. If it is aimed at personal, material or symbolic targets, it might gradually weaken the antagonist (e.g. by killing important regime functionaries or leaders of the opposition, or by destroying crucial infrastructure or military targets). It can also have political impact by demonstrating the political relevance of the party committing the violence, or by psychologically encouraging the group's own supporters. The message is that the members of the targeted group cannot be safe. Other acts of violence, especially by insurgent groups, might be aimed at competing groups or dissenters in the same organization. It is not uncommon for militant groups to use both political and violent means to try to achieve a leadership position or even a political monopoly within their own constituency (such as an ethnic or confessional group, or the opposition in general). Assassinations, bomb attacks and paramilitary operations may be important tactical means.

In other cases, a militant group (or a state security organization) might attack either parts of the general public or members of the social base or sympathizers of the antagonists, such as politically connected businesspeople, family members of policemen or soldiers, or a competing ethnic or confessional group. Again, the main purpose is to frighten and politically paralyze the support base of the antagonists and to increase the cost of resistance to the perpetrators. However, attacks on the general public can be risky: While, if committed by insurgents, they demonstrate both the determination of the responsible group and that the government is incapable of protecting the public and will look weak or helpless, they may create a backlash, at least in the medium term. In the competition for the "hearts and minds" and the loyalty of the population, systematic and repeated attacks on the general public (in potential contrast to attacks on a hostile ethnic, confessional or political community) will turn the population against the

perpetrators, at least in those sectors which are not fully committed to the militant group (Heger 2015).

Stefan Malthaner rightfully emphasizes that jihadist groups are not operating in a social vacuum. He stresses "the fact that militant groups refer to certain parts of a population — or in other words, that the militants set themselves in relation to certain social groups with whom they identify and for whom they claim to fight. This orientation determines the way in which militant groups engage with these populations and thus shapes emerging support relationships" (Malthaner 2011: 39).

Neglecting their own social base, becoming isolated from it and alienating it by systematic violence were responsible for what happened to *Al Qaeda* in Iraq in 2006-2008, when most Sunni Arabs stopped supporting it and started hunting down its members (Hippler 2012: 64-65). This same mistake is also at least as important for the gradual weakening of ISIS in Syria and Iraq as the bomb attacks by foreign powers.

Strategically, the use of violence by relevant non-state actors, if not committed for specific tactical goals, often has two interconnected functions: It can contribute to transforming a complex socio-political landscape with numerous overlapping centers of influence, power, identities and loyalties into a polarized one. Major or systematic violence forces the members of a society to take sides, to choose between "us" and "them". This also implies that violence can re-define identities, i.e. the definition of who "we" and "they" are and what constitutes the differences. Re-defining identities also often re-defines loyalties: Who is regarded as a potential threat and who as potential source of protection, considerations which are of no relevance in a non-violent social context. So, while organized political violence can lead to a polarization of societies or at least to a re-configuration of identities and loyalties, it can also lead to homogenization of social groups and sectors of the population, such as ethnic or confessional groups. This will be the result of an actual or perceived threat of a group by another which leads to a defensive "closing of the ranks". Homogenization of social groups will also be the effect of a conscious policy of non-state violent actors of a specific social/ethnic/confessional group that use intra-group and external violence to enforce its leadership role in its own community over competing organizations. Also, systematic violence generally leads to a militarization of societies and of political organizations, and to clandestine modes of politics, all of which tend to reduce democratic modes of politics, strengthen authoritarianism and reduce pluralism. This is one of the key reasons that, in the past, even progressive liberation movements often produced one-party rule or dictatorships after victories. At the same time, a militarization of politics and its transformation into authoritarian leadership structures can indirectly make it easier to cross the threshold from political violence to its terrorist form. A person who is used to ordering acts of violence will probably have less hesitation in re-directing this violence towards "soft targets" (civilians) than a member of a labor union or women's organization would have to kill civilians.

The table below summarizes and sub-categorizes the three main political contexts, as discussed in this chapter, from the smallest and least organized levels up to the largest and most systematic. It also provides the types of potential actors and examples of relevant cases.

Table 1: Political Contexts and Potential Actors of Political Violence and/or Terrorist Acts

	Potential Actors	Examples
Small and politically Isolated groups	"Lone wolves"	Unabomber, Oklahoma City bomber
	Peer groups or family-based groups	Boston marathon bombers, Sauerland Group
	"Political sects"	Red Army Faction, Weathermen Underground
Insurgent groups and non-state militias	Armed insurgencies / guerrilla organizations	Liberation movements of the 1960s to 1980s, ISIS since 2003/2004, Nusra Front, Kurdish insurgent groups in Iraq or Turkey, LTTE in Sri Lanka, US war of Independence
	Warlords	Mohammad Atta and other Afghan warlords, Mohammad Aideed and others in Somalia
	Politically relevant criminal organizations, such as some drug cartels	Columbian and Mexican drug cartels
	Tribal or ethnic armed groups	Baloch insurgent groups in Pakistan, Southern Sudan, Hutu/Tutsi in Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, Sunni and Shia militias in Iraq
	Armed groups controlled by members of the political/socio-economic elite	Private armies/militias of major landowners, former warlords who joined the government
Governments or state Institutions	Non-state violent groups operating for a government or state organization for financial profit or for political or ideological reasons	"Contras" in Nicaragua, "Carlos" or Abu Nidal in the 1970s and 1980s, mujahedin in the 1980s in Afghanistan
	Death squads, operating under control of or for government organizations but who are formally outside the government or state	Several Latin American countries during the military dictatorships (Chile, Argentina, Brazil)
	"Self-defense" or similar militias organized and/or armed by the government, either for control of the population, for repressive purposes, or directed against insurgent movements	In Vietnam during the Vietnam War, Guatemala and El Salvador during the insurgencies and civil wars
	Police	All countries during insurgencies and civil wars; most dictatorships either when considered useful, or systematically
	Military	
	Intelligence agencies	
	Legal system, courts	Show trials in Stalinism, fascism, other dictatorships
	State institutions involved in a (military) coup against an established government	Franco's coup in Spain, military coups in Greece or Latin America

Source: Author's own table

3.2 Terrorism and Insurgency

3.2.1 The General Relationship of Terrorism to Insurgency

The resort to violence in general and the adoption of its terrorist forms are to be distinguished in legal, political and analytical terms. If in cases of war, civil war, insurgency or foreign occupation a party to the conflict attacks armed forces of the opposing side, this might be right or wrong, useful or self-defeating and it does constitute a form of violence, but according to all definitions provided above it is not terrorism. In many cases this would not even be illegal, as during the struggle of Afghan groups against Soviet occupation or of French or Soviet resistance against German Nazi occupation, to mention only a few of the less controversial historical cases. (Obviously, when occupation forces are affected by such counter-violence, they tend to call *all* kinds of violence "terrorist" for political reasons.)

If we avoid overburdening the term terrorism by applying it to all cases of political violence against civilians, we still can utilize it analytically. But for this purpose we have to make a distinction between different categories of its use, which can and have to be removed from the political contexts discussed above. To remind ourselves, the main categories are (1) terrorism as a key strategy, which generally applies only to relatively small groups which are socially and politically isolated and are trying to increase their political relevance by committing terrorist acts; (2) state and state-related terrorism, which can range from selective and individual cases by pro-regime militias or warlords to violently terrorizing whole societies; and (3) terrorism as an element of insurgency.

The first of these three categories constitutes terrorism in its purest form, since it is only involved with other policies and practices to a minor degree. This category might be frightening to many citizens but produces comparatively very few victims. Its relevance generally is mostly psychological, but it hardly ever constitutes a serious political threat or alternative to an established power structure. On the other hand, terrorism by the state, by state agents or perpetrators controlled or utilized by state organizations have probably resulted in by far the most victims of terrorism during the last century (Rummel 2003). It also, directly and indirectly, has the biggest effect, compared to the other categories. However, since this paper does not provide a systematic analysis of the state as perpetrator of terrorism, the most relevant category connected to terrorism for us is that which results from contexts of insurgency against national governments, dictatorships and foreign occupation.

Gunaratna/Schnabel link insurgencies and terrorism in this way: "Insurgent movemets are armed opposition groups and their support bases. Insurgents engage in guerrilla warfare attacks against security forces and terrorist attacks against civilians" (Gunaratna/Schnabel 2015: 3). While they do not directly equate insurgency with terrorism, they still perceive terrorism as one of the two main activities of insurgent movements. They also suppose that "terrorist networks" have emerged and spread "from regional conflict zones where such insurgencies flourish" (Gunaratna/Schnabel 2015: 10).

To avoid misunderstandings it has to be noted that insurgencies as such are not identical or necessarily related to terrorism, as states also do not necessarily act in terrorist ways. Insurgencies as such are not terrorist and do not necessarily use terrorism but they *can* produce an environment which makes terrorist acts a rational option of struggle. William R. Polk suggests that insurgents in an early stage of their struggle "are too few to fight as guerrillas so they fight as terrorists. […] Such small groups could not engage in guerrilla warfare. For them, acts of terrorism were the only possible acts. So terrorism is often the first stage of insurgency" (Polk 2008: XIX). This implies that the use of terrorism would necessarily cease at later stages of an insurgency, which may or may not be the case. Many historical examples would contradict this assumption, such as ISIS or the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). But the strength of William R. Polk's suggestion is that he does not disconnect terrorist activities from other forms of violence and places them into a political context. He also understands terrorism as instrumental.

If, in an insurgency, some of the violence is not targeting soldiers, armed groups or combatants but civilians of the opposing side (e.g. restaurants, buses, mosques, markets, private homes, shops) it would cross the threshold separating violent resistance from terrorism. This differentiation is important morally, politically and legally. Even in the context of a legitimate violent resistance (such as self-defense or struggle against illegal military occupation), attacking civilians remains illegitimate and illegal, as in instances of the Afghan "mujahedin" attacking orphanages, killing prisoners of war, or bombing markets while fighting the Soviet Union.

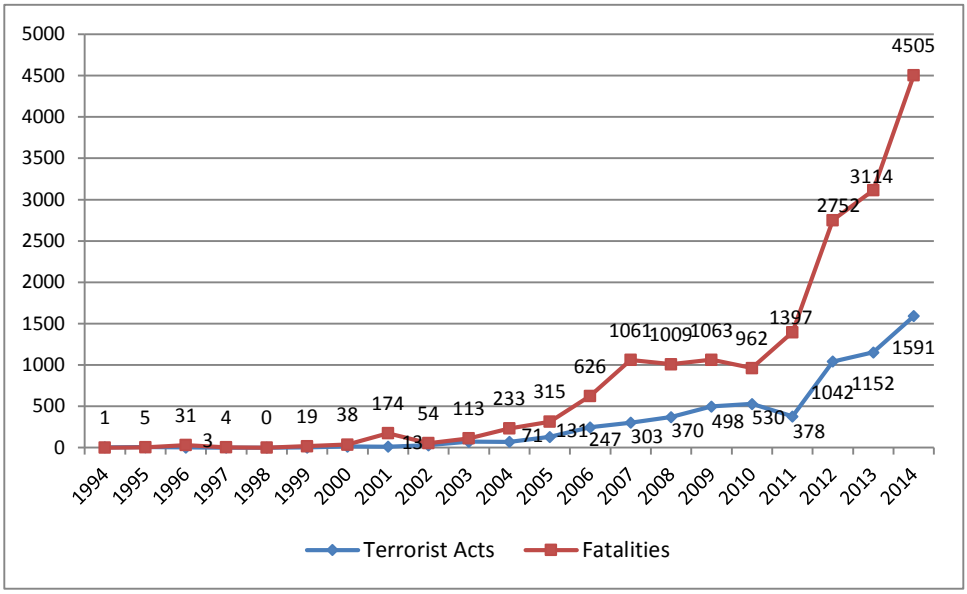
Several of the authors of Rohan Gunaratna and Albrecht Schnabel's (2015) edited volume display a nuanced understanding of terrorism in insurgencies, such as Dennis A. Pluchinsky. They distinguish insurgent groups, which can apply "political terrorism as a tactical instrument", from "terrorist group(s)", who "use it strategically" (Pluchinsky 2015: 33). It is regrettable, though, that even these authors do not provide a systematic or in-depth analysis of the use and logic of terrorism in the context of insurgencies.

Analysis of instances of civil war, insurgency or violent resistance against foreign military occupation shows a general use of both civil and violent forms of resistance and of the combination of quite different forms of violent struggle. Often the militant groups will use both peaceful means and the full spectrum of violent methods: guerrilla tactics, paramilitary operations, symbolic forms of violence, limited military attacks, and terrorism, to name only the most obvious. The preference and mix of these forms of violence generally is determined pragmatically, according to the group's means, the political context, effectiveness, and the character of the enemy, as we have seen above. Each of these tactics has its specific uses and advantages for the groups utilizing them, along with specific disadvantages. This is the reason why they almost always use a specific mix of tactics, instead of only one. Therefore it is not very useful to categorize terrorism as a kind of warfare (for instance O'Neill 1990: 24; Lynn 2008: 320) or even strategy: It generally is a violent *tactic* within a war-like or insurgency context, it is just one instrument of many.

The link between terrorism and insurgency or civil wars, though often neglected in research literature, becomes more obvious when looking at some data on terrorist acts. The "Global Terrorism Database" (GTD) provides detailed

figures on terrorist acts worldwide, on a country-by-country basis (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) 2015).[3] The quantitative development of terrorist acts will be examined here using the key examples of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. The following charts provide the number of terrorist attacks and subsequent fatalities for the three countries based on GTD figures.

Figure 2: Terrorist Acts and Fatalities in Afghanistan, 1994-2014



Source: Author's own chart based on GTD (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) 2015)

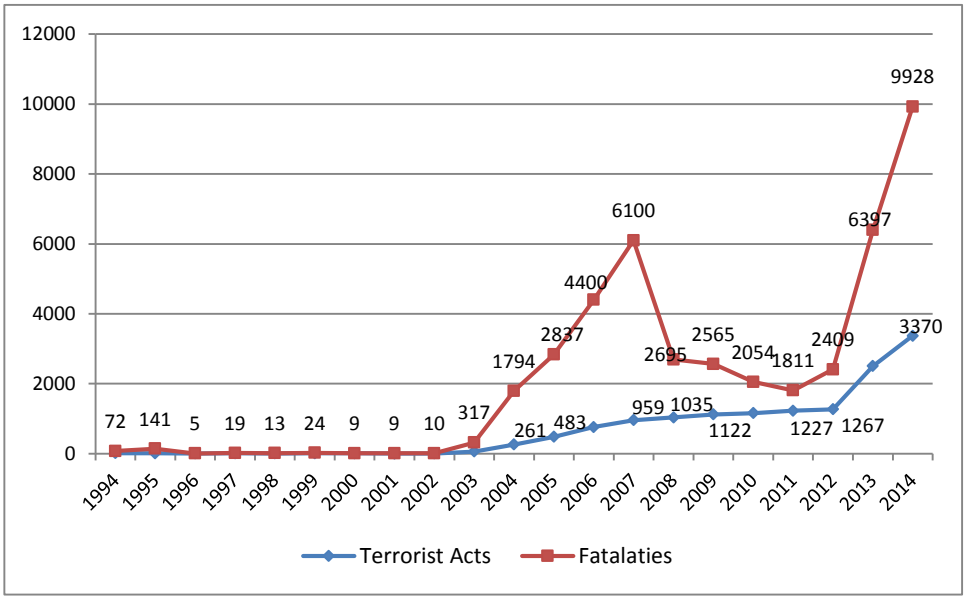
[3] The Global Terrorism Database, GTD, is the most inclusive, largest and most long-term database on terrorism in the public domain, accessible via www.start.umd.edu/gtd/. It is compiled by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. The data in this section are based on the author's own computations utilizing the full dataset, which is provided online as a highly differentiated Excel file which is updated yearly. The 2015 version includes 141,966 "terrorist" attacks worldwide, from 1970 to 2014. But there are indications that a relatively high number of these attacks are actually not of terrorist character, but also include other forms of violence, at least to some degree. However, it allows stricter criteria to be applied for the selection of cases. For instance, one criteria is that a violent act "must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal", which would be an important indicator of terrorism. Another useful indicator is that "the action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities", so that collateral damage in situations of warfare are excluded. Then, GTD acknowledges that in some cases it is difficult to distinguish between terrorism and other forms of violence, such as "insurgency, hate crime, and organized crime", or that there might not be enough information to decide on a terrorist character. GTD offers an indicator to exclude doubtful or unclear cases of violence, which may or may not be terrorist. If we exclude these indicators (i.e. cases which are not based on political, social, religious, and economic goals; cases which result from the context of legitimate warfare contexts; and cases where the terrorist character is not clear), the total number of terrorist attacks for the years 1970-2014 is reduced to 106,629. The figures presented in this section only use data from this sub-set, so exclude all doubtful or cases of non-terrorist violence, as far as the GTB indicators and coding enable them to be identified. Of the total number of terrorist attacks, 18,797 can be classified as international terrorism which would imply cross-border terrorism or terrorism in which the victims and perpetrators belong to different nationalities.

From 1994 until the US intervention to overthrow the Afghan Taliban in 2001, the number of terrorist attacks remained very low, generally in single figures. Numbers of corresponding fatalities remained correspondingly low, between 0 and 38 per year. Terrorism in these years was not, therefore, completely absent but still very low. This gradually changed after the overthrow of the Taliban at the end of 2001, and especially with the resulting insurgency and low-level civil war which intensified after 2005. From 2002 through 2014, the number of terrorist fatalities rose from 54 to a staggering 4505 per year. The chart's figures do not include war-related incidents and deaths but only strictly defined cases of terrorism according to the GTD indicators, as explained in footnote 3.

It is quite obvious that the rising numbers of terrorist attacks and fatalities in Afghanistan since 2001 correspond to the evolving insurgency and civil war.

A very similar situation arose in Iraq after the US invasion and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 triggered an escalating insurgency which in parts of the country evolved to a civil war. During the five years prior to the US invasion, the number of terrorist attacks in Iraq remained in the single-figure range, similar to Afghanistan. From 2002 (the last full year before the invasion) to 2014 the number of deaths caused by terrorist acts rose from a mere 10 to 9928. It is also significant that the dramatically rising figures from 2002 to 2007 decreased up to 2011 (from 6100 to 1811), and then surged again in just three years to nearly 10,000. Again, the development of these terrorism-related figures corresponds closely to the developing insurgency and civil war, both in their upward and temporary downward movements.

Figure 3: Terrorist Acts and Fatalities in Iraq, 1994-2014

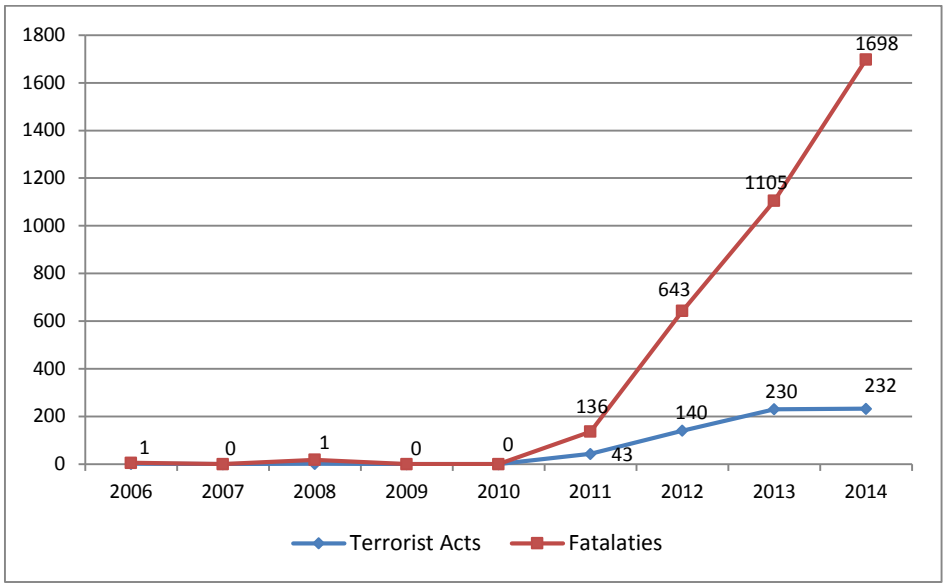


Source: Author's own chart based on GTD (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) 2015)

Our third example is Syria. During the five years before the start of the insurgency and the civil war in 2011, only two terrorist attacks had occurred in

Syria. From this level of near-zero terrorism until 2010 (not forgetting that Syria had experienced serious waves of violence during the early 1980s) the number of terrorist attacks rose to 232 in 2014, killing nearly 1700 people in this year, excluding victims of war, disease and other causes. Again, it is plainly obvious that the level of terrorism closely corresponds to the development of the insurgency.

Figure 4: Terrorist Acts and Fatalities in Syria, 2006-2014



Source: Author's own chart based on GTD (National Consortium for the Study of *Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) 2015)*

From these examples we can draw three interrelated conclusions: firstly, there is a close correlation between terrorism on the one hand, and insurgency and civil war on the other. Secondly, the *scale* of terrorist violence closely corresponds to the development of the respective insurgencies and/or civil wars. And thirdly, both facts imply that at least in the above cases, terrorism cannot be analyzed or understood independently of insurgency and potentially resulting civil wars, since they are intimately linked. Terrorism has developed because and as an element of the respective insurgencies and civil wars.

It is interesting that the surge in terrorist acts in Europe in 2015 and 2016 was closely related to insurgencies/civil wars (and European involvement) in Syria and Iraq and particularly to the rise of ISIS, while a similar regional overspill did not occur in regard to the Afghan war and only to a much lesser degree in regard to the Iraqi insurgency/civil war before the rise of ISIS. This demonstrates the role political choices and decisions of violent actors can play in exporting terrorist campaigns. Also the availability of potential perpetrators in target countries plays a key role.

3.2.2 The Logic and Use of Terrorism in Insurgencies

If a violent conflict occurs between two sides of very uneven military capabilities, an obvious practical difficulty arises for the weaker side. If militarily weak resistance groups openly attack well-guarded and strongly defended military installations, this will generally not be successful and even lead to heavy casualties. Therefore, open and conventional military attacks on an overwhelmingly strong enemy are generally useless or self-defeating. Militarily inferior or weak movements tend to turn to "guerrilla" warfare, which is based on hit-and-run tactics und quick dispersal after surprise attacks (O'Neill 1990: 25). If the resistance or paramilitary force is even too weak for this (or the context is not conducive to such tactics), some armed groups respond by also attacking civilian targets, i.e. employing terrorist means. The rationale for this is quite pragmatic: Civilians generally are unprotected (Shaw 2003: 142), the risk involved in an attack therefore is much lower, and the number of civilian targets is much too big for even a strong military and police force to provide security for all of them. Also, if a military force tries to protect a large number of potential civilian targets at the same time, this would spread it thin and offer additional opportunities to attack soldiers guarding "soft targets". (For example, it is much easier to attack a few soldiers guarding a train station than a fortified military installation.) Also, attacking civilians is often an attempt to demonstrate or deepen the political weakness of an antagonist by showing its failure to protect the population. Therefore, terrorist tactics in the context of a violent conflict often have definite pragmatic advantages for a weaker party.

3.2.3 Target Groups of Insurgent Terrorism

To understand the potential terrorist aspects of insurgencies it is important to analyze the rationality of terrorist acts in such contexts. To do this we have to understand the dynamics of insurgencies, and the civilian target groups attacked by terrorist means. Potential target categories of insurgent terrorism comprise:

- Informers and spies working for the government or its security organizations
- Key personnel involved in ordering or organizing the repression of the insurgency, including members of the government
- Mid- and low-level representatives of the government, public officials, and related personnel
- Members of the general public, or of ethno-religious or other subgroups, irrespective of administrative or political activities.

3.2.3.1 Spies and Informers

Spies and informers, who provide intelligence to a military force the insurgents are fighting, are the first target group to consider. They might be civilians, but the insurgents will regard them as part of the enemy's system of repression and more dangerous than weapons. If the identity or location of insurgents is disclosed to the state army or police, this will not be simply politically disruptive

but also life-threatening. It is not unusual for insurgents to attack and kill such spies or informers.

3.2.3.2 The Political Leadership

The second potential target group for insurgent terrorism is the broader leadership of the government and socio-political elites. Presidents, government ministers, key members of parliament, top military, police or juridical leaders, economic power brokers and similar people would have to be considered here. While most of these are technically civilians, most insurgents would consider them legitimate targets of violence, since they often are the decision makers who send the armed forces against the opposition or insurgents. For instance, a Prime Minister, President or Minister of Defense might technically be "civilian", but at the same time can be "Commander in Chief" or the superior of the military, intelligence and police forces. Attacking and killing such key personnel would not just be of highly symbolic value to the insurgents, but potentially also contribute to disrupting government activities and military operations. In these two categories of targets of terrorism, there might be a disagreement over whether the potential victims are really civilians or non-combatants. In fact, though not necessarily in law, it often can be assumed that they are both civilians and combatants as they play decisive roles in the government's campaign of violence against an armed insurgency.

The next two categories are more clear-cut since their civilian and non-combatant status cannot be seriously disputed. At the same time they have much less military or para-military relevance, but are defined politically. They are basically targeted because of the political character of violent insurgencies.

3.2.3.3 State Functionaries

In this sense, the third potential target group of insurgent violence consists of the broad category of state functionaries, irrespective of their rank, and of comparable actors or those linked to them. This range of targets obviously can be quite broad. It might include Provincial Governors, judges, foreign advisors or consultants to the government, local mayors or political pro-government activists, prominent or less prominent party members, or even teachers or traffic police, and many more. It is obvious that some of these potential targets of terrorist violence are at least partly chosen for their symbolic relevance and propagandistic effect, especially the more prominent and/or high-ranking individuals. Regarding this sub-category, there is a clear overlap with the even more high-ranking targets of the first group. But all of this category (mid- and low-level representatives of the government, public officials, pro-government activists or business people, and related personnel) share the role of directly or indirectly representing the government or the political system, and help to ensure it continues to function correctly or provide services for them. They may not be part of the political or administrative elite, but they provide the manpower of what the population experiences as "the state" or "the government". Here we have to remind ourselves that insurgencies and their twins, counterinsurgencies, are basically a struggle for the legitimacy of rule, as explained above (see: Section 3.1.3). If insurgencies cannot be crushed by brute force, which will succeed only

rarely, an established system of Governance has an advantage over the insurgents, since its institutions of control, rule and incentives are already in place, while the insurgents have little more than a rudimentary equivalent and the promise of a better future. What the government needs to prevail is an "effective and legitimate system of Governance" (Hippler 2011: 273) i.e., it requires both effectiveness and legitimacy of its institutional mechanisms of rule. This is precisely what is targeted when insurgents use terrorist tactics to attack mid- and low-level representatives of the state. Disrupting the functioning of the state apparatus by attacking and killing mid- and low-level functionaries and intimidating many more in this way is most effective if the state is already weak or fragile, either nation-wide or in specific areas. This has been aptly described by Anna Geifman in an interesting study of terrorism in the final phase of Tsarist Russia:

> "The terrorists hastened the downfall of the tsarist regime not only by assassinating prominent state leaders, but also by killing thousands of capable lower-level civil and military officials. The officials who did not themselves became targets of terrorist attacks continuously lived in fear for their lives and the lives of their families—a fear that undoubtedly had an adverse effect on both their attitudes and the way they performed their official duties. To a large extent, the revolutionaries succeeded in breaking the spine of Russian bureaucracy, wounding it both physically and in spirit, and in this way contributed to its general paralysis during the final crisis of the imperial regime in March of 1917" (Geifman 1993: 249).

A century later, this mechanism is still effective: In Afghanistan, for instance, attacks on teachers or schools often have been explained by ideological preferences of the insurgents (the Taliban and others). While this might be true in some cases, in parts of the country the local teacher or policeman might be one of the very few governmental representatives in a village or district. Frightening away or killing the teacher then comes close to eliminating the government from local politics. If this happens not just in a few places but across a large area, it will rid this area of most of the government's presence, and its influence. It will create a political vacuum, which can be easily filled by the insurgents. The government's primary strategic goal to achieve an effective and legitimate system of governance obviously cannot be reached if the remaining judges, policemen, teachers or health clinics cannot operate because the relevant personnel has fled, is intimidated or has been killed. Often the insurgents are trying to establish a parallel government to the official one, or parallel courts dispensing their own version of justice, or providing their own version of local security through insurgent militias or informal police (Mampilly 2011). In the longer run, the goal is to establish their own system of governance, to supplant the state organizations. Terrorist acts against the target group can be a highly effective instrument to achieve this goal, while the main activities would include fighting para-military battles against armed government forces, organizing the population politically, providing basic services to the local population (including schooling where state schools have been destroyed) and a non-state juridical system. This demonstrates that terrorist acts might not always be committed because "terrorism" has been selected as the key strategy, but because it might have a useful supporting role in a para-military or political strategy. Terrorism in such cases is tactical and instrumental, not strategic.

3.2.3.4 The General Public or its Sub-Groups

There are often similar effects as a result of terrorist acts against the fourth potential target group, the general population or relevant sub-sections thereof, such as ethnic or religious communities. Bomb attacks against restaurants, places of worship, traffic infrastructure (such as buses, train stations, airports, etc.) and similar places are not generally targeted at specific, identifiable persons but are intended to inflict multiple casualties among unknown individuals. However, they can still be directed against a specific category of persons: If a terrorist attack is directed against a Shia mosque, the victims most likely will be Shia; if it hits a Jewish supermarket, victims will probably be Jewish. If, on the other hand, a bomb is detonated in the lobby of a major train station in a multi-ethnic city-center, it is more likely that the victims will represent a cross-section of society.

Such attacks, if undertaken by insurgents, can fulfill different functions. If members of an ethno-religious group are targeted, the most likely effect will be to inflame or strengthen inter-group hostility. It will very probably trigger fear in the group being targeted and, if not a one-off incident, might produce violent revenge against the group or perceived supporters of the group that is held responsible. The result will be a growing atmosphere of fear and insecurity in society, a growing hostility between ethno-religious groups, and an increasing pressure to "close the ranks" in intra-group relations. The overall result could be a polarization of political conflicts, as mentioned above, and possibly an ethnization or confessionalization of politics, as seen in Syria. This will directly strengthen and make more relevant the radical ethno-religious groups which may therefore be tempted to use similar terrorist tactics. Also such a result will create a political trap for a government: If politics are polarized along ethno-religious (or other, e.g. social) lines, the government will face a dilemma. Either it takes sides in this polarization and backs one group against the other. This would automatically justify and legitimize the violence of the opposing group or even the insurgent organizations, at least from the perspective of the group that feels marginalized. Or the government tries not to take sides. Such a scenario is not without risk and cost to the government as well. It is quite possible that a neutral government in the context of a developed political polarization will not be accepted by either side, and the government might lose most of its social base. This could undermine the ability of the government to rule effectively. Also, a government that is neutral in regard to ethno-religious polarization would be expected to persecute the enactors of terrorist acts and protect society from further violence, particularly the victimized group(s). If the government fails in these regards, it would either been perceived as partisan or as incompetent. In both cases it would lose credibility and legitimacy, the main political assets it needs to prevail over the insurgency.

The alternative scenario is a terrorist attack that is not directed against members of an ethno-religious or social group in society but against a undefined group of people. In such cases the terrorist acts of insurgents are not attacking a self-defined enemy (such as members of an opposing group) but political stability. They are also demonstrating that the government is either unwilling or unable to protect its citizens and thus undermining a key element of governmental legitimacy. What is a government worth if it cannot ensure the

security of its citizens? Roger Trinquier pointed this out long ago, in the context of the Algerian War (Trinquier 2006: 15).

Another category of insurgent violence against civilians (of either a terrorist or non-terrorist nature) has been highlighted by Claire Metelits. Under specific competitive conditions, insurgent organizations, which can be either non-state violent actors or state organizations, are using force against civilians to keep control or monopolize vital resources (Metelits 2010: 11-12, and chapter 2). Such coercion is often violent and can include terrorism. It might also be frequently directed against civilians who are socially, ethnically or in other ways close to the insurgents, especially if a rival group is competing for resources provided from within the same social strata.

In the paragraphs above, we have seen the tactical and strategic uses of terrorist means against different target groups in the context of insurgencies. It has become obvious that terrorist acts can be politically useful as a tool of political-military struggle, no matter how illegal or immoral they may be. It should also be noted that the pragmatic usefulness of terrorist acts is independent of the ideological preferences of the insurgents. Empirically, religiously inspired groups (Sunni, Shia, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and others), but also secular groups of nationalist or left-wing persuasions (Tamil Tigers, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Irgun, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Lord's Resistance Army, etc.) have utilized the logic of terrorism, whenever useful. No matter how grave the ideological differences between the perpetrating groups, the use of terrorist means to further their power has been quite common across ideological boundaries. In all cases the perpetrating groups easily manage to integrate their terrorist tactics into their respective ideologies. However, the choice of specific violent practices can be culture-specific. Beheadings, for instance, are rarely committed by groups which do not have a Salafist-jihadist orientation. Also public legitimation of both terrorist and non-terrorist violence will often be culture-specific.

3.2.4 Individual Motivation and Political Support

While the functional consideration of the use of terrorism is quite obvious from the vantage point of the respective insurgent movement or organization, the individual fighters or activists committing terrorist acts may have a different perspective. For many of them, the tactical advantages in the context of a political strategy might be less important than personal considerations. Here, peer group pressure, personal frustrations, the need for the perpetrator to prove his or her own bravery or commitment, hatred for a perceived enemy or group, belief in an overwhelming charismatic leader, or ideological fanaticism can all play a role in motivating the individual perpetrators. This is one of the reasons why attempts to identify a common psychological profile of terrorist perpetrators have not been successful (Horgan 2014: 47-76; Bongar et al. 2007). There are very diverse categories of perpetrators, depend on the political context, on the character of the group and its internal dynamics and on the conditions in the respective society. For instance, the terrorists of 9/11 and of several terrorist attacks in Belgium and France in 2015/2016 have been of very different types in regard to their

biographies and psychological motivations. Common ideologies often hide these differences more than they explain their deeds.

While all this can be highly relevant on the individual level and deserves more research, for the insurgent movements and organizations this tends to be of secondary importance. For them, the key driver in resorting to terrorist means is that it can be highly profitable in a specific context. If terrorism did not work, if it did not produce results for the perpetrators, it would long have disappeared.

While terrorist tactics tend to be an efficient tool of political violence in causing harm to a much stronger enemy, this does not necessarily translate into achieving the hoped-for political results. They can create costs to the perpetrators' cause, because the killing and maiming of civilians, including women and children, will often be seen as appalling, and discredit the political goals and organizations that are undertaking them. Terrorist acts can undercut the prestige and credibility of a perpetrating group amongst its (would-be) followers, or increase the determination of the opponent group or affected society to defend itself. Therefore, to achieve its goals, terrorism requires not only technical efficiency, but also a supportive political context. Scott Atran emphasizes the "need (for) strong community support" (Atran 2004: 81) as a condition for successful campaigns of terrorism, but this might be broadened to include other kinds of sustained violence against an overwhelmingly superior military adversary. Guerrilla warfare, for instance, would also require strong backing for the insurgents by at least relevant parts of the local community or society. This is the reason why strategies of counterinsurgency and counter-guerrilla warfare generally focus on undermining this community support (Hippler 2006: 39-45). Local support by large sectors of the population is therefore important for insurgent forces but not specifically to terrorism alone. As mentioned above, groups utilizing terrorist tactics are also very often likely to use non-terrorist forms of violence, and non-violent means, such as social and political work. This can be explained by two arguments: First, often violent policies and groups grow out of local conflicts and local movements, which implies a local support base; and secondly, even if this is not the case, any group which attacks a much stronger enemy by force needs local support which in turn puts a premium on political and social activities to attract or stabilize it. In the words of Jessica Stern: "Jihadi groups' social welfare activities, especially the practice of compensating militants' families in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Palestine, seem to play a role in making the groups more appealing to the poor" (Stern 2003: 285).

Another factor generally required for the emergence of a terrorist type of violent resistance is a polarized form of political conflict, psychologically reducing it to an *us-versus-them/good-versus-evil* situation. This tends to reduce the chances of a non-violent solution, opening the door to ideologically and emotionally charged policies. When a conflict of interest is translated and transformed into one of identity (along moral, ethnic, religious, nationalist or other lines), compromise will become much more difficult: It is often possible to reach a compromise with an antagonist on a delineation of interests, but few people are willing to compromise their identity. What started as a conflict over specific grievances can in this way turn into a conflict over basic values. This results in a discourse that has one group represented as the side of goodness and

humanity while the other is portrayed as evil and sub-human creatures. This process of dehumanization of the opponent is often a psychological precondition for moving from political antagonism to violence or from violence against an armed enemy to terrorist attacks against civilians, women and children. This psychological process has both individual and collective dimensions. But again, this dehumanization of the enemy is not specific to terrorist forms of violence. It is also a well-known feature in regular warfare or other forms of violence.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

"Terrorism", as we have seen, is both a broad and contested term. The conclusion of this paper is that it should be narrowed down considerably, be used more consistently and precisely, and that it is largely meaningless outside its specific contexts. Analyzing and understanding these socio-political contexts goes a long way in comprehending terrorism. Also, more analytical clarity might be gained by *not* using the term when other, more precise terminology is available. Finally, the definition of the term terrorism should be reconsidered.

4.1 Narrowing Terminology

Analyses of terrorist acts and actors should not automatically assume that "terrorism" is a unified and coherent concept. At the very least, they should not dismiss the possibility that it is a fragmented concept that brings together many different practices. Quite different phenomena are combined in one terminological category, despite being qualitatively and quantitatively heterogeneous and fragmented. The common term "terrorism" might suggest a common and systematic character that does not exist beyond very general and vague abstractions, such as "political violence against non-combatants".

As we have seen above (Section 2.4), the term "terrorism" is used too broadly and for too many different things in academic and political discussions. As long as the term is used so sweepingly and indiscriminately, any attempt to define it in a clear way will not be successful. If something is hard to define, using the same term for many related but different phenomena will also prevent any chance of clarity. If we call a dog a dog, the term "dog" should not be used for all mammals, not for cats, not for the *idea* of a dog, not for a dog-bite, and not for dog-food. It should only be used for dogs. This humble suggestion seems quite obvious, but it is often ignored in regard to our topic. In the same way, "terrorism" should not be used as a synonym for "extremism" or "radicalism", not for an ideology, not for violent groups, and not for a cultural or psychological disposition. It should, as we have seen, remain reserved for *acts of a specific character* (terrorist, however it may be defined). It could also be used for an overall analytical concept of such behavior, as the "ism" in the term indicates. But if "terrorism" is used in both ways, then a clear distinction between the two is required.

As we have shown above, clarifying the term "terrorism" alone is not sufficient. For instance, terms such as "terrorist organization" or "terrorist group" might sound plausible, if "terrorism" is clearly defined, but this apparent

plausibility is misleading. There is often only an extremely vague notion of what a "terrorist organization" is: While many organizations, both state and non-state, commit terrorist acts, not all of them should be called "terrorist organizations" as this would broaden the term in a way which would render it useless. Without clearly defining precisely what constitutes a "terrorist organization", the term is hollow or polemical. As long as terrorist acts are committed by different types of political organizations and as long as many organizations which are generally described as terrorist (such as the "Islamic State", ISIS) undertake so many activities of a non-terrorist or even non-violent character (Cronin 2015), the distinction between terrorist and non-terrorist organizations remains diffuse and in need of clarification. In this paper, we have suggested the term "terrorist organization" should be used only for groups who commit terrorist acts, not merely as a tactic or opportunistically, but as a strategy, and/or whose behavior is overwhelmingly characterized by their use. Since many actors commit terrorist acts only occasionally, opportunistically or tactically, this would limit the application of the term "terrorist organization".

4.2 Reconsidering the Definition of Terrorism

Restricting an inflationary use of the term "terrorism" and avoiding its use for a range of connected but distinct phenomena might be useful, but it does not solve the problem of an unsatisfactory definition of the basic term. At the beginning of this paper (see Section 2.2) we had settled for a preliminary definition that more or less followed the State Department's use of the term as "politically motivated violence against non-combatants". This had some advantages over other, more complicated definitions. It avoids emotionally charged language, it does not pre-determine some actors to be terrorist or non-terrorist by definition, it is broad enough to include the full range of activities that can be called terrorism (see Table 1 in Section 3.1.3 and Table 2 in Section 4.3 below). It is also simple and clear and avoids ambiguous or subjective terminological indicators, such as creating "fear" as an objective or result of terrorism.

However, despite such advantages, this preliminary definition offered in chapter 2 is not without its weaknesses, as the analysis has shown. Basically, it is still too broad and does not provide very specific criteria to distinguish terrorism from related forms of violence. A definition which qualifies the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima, Stalinist mass murder, an attack on a public place with assault rifles, or the killing of a teacher to intimidate other government officials as the same phenomenon – terrorism – is not very specific and not very useful. This is probably one of the reasons terrorism is often defined in a more specific way which is then only applied selectively or arbitrarily. We therefore face the unpleasant choice of using the term terrorism in a consistent way that will be so broad as to render it nearly useless, or arbitrarily narrowing it down (for instance by applying it only to non-state actors or to actors threatening Western interests) and transforming it into a political, not an analytical category. In this paper we have suggested using more specific terms whenever possible (such as "political murder") and to use the term terrorism only when it has a greater analytical value or when it cannot be avoided. In fact, the term terrorism rarely has analytical advantages over other, more specific and less charged terms. But the obvious suggestion to avoid the term altogether is not helpful either, since it is used so

often in academic, political and public discourse that this would not be a realistic approach. After more than forty years of trying to define the term terrorism, we might have to concede failure in ever reaching a consensus which will be academically satisfactory. Probably, the best remaining option is to minimize the dangers which arise when using an academically indefinable term. The key to this is at least to acknowledge and recognize the problem. Appreciating the weaknesses of the term "terror*ism*" should help us to formulate at least some suggestions to limit ambiguity. Firstly, as argued above, we should bear in mind that "terrorism" rarely refers to one coherent concept or set of activities, if it is not extremely abstract. It is more an omnibus term, bringing together very different kinds of political violence which are actually better analyzed separately. Combining those into one term suggests a commonality which rarely exists. Secondly, if we do use the term, the same standards of usage should apply to all actors, large and small, state and non-state, respected and fringe, pro- and anti-Western, mainstream and extremist. Avoiding double standards is a pre-requisite for rescuing the academic usefulness of any terminology. Thirdly, the reason why and how we use the term "terrorism" should always be clear. Otherwise this would entail the danger of misunderstandings or even a manipulative discourse. Since there are so many definitions and even more ways of usage of the term, and many of them quite legitimate, we at least have to be transparent and specific in justifying our specific choices of why and how we use the term.

The first step in trying to define "terrorism" should be to postpone defining the "ism" part of it and instead firstly clarify what constitutes a "terrorist act", instead. Here the State Department's suggestion is still useful, if applied to the acts, not directly to "terror*ism*". This paper's suggestion here is: ***Terrorist acts are acts of violence serving political purposes, directed against civilians or non-combatants***.

As a second step, we then can proceed to define "terrorism": It is the ***systematic or strategic use of terrorist acts over a medium or longer period of time*** (in contrast to tactical or instrumental use), not a single or limited number of terrorist acts.

Thirdly, this should also define what a "terrorist organization" is: The term should only be applied to organizations (or groups, movements, individual actors) ***which commit terrorist acts systematically and strategically over some period of time as their main activity***, not just occasionally or opportunistically.

Fourthly, our suggestion is to avoid using the terms "terrorist" or "terrorism" in all cases when more precise and less ambiguous terminology is available. Very often terms such as "political murder", "massacre", "assassination", "politically motivated bomb attack" or "genocide" will be more specific, less politically or emotionally loaded, and fully sufficient to describe or analyze the violence they refer to. Only if the use of the terms "terrorist" or "terrorism" adds a useful analytical dimension it should be used.

4.3 An Outline of Terrorism Research

The previous paragraphs have mostly focused on the complex problems of terminology. Now it is appropriate to provide a definitive if brief outline and

structure of the field of "terrorism" research and analysis. It is helpful to remind ourselves of the highly diverse aspects that should be taken into account when analyzing the phenomenon of terrorism. If we conceptualize terrorism not as a mindset or mentality but as a (violent) political activity, we should have an understanding of which aspects of it require empirical knowledge and subsequent analysis. This will not automatically establish causal relationships between different variables, but permit us to build a mental map of the research field, which can lead our categorization of the different types of terrorism.

The 16 points of the following table can serve as a starting point for organizing research and deciding on research priorities.

Table 2: Dimensions to Analyze Terrorism

1. Geographical Reach	• Sub-national • Domestic • International • Transnational, global
2. Conceptual Reach	• Symbolic • Tactical • Strategic
3. Context	• Isolated incidents • Political repression, dictatorship • Inter-group conflict • Intra-group conflict • Foreign occupation • Insurgency • War, civil war
4. Causes	• Causes for the use of violence in a specific context for political purposes • Causes for the use of violence against non-combatants/civilians
5. Ideology	• Political • Socio-economic • Ethno-nationalist • Religious
6. Motivation of Individual Perpetrators	• Ideological • Personal frustration • In-group dynamics, such as peer-group expectation or dependency, or following a charismatic leader • Self-promotion and achieving personal relevance, such as demonstrating bravery, fearlessness, becoming a "hero", being part of a "vanguard"
7. Actors	• "Lone wolves" • Relatively small groups with no or very limited support in society • Insurgent movements with support at least in some relevant sectors of society • Non-state actors and groups supporting the political and social power structure • Governments/states, or state institutions

8. Organizational	• Individual perpetrators, self-organized, though potentially inspired by political groups • Relatively small groups of peers or family relatives, usually grouped around an accepted leader • Top-down organizations, quasi-bureaucratic or leader oriented • Flat hierarchies • Franchise systems • Networks • Systems of autonomous cells
9. Targets	• Symbolic locations • Infrastructure • Politicians, public officials • Members of security services (outside of war or civil war contexts) • Civilian members of specific groups, either ethnic, national, religious, political • Members of the general public
10. Operational Types	• Sabotage • Kidnappings • Assassinations, individual and multiple • Massacres • Ethnic cleansing • Genocide
11. Instruments	• Non-weapons: cars, stones, airplanes • Personal weapons: knifes, handguns, poison • Explosives: IEDs, bombs • Military weapons I: mortars, mobile missile systems, light artillery • Military weapons II: tanks, airplanes, heavy artillery, cruise missiles • (Potentially: WMD)
12. Embedding	• "Pure" terrorism • Mix of diverse forms of violence, specific function(s) of terrorism in this • Mix of violent and non-violent activities, specific function(s) of terrorism in this
13. Communication	• Violence as a kind of communication to different groups (members, potential supporters, competitors, antagonists, general public; domestic, international) • Channels and media of communication; media strategies • Internal vs. external communication
14. Quantitative and Qualitative Tends	• Quantitative trends in regard to numbers of attacks, victims, perpetrators, means of attacks, both domestic, country specific, and international • Changes in the character of terrorist violence with regard to the criteria and categories mentioned above
15. Anti-Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism	• Domestic vs. international • Preventive measures I – addressing the causes and socio-political contexts • Preventive measures II – improving data collection, intelligence and security

	• Dealing with political violence against civilians as a criminal offense • Military operations; "War on Terrorism"
16. Results	• Casualties • Damaged/destroyed property and economic consequences • Political results, direct and indirect

Source: Author's own table

Table 2 amply demonstrates the complexity and multi-dimensionality of what is sweepingly termed "terrorism". It also illustrates the difficulty in combining so many diverging and even contradictory facets into one analytical concept. This compilation can help us to avoid becoming mired in all the different aspects relating to the term terrorism. But it also raises the question again, whether just one term can be sufficient to capture the multitude of sometimes contradictory phenomena which are subsumed under it. While Table 2 cannot solve the problems of definitions and terminology in regard to "terrorism", discussed above, it can be useful for systematic research by providing a mental map of the topics involved. It can direct research in a way to allow empirically based and systematic analysis, linking the different levels of the phenomenon of terrorism. It is also a tool to link operational and organizational factors to their political contexts.

4.4 The Political Context is Key to the Analysis of Terrorism

Terrorism research should start with analyzing the political context, as this determines everything else – the actors, their goals and intentions, the means of violence, the targets. Without understanding the contexts, terrorist acts are still terrible, but meaningless. This is one of the reasons for the terminological and conceptual confusion surrounding "terrorism", as described in chapter 2. Since terrorist violence, like all political activities, is not a goal in itself but a tool to achieve one or several goals, the relationship between these acts and the goals are decisive in analyzing terrorism. And the goals depend on both the character of the actors and, even more, the political context they are operating in.

Suggestions for terrorism research:

- Start analysis with the socio-political context, not with the actors or acts of terrorism.
- Focus first on all political violence and its different dimensions and aspects and not exclusively on terrorist violence.
- Analyze the relationships between terrorist violence, non-terrorist violence, and socio-political activities of the relevant actors.
- Avoid reifying terrorism by turning it from a tool and tactic into a strategy or basic category, as long as this has not been proven appropriate.

Starting analysis from the vantage point of the specific socio-political context allows a deeper understanding to be gained of the dynamics of terrorist and non-terrorist violence in a given case but it will not necessarily produce insight into "terrorism" as such because of its heterogeneous character. However, context-based research can help to contribute to developing several categories of the use

of terrorist violence. These would not necessarily combine into a cohesive concept of "terrorism", but again, this might well be impossible anyway. We can compare this analytical situation to the common tactic of "ambush". Ambushes are undertaken with success by criminal gangs, guerrilla forces, hooligans, conventional armies or non-state militias and other groups. It is useful and potentially fruitful to analyze them in their different contexts but it remains dubious whether there is any academic need to develop a common concept or "theory of ambush" as such. It would have to remain very general and vague, and would be as unlikely to produce a deeper understanding of armed conflict as analyzing the tactics of armed forces, criminal gangs or other groups. Understanding tactical tools is important, but should not be confused with understanding strategy. In the vast majority of cases, terrorist acts (and terrorism in the sense of systematically committing them) are tools, tactical instruments, not a strategy. And these tools have different meanings in different political contexts. The strategy in question can only be deciphered from the socio-political context, not from the tactics, and these socio-political contexts are extremely diverse.

Too often terrorism is dealt with outside of its specific contexts, as if it were a kind of human behavior which is formed and decided upon beyond or independent of society and socio-political conflict. Sometimes, terrorism is perceived as a kind of war, or as one of its subcategories. This misunderstands the character of terrorism. Several authors conceptualize terrorism primarily in ideological terms. Typically they distinguish between nationalist, political, and religious terrorism, implying that these ideologies determine different kinds of terrorism. While acknowledging that ideologies can and do influence terrorist actors or actors who commit terrorist acts, this study has argued that the starting point of understanding and analyzing terrorism should not be the different ideologies, but the political context in which terrorism is applied. It will determine whether terrorist acts are committed at all, opportunistically, tactically, or strategically, which means of violence will be used and against which target groups, and which groups are reacting in which way to terrorism. Ideologies, relevant as they may or may not be in specific cases, can generally be reconciled with most political needs of a specific socio-political context. We should also remind ourselves that no ideology has in itself a necessary connection to terrorism – Salafism, for instance, may be peaceful or even non-political, while in other cases it can transform itself into a jihadist ideology of terrorism. Thus it shares trait with other ideologies, including secular ones.

In general therefore, terrorism should not be studied as a phenomenon by itself, as if resulting from the choices of "terrorists" or from their ideologies. Such choices are real and important, but they are made in the framework of specific socio-political contexts which will shape the choices made. Instead, it should be understood that terrorist practices generally develop because of the practical advantages they offer in a specific political framework, in contrast to or in combination with other activities and policies.

We should also recognize that terrorism is hardly ever a distinct and isolated phenomenon, but generally part of something bigger. As we have stressed in this paper, terrorist acts rarely take place in a "pure" terrorist form, as a strategy or main activity of a political actor, but overwhelmingly in connection with and as

a part of a much broader political struggle. Terrorist acts are generally committed alongside and in combination with other violent but non-terrorist policies, as well as in combination with non-violent practices, of a political, social or economic character. Analyzing terrorist acts as terror***ism*** is not very productive when in fact they might just be one tactic amongst several others in a broader political struggle.

The key factors are the socio-political conditions that produce the preconditions and breeding-grounds for political violence in general and terrorist acts specifically and the insurgencies and connected civil wars, which constitute the framework and reference point to which terrorism often is linked. Only in the context of such an analysis can terrorism be understood. The analysis of the policies, strategies, and tactics of violent or terrorist organizations, or of terrorist acts committed by other organizations, is much more promising compared to analyzing terrorist acts of violence out of context.

4.5 Terrorism as an Instrument of Struggle in Insurgencies and Failing States

Sometimes relatively small groups of otherwise irrelevant, politically marginal or isolated actors choose terrorism as a key strategy to gain influence and attention. In other cases, "lone wolves" (Pantucci 2011; Simon 2013; Friedholm 2015) who might feel ideologically connected to relevant organizations or movements wage their personal crusades by terrorist means. Also, governmental organizations use terrorist acts as a tactic against opposition actors or as a strategy of rule. But most terrorist acts (if we exclude large-scale and systematic state violence such as occurred under Stalinism or fascism) result from the context of insurgencies or are connected to civil wars. In such cases, conceptually de-linking terrorism from insurgency would be counterproductive and even misleading. The analysis should instead concentrate on the uses and practical advantages of terrorist acts for political actors in the pre-insurgency, insurgency or civil-war phase of conflicts. There is a long tradition of at least rhetorically linking terrorism and insurgency: During the Cold War it was not uncommon to routinely call liberation movements and their insurgencies (against colonialism or local dictatorships) either "communist" or "terrorist", or both. But generally this was just political labeling, not the result of serious analysis. Still today, in a superficial way, both concepts are often linked rhetorically, but this link is hardly ever analyzed. This lack of research is regrettable, since it negatively affects our understanding of both insurgency and terrorism. As this paper has demonstrated, terrorism and insurgency are both empirically linked (see Section 3.1.3) and also part of the same dynamics of conflict (see Section 3.2). Very often terrorist acts and more systematic terrorist campaigns fulfill useful functions in the context of insurgencies, both for the insurgents and counterinsurgents. At the same time, terrorism in these contexts is not without risk. However, generally speaking, it is just one instrument in the insurgents' and counterinsurgents' toolbox, being used in combination with other violent tactics, and with non-violent policies as well.

As explained in Section 3.2, insurgencies and counterinsurgencies are struggles for the loyalty of a population and a competition for legitimacy. The

strategically decisive factor is usually the ability and willingness of a government to provide effective and legitimate governance. The use of force (military, paramilitary, terrorist violence) can hardly ever decide the outcome of such conflicts but will fulfill a supporting role, whether the parties are aware of this or not. Violence, both in its terrorist and non-terrorist forms, can have important roles in undermining the legitimacy of opponents, in strengthening or eroding effective and legitimate governance, and in achieving other political effects which were discussed above. In such a context, systematic or sporadic terrorist acts can become highly relevant, both for a government and the insurgents. While the enemy will rarely be conquered by force, it can reshape the political battlefield in important ways and by doing this, co-determine the outcome of the conflict.

Generally, "terrorism" is neither a distinct category of violent conflict such as war, civil war or insurgency, nor a subcategory of any of these. In the vast majority of cases, it remains an instrument or a tactical tool in the context of a broader struggle. This context deserves more academic research.

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