The Changing Meaning of Terrorism

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One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.
Who do you think of, when you think of a terrorist?
When was the last time the United States declared a genocide?
“Reaffirming also that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group.”

UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006)
History vs. Law vs. Philosophy
Orthodox Accounts of Terrorism

- Three Pillars
  - Functional – provoke a response by the state
  - Symbolic – violence used to intimidate and strike fear into targets
  - Tactical – both short term goals and long term strategic initiatives
- Theory to suit hegemonic agendas (institutionalized power)
- How terrorism works and what it is intended to achieve
- Recognizes “terrorist” as a rational actor
- Example: The United States
Issues With The Orthodox Account

- https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?charttype=pie&chart=target&casualties_type=f&casualties_max=&start_yearonly=2001&end_yearonly=2015&dtp2=all&country=217&count=100
Critical Accounts of Terrorism

- Two Schools of Thought
  - The Revisionist School
    - Impossible to predict where violence will occur, how it will occur, and who will compose the violence
    - Violence is politicized
      - Definitions thus far serve national, sectional, and/or class interests
  - Critical Terrorism Studies
    - Autonomy possessed by the individual
    - A commitment to emancipation
      - Those who feel slighted and want to break from their chains
- Example: Syria
Issues With the Critical Account

Radical Accounts of Terrorism

- Personalized stories and interpretations from the actors themselves
- This field transcends time and space, and is still the least studied field in defining terrorism
- Situational basis in history, by group, for different causes
Issues With The Radical Account
Terrorism: What can be done?

- The term itself incites fear and violence.
- To derive prevention scenarios and punishment schemes by labeling something as terrorism is incredibly misleading.
- Broad strokes are made against individuals or groups bound by the actions of very few.
- The way we treat actions domestically as compared to the same events in another country, changes dramatically.
- The term questions the fabric of history itself.
Autonomy

Violence

SINCE ALL VIOLENT ACTIONS CAN BE DEEMED AS TERRORISM, IT INVALIDATES ANY MEANING OF THE TERM ITSELF
Autonomy Violence

- Combined definition of the accounts mentioned without the inflammatory language or sweeping terms
- Differentiates treatment of those guilty dependent upon the crime
- Broad strokes are not made to incorporate the entirety of organizations, civilizations, ethnic backgrounds, religions, or nationalities
  - To recognize large groups or organizations that are truly guilty of such violence (such as ISIS) only gives them more legitimacy
- THE INSTITUTIONAL JUDGE, BUT THE SITUATIONAL JURY
- Historical influence must be taken into account
  - War crimes, genocide, or political activism
“The application of the term ‘terrorist/terrorism’ is part and parcel of the war of ideas and the production of propaganda.”

Anthony McIntyre
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