

Asymmetric Labeling of Terrorist Violence as a Matter of Statecraft Propaganda: Or, Why the United States Does Not Feel the Need to Explain the Assassination of Osama Bin Laden

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Abstract

“Terrorism” is fundamentally the same, whether it is carried out by States or non-State actors. Difference arises as one identifies the processes wherein labels are applied which identify select acts of political violence as “terrorism,” while terming others “legitimate defense” within the national interest. The subjective labeling of “terrorism” which obscures the systemic violence of State terrorism has accelerated in the post-9/11 “Global War On Terror/Terrorism,” as wars advanced by the US and its allies have further expanded into the Middle East, Asia and Africa with numerous proxy wars. This construction of terrorism can be seen as a rhetorical tool utilized by the State, as well as non-State actors that challenge State authority. Throughout these arenas of violence, authoritative language is used by the State within a process of “othering,” and intentional language is adopted to demonize anti-State opponents and legitimize State-crafted actions.

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Defining “Terrorism” & State Violence

In the modern discourse on terrorism, one often witnesses a conflation between terrorism as an *ideology* and terrorism utilized as a tactical and strategic *means* within a larger political campaign. Through this explanative model, terrorism is not seen as an act but as a way of thinking, a model for understanding the world. This framing places terrorism alongside Maoism, Zionism, Christian Identity or pan-Arabism as an ideology ready for adoption. With these definitional trends in mind, the arguments presented here presume that the adoption of “terrorism” is a tactical and strategic matter, following a decision-making process akin to other modes of political engagement such as picketing, electioneering, protest marches or strikes. Terrorism is no more explicitly tied to an ideology than are other methods of applying political force such as a staged sit-in, a bombing, rioting or voting in a party election. The decision to use terrorist means is not dependent on ideology, as terrorist tactics are used by every form of political actor across the spectrum from anarchist to capitalist, and from millenarian to Salafi.

If one views terrorism as a tactical and strategic selection independent of ideology, it can be seen to be fundamentally the same phenomenon whether it is adopted by States or non-State actors (NSAs). The history of nation-States is rampant with the use of targeted assassinations, indiscriminate bombings, and other acts of violence designed to inspire fear and compliance within a set population. Though terrorism’s main features are unchanged despite the national identity of its user, what does change is the manner in which that act of political violence is labeled within the wider society. This is where the State emerges as an authoritarian entity, differentiating it from a NSA. It is within this realm of Statehood that some acts of violence are legitimized with terms such as “war,” “national security,” and the like, whereas other acts of violence are condemned and termed “extremist attacks” or “terrorist violence.”

The academic field of international relations is rife with definitional constraints, incessant debates and constant reinterpretations. The field of Terrorism Studies is no different. It is quite common for academics to spend considerable time defining commonly used terms and defending their definition in relation to others previously proposed. Speaking to the endless debates surrounding definitional constraints, Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman (1988) wrote that “au-

thors have spilled almost as much ink as the actors of terrorism have spilled blood” within this debate (p. xiii). Schmid and Jongman (2009) authored what is often referred to as the “academic consensus definition” of terrorism wherein they define terrorism as:

. . . an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action . . . for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby — in contrast to assassination — the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought. (p. 28)

Within their definition of terrorism, the terrorist actor is defined as a “clandestine individual, group, or state actor” (*ibid*). This inclusive definition increases the scope of possible terrorists to include the State.

Despite the constantly shifting nuances in the contested definitional meanings of terrorism, the current standard language does nothing to disqualify State terrorism from sharing much with acts carried out by NSAs. Following the foundational definitional writings by Schmid and Jongman, a study was published in 2004 that sought to gather, condense and analyze all of the current and competing definitions of terrorism. The three authors in this study (Weinberg, Pedahzur, & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004, p. 779) attempted to produce a definition that served as a mark of consensus within the academic community by analyzing definitional trends found within fifty-five articles in the three leading academic journals dealing with terrorism. From this survey approach the authors provide no challenge to the Schmid and Jongman definition, which identifies the terrorist actor as either a State or a NSA.

Notwithstanding this seemingly homogeneous understanding of States’ ability to intentionally utilize the tactics of terrorism, State violence continues to be concealed, misrepresented, and mislabeled as other acts. This trend is true throughout State rhetoric as well as

within the 'academy.' In the burgeoning field of Terrorism Studies, this is no different. According to the 2007 article "A Case for Critical Terrorism Studies," the authors state:

'Terrorism studies' often suffers from state bias . . . as a result of government-funding opportunities and affinities between state institutions and researchers, research often displayed an uncritical orientation towards state perspectives and concerns. (Jackson, Gunning, & Smyth, 2007, p. 368)

These divergent standpoints should be expected from critical scholars as State posturing at its core seeks to veil and intentionally mislabel violence seen as counter to its interest. This is not limited to what Slavoj Žižek calls "subjective violence" that exists in the form of "crime and terror, civil unrest, [and] international conflict," but also Statecraft serves to conceal and explain away systemic violence, referred to by Žižek as "objective violence" (i.e., systemic inequality in the society) (2008, pp. 1–2). Here one can see the State's desire to normalize the violent state of affairs passed off as State capitalism, war, exploitation and inequality. Thus, the State's strategy of mislabeling is broadly a two-pronged approach, one which seeks to conceal "objective violence" and a second maneuver which seeks to misconstrue State acts of "subjective violence" (i.e., extra-judicial assassination) by renaming these actions as defensive and/or necessary. As the State is the maintenance agent reproducing and concealing spheres of inequity and systemic violence, it remains within a Statist interest to tightly control the labeling of violence. This includes ("objective") violence which is hidden beneath hierarchies of race, class, nationality, etc., as well as obvious forms of ("subjective") violence, such as those exemplified in war-making and policing.

The State serves to *normalize* and simultaneously *conceal* the "ideological violence" inherent in the system of capitalism, militarism and a prison-industrial complex aimed at mass incarceration (Žižek, 2008, p. 10). While obscuring these inherent violences, the State urges its citizenry to abhor "subjective violence, of violence enacted by social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds . . . [as it is the] most visible of the three [forms of violence]" (p. 11). This obfuscation is carried out, according to Žižek, to "distract our attention from the true locus of trouble, by obliterating from view other forms of violence and thus actively participating in them" (pp. 10–11). By shifting the lens of analysis away from "ideological/

objective violence,” as well as away from State-enacted “subjective violence,” the State is able to normalize its own violent actions and present the attacks of NSAs as irregular, criminal and the product of anti-social rage. To focus one’s attention on only that violence that is “subjective,” while ignoring the “objective” which creates the conditions, is “hypocrisy” and intentional blinding (Chomsky as quoted in Žižek, 2008, p. 44). In sum, the partitioning of “objective” and “subjective” violence, of blood shed by the State versus that shed by an irregular combatant, is a keystone of an intentional ideological Statist agenda to maintain acquiescence towards its inherently violent methods. In effect, the sublime ideological power of such State rhetoric rests in its ability to normalize systemic and State-enacted violence.

Terrorism as a State Weapon

The previous analysis concerning the obscuring of violence by the State says little about an actor’s use of palpable, plainly-stated coercion, intimidation and direct attack through violent means. This too is within the realm of State histories, both contemporary and historical. The usage of terrorist tactics by nation-States and dominant parties seeking to usurp or maintain State power witnessed a dramatic increase following the second World War (WWII), as the world saw “totalitarian regimes using mass terror on an unprecedented scale” (Wilkinson, 2003, p. 107). The increase in State-level terrorism was largely the product of European, fascist movements such as the *Sturmabteilung*. The *Sturmabteilung* (or *Sturm-Abteilung*), also known as the Brown Shirts, were part of Adolf Hitler’s German Nazi movement. The rise of such fascist terrorist groups occurred in what author Mark Sedgwick classifies as the “German wave” of terrorism, beginning in 1919 and ending along with WWII in the late 1940s. This wave of terrorism, according to Sedgwick (2007), breaks from traditional violent patterns wherein common tactics such as bombings or hostage taking are largely absent. In the “German wave [of terrorism],” part-time paramilitaries carried out street-level repression and intimidation through means such as beatings and mob attacks (Hoffman, 1999, p. 24).

In its time, the *Sturmabteilung* were not classified as a terrorist organization, though their actions were designed to intimidate and force socio-political compliance (Sedgwick, 2007, pp. 103–04).

The Sturmabteilung policy of fascist-backed intimidation was an “indirect strategy of violence,” having “indirect political and psychological consequences,” used beneficially to gain power, silence opposition and maintain political control (*ibid*). The violence of the Sturmabteilung was carried out for “propaganda value,” and served to “intimidate opponents, and ‘foster a sense of insecurity within the population’” (*ibid*). The brutal strategy of the Sturmabteilung utilized acts of destabilizing violence to create a state of crisis, which the fascists could exploit to criticize and discredit the challenged German State. A second example is Mussolini’s Black Shirts, which also operated during the period of the “German Wave.” The Black Shirts, like the Brown Shirts, used violence to intimidate and destabilize through attacks outside of State control prior to Mussolini’s 1922 seizure of power. Other examples of State terrorism within this category include Stalin’s “Great Terror” and Juan Perón’s “Justicialism” movement in Argentina (Hoffman, 1999, p. 24).

The academic literature is filled with examples of State-led terrorist violence from the obvious to the obscure. For the obscure, consider former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s destruction of more than 1,200 oil wells as an act of terrorism carried out by the State that targets the environment and victimizes the citizenry who must live within a contaminated territory (Schwartz, 1998, pp. 484–5). Whereas Saddam’s attack against the physical environment may seem like a conceptual leap, the well-documented history of pro-government “death squads” in South and Central America is seemingly clearer. For example, in 1989 six politically active Jesuit priests were killed along with their housekeeper and daughter by a US-backed, Salvadorian death squad (Wright, 2007, p. vii, 31.). Tactics such as the overt intimidation of human rights advocates, labor organizers and students by pro-government paramilitaries was seen throughout conflicts in Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru and elsewhere (Hoffman, 1999, p. 25). While a more complete history of State-sponsored violence in Latin America will be reviewed in subsequent sections, in documenting this history of death squads and government-backed intimidation it appears clear that State-usage of terrorist violence is fundamentally the same as violence carried out by NSAs. The means are similar, if not often identical, and the outcome is the same, coercive violence that aims to produce ideological compliance.

Subjectivity of Labeling: Comparing Assassinations

In order to argue that State usage of terrorist tactics is analogous to NSA usages of the same *means*, three examples of assassination will be examined. In these examples assassination was used to target a primary subject, while simultaneously producing political messaging to secondary and tertiary audiences. In all three examples, peripheral casualties were the result of either inaccurate targeting or negligent disregard for the safety of proximate noncombatants. These examples were chosen to show a range of perpetrators, but the argument here could easily be applied to the long history of political violence emanating from anarchists and other anti-authoritarian leftists. The examples abound from the famous assassination of President McKinley by a (debated) associate of Emma Goldman's, to the less well-known campaigns carried out under monikers including the Dynamite Club, the Bonnot Gang, the George Jackson Brigades, the Direct Action Five, as well as others advocating *propaganda of the deed* through the production of spectacular displays of revolutionary violence. Despite a long history of such incidents, the following analysis will focus on extra-judicial assassinations carried out by the Red Army Faction (RAF), the Israeli Mossad and the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

In 1972, the German RAF attempted to assassinate federal Judge Wolfgang Buddenberg because of prosecutions he was seen to have led against members of the group. The RAF placed an improvised explosive device (IED) in the Judge's car in an attempt to kill their target. Instead the IED detonated while the Judge's wife was present, injuring her while the intended target was not present (Varon, 2004, p. 210.). In their communiqué that reported the bomb attack, the RAF did not mention their failed targeting (Red Army Faction: Manfred Grashof Commando, 2009: n.p.).

In 1973, the Israeli Mossad began a campaign to assassinate Ali Hassan Salameh. The targeting of Salameh was directed in retaliation for the Black September Organization's (BSO) attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. In response to the BSO's actions in Munich, the Israeli State initiated "Operation Wrath of God," a Mossad-led campaign to assassinate Palestinian and Arab leaders affiliated with the BSO. The main target in this clandestine operation was Ali Hassan Salameh, reported to be the chief of operations for Black September. In pursuit of Salameh, Mossad agents

in Lillehammer, Norway shot a man over a dozen times, killing him as he walked with his pregnant girlfriend. The victim turned out to be an unaffiliated restaurant waiter who had been mistakenly identified by an informant as the target (Pedahzur, 2009, p. 45; Payne, 1990, p. 87). While the Mossad agents fled the failed assassination, they struck a teenage civilian with their car, killing him (Nasr, 1996, p. 73.). Six years later, Mossad agents tracked Salameh to Beirut, Lebanon and killed him with an IED. The explosion managed to kill not only Salameh, but also four secondary targets (working as bodyguards), and six unaffiliated civilians including foreign tourists (Payne, 1990, pp. 90–1). Eighteen additional people were injured (Nasr, 1996, p. 109). The two Mossad operations targeting Salameh resulted in thirty-two casualties, including thirteen fatalities.

The CIA's assassination of Baitullah Mehsud, a leader of the Pakistani Taliban, exemplifies the same trend. Mehsud was assassinated via a Predator-drone air strike in 2009 while sitting on a relative's roof. The attack killed Mehsud and eleven others, included eight secondary targets (one Taliban lieutenant and seven bodyguards), as well as three family members, including Mehsud's wife and two in-laws (Mayer, 2009).

In these three examples, peripheral civilians were killed or injured. The three assassination attempts examined managed to kill two out of three intended targets, twelve secondary-affiliated targets, eleven unaffiliated civilians, and resulted in the injury of at least twenty others. Within this history, assassinations carried out by States and NSAs constitute clear acts of terrorism as they produce unchecked, extra-judicial, lethal violence designed to intimidate and further political ends with inadequate regard for potential collateral damage. The status of the perpetrator as either a State or NSA is inconsequential in judging their actions under the label of terrorism. The usage of the term "terrorist" is a judgment of the action and its effect, not the ideology or national status of the perpetrator or victim. All three attacks were acts of terrorism, one by a NSA (the RAF), and two being State-sponsored acts by the Mossad and the CIA.

The IED attack by the leftist RAF requires additional examination in order to draw out an often cited, but none the less necessary point of conjecture — namely, State policy that frames revolutionary violence as illegitimate to deny NSAs the ability to utilize such means. Revolutionary movements, from the "left" and the "right," that adopt violent means are framed as irrational and extremist to deny such actors adequate evaluation in the public sphere. While this essay

argues that tactics such as assassination are “terrorism” regardless of the perpetrator, one witnesses the asymmetric framing of such actions as terrorism when NSAs challenge State authority. When such actions are the product of revolutionary NSAs, they deny the State what Max Weber calls the “monopoly of violence,” which frames State violence (i.e., capital punishment, war, etc.) as justifiable and normal, and call into question the State’s proscribed mandate to kill (Weber, 1946). Within Weber’s model, States maintain themselves as the sole legitimate producer of violent action. The State controls the process of labeling, maintaining a “monopoly” on legitimizing State violence, while condemning extra-national acts of violence (Wimmer, 2003, pp. 1–2, 4). By maintaining this monopoly, the State can automatically present its actions positively, while simultaneously condemning all actions by guerrillas, insurgents, vandals, separatists, saboteurs and all forces opposing the State’s solitary mandate as the producer and interpreter of violence. This duality relies on a process of ‘othering’ wherein by legitimizing its own actions, the State distances and alienates the actions of others (Nasser, 2003, pp. 4–5). Through this *othering* process, two similar actions can be understood differently dependent on the identities of the *perpetrator* versus the *victim* (Bahgat, 2003, p. 101).¹ Thus, a State properly maintaining a “monopoly of violence” can execute a prisoner or fire a cruise missile without such actions being labeled as murderous. Statecraft serves to aggressively defame NSA use of violence, since the uncritical presentation of such tactics could serve to call into question the State’s own mandate for legal and extra-legal lethal actions.

In the previous examples focused on assassination, the Israeli and American States used terrorist tactics to achieve a military goal, but terrorism can also be used by States as a tool of public policy, utilizing the fear of terrorist attack as grounds for the adoption of new laws and the creation of new security forces. Often the adoption of anti-terrorism laws and the building of anti-terrorist security forces are considered standard reactionist policy within what is termed a “legal reform strategy” or “criminal justice model” of counter terrorism (Miller, 2007, p. 4, 7; Pedahzur, & Ranstorp, 2001, p. 3, 5). This is not to say that States purposely allow for terrorism to

¹ For a further discussion of ‘othering’ as it is used to legitimize and delegitimize violence, see Gawdat Bahgat (2003), who describes the ‘othering’ process in relation to Iran’s understanding of the activities of Hezbollah, Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK) and unnamed Palestinian armed factions.

create such laws and security bodies, but that through the process of preventing, combating and reacting to acts of terrorism, States are able to advance specific national policies within a larger political campaign. Contemporary examples of policy creation can be seen in the United States' passage of the "USA PATRIOT Act" in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the United Kingdoms' passage of the Counter Terrorism Act of 2008 in response to the coordinated bombings of July 7, 2005. The creation of new security force bodies has also occurred in the same time period. Following the attacks of September 11, the United States created a number of new security bodies including the expansive Department of Homeland Security and the Information Awareness Office, under the direction of The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA, 2002: n.p.).

The lethal actions of States, especially those that occur outside of the venue of a publicly touted war have accelerated in the increasingly interlinked militarism of the post-9/11 "Global War on Terror." Notable offensive actions in 2011 include increasing US Predator drone strikes in Pakistan, US and NATO bombings of Libyan forces loyal to President Muammar Gaddafi, the extra-judicial assassination of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan, and the attempted assassination of Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen and al-Qaeda leader, residing in Yemen. The unending justification evoked within the jargon of a "Global War on Terror" was once again invoked in July 2011 when US forces expanded their Predator drone airstrikes into Somalia, targeting Islamist fighters linked to al-Shabab (Jaffe, & DeYoung, 2011; Reuters, 2011). In Summer 2011, drone strikes by US forces in Yemen became more frequent, with at least four such attacks between May and July 2011 (Mazzetti, 2011). On July 14, 2011 eight "suspected al-Qaeda militants" were killed when CIA/Joint Special Operations Command struck a police station (*ibid*). These actions, including the extra-judicial assassinations and drone strikes were presented to the global audience as *defensive*, *necessary* and within a legalistic framework of State action. Critically examined, these actions represent what is termed 'low-intensity warfare,' that the US has maintained throughout its Middle Eastern, Asian and African proxy wars. While the US has not declared war with Pakistan, Libya or Yemen, the State proudly reports its military involvement without the accompanying legal justification. This is not to say that an Act of Congress would legitimize such attacks, but by not bothering to manufacture the public performance of feigned legality, the State asserts its "right" to act in such a manner regardless of the laws of the nation or the

desires of the governed. These actions are regularized through State rhetoric, and defended as the construct of war is presented as the 'cost of doing business' with 'acceptable losses,' justified within a normalized state of perpetual war.

State Sponsorship of Terrorism: The Case of the US & Iran

In the preceding examples, State terrorism was direct. In the case of the Jesuits murders in El Salvador, the violence was carried out by a local actor under foreign direction. The Salvadorian paramilitary killings bridge categorical absolutes, demonstrating the fluidity of State involvement versus State sponsorship. This fluidity can also be seen in the 1973 overthrow of the Chilean government by elements of the CIA (Wright, 2007, p. 51). Beginning in 1963 and proceeding for at least 10 years after, the government of the US, through the CIA, cooperated with military juntas in Chile to plan and stage an overthrow of the democratically-elected, Marxist-aligned, Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende. The CIA utilized terrorist means such as the dissemination of propaganda and the sabotage of infrastructure, as well as orchestrated paramilitary violence through proxy forces such as the Fatherland and Liberty National Front (*Patria y Libertad*) (Gareau, 2004, pp. 71–2). Through numerous front groups, the CIA was able to assist in the sabotage of infrastructure as well as aid in the planning of assassinations (Senate, 2009, pp. 6–11). In the end, President Allende was killed in the coup d'état and replaced by Army General Augusto Pinochet, who would go on to commit large-scale acts of terrorism against the people of Chile (Gareau, 2004, pp. 71–2).

In the decade following the overthrow of Allende, the US and Soviet Union increased their presence within global proxy conflicts, largely through the sponsorship of foreign terrorist movements (Gregory, 2007, pp. 1015–6). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the US trained paramilitary leaders in terrorist methods such as sabotage, counter-insurgency, assassination and 'coercive interrogation' techniques (i.e., torture) at the School of the Americas (SOA), in Fort Benning, Georgia, which was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC) in 2001 (Wright, 2007, p. 25). Several other historically brutal regimes in Brazil, Argentina and Chile also received US support and training, including the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, which reportedly was involved in the killing of 1,000 people in 1975 (LSO, 1979, p. 7). In Nicaragua,

the CIA, with the permission of the US Department of State, carried out attacks on “soft targets” within the citizenry including the targeting of “agricultural cooperatives and health clinics” (Chomsky, 2001, p. 56). With the dual US-USSR power struggle of the Cold War, the US assisted Nicaraguan anti-Sandinista Contras, while the USSR aided Soviet-aligned radicals including Palestinian nationalists, Irish Republicans, US leftists and numerous “Third World,” quasi-Marxist movements including Colombia’s FARC, Bolivia’s ELN and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (Wright, 2007, p. 30). Some of these conflicts continue into the present day, while others have ceased to function after the withdrawal of Soviet support following the end of the Cold War. US support for violent NSAs was not solely restricted to Latin America. In the 1980s the CIA (aided by the Pakistani, Saudi Arabian and British intelligence services) recruited, funded, trained and armed the Islamist elements of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan (Gareau, 2004, pp. 22–26, 193; Gregory, 2007, pp. 1015–6; Chomsky, 2001, p. 79). Furthermore, in the 1990s under the Clinton administration, the US provided 80% of the weaponry used by Turkey to “ethnically cleanse” its Kurdish population (Chomsky, 2001, pp. 44–45).

In the years following the Cold War, numerous State sponsors of terrorism declined (Wilkinson, 2003, p. 125). Although State-sponsored terrorism has not decreased, the perpetrators have diversified, and while the joint powers of the US and Soviet Union reduced sponsorship, other nations such as Iran and China filled the vacuum. According to the Associated Press, in November 2009 the Iranian State passed legislation setting aside \$20 million in “support of militant groups opposing the West” (AP, 2009). The report states that a “committee” from the Intelligence and Foreign ministries is charged with allocating the funds, and it is alleged that at least some of the monies are to be dispersed to Hezbollah and Hamas. Iran’s sponsorship of violent non-State actors appears to be widespread, providing varying degrees of support to the transnational al-Qaeda movement, Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (al-Saheil, 2011; Hastert, 2007, p. 327, 328, 331–3; Bahgat, 2003, pp. 96–8, 101; Hoffman, 1999, p. 194; US Dept. of State, 2006). These groups receive support in a variety of ways. For al-Qaeda, Iran is said to have aided in the safe passage of affiliated persons through the country en route to Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as helped to forge travel documents (Hastert, 2007, p. 327, 331). The Iranian intelligence services are said to have cooperated with al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, by helping to maintain networks

for human smuggling (*ibid.*, p. 333). Evidence for direct support of al-Qaeda by Iran is ample as Paul Hastert concludes: “The evidence of *operational* cooperation between Al Qaeda and Iranian regime elements (Imad Mugniyeh working through the Revolutionary Guards) is clear” (*ibid.*).

Iran is often identified as the main sponsor of the Palestinian Islamist movements (Hamas and PIJ), though some within the Iranian State contest this classification through statements that attest their government provides *political* not *operational* nor *military* support (Hoffman, 1999, p. 194; Bahgat, 2003, p. 97).

One example of Iranian State sponsorship of foreign terrorist groups is Tehran’s attempt to deliver weapons to Palestinian factions via the Karine-A (Bahgat, 96). The Karine-A was a cargo ship that was intercepted 300 miles from Israel while sailing in the Red Sea. In what was called Operation Noah’s Ark, the ship was intercepted by a combined force of Israeli naval and air forces on January 3, 2002. Upon inspection, the ship was found to be carrying fifty tons (approximately 45,500 kilos) of weapons including machine guns, sniper rifles, short-range rockets, mortars, anti-tank mines, anti-personnel mines, anti-tank rockets and ammunition. Also included in the shipment was an estimated 2.5 tons of explosive material. The Israeli State reports the ship originated from Iran, and its operational planning coordinated by senior Hezbollah operative Imad Mugniyah (*ibid.*). The Karine-A demonstrates Iran’s expanded sphere of assistance, diversifying its aid from the Islamists of Hamas and PIJ to the nationalists of the Fatah-controlled Palestinian National Authority (*ibid.*, 97). In some cases, where Iran fails to provide support to the Palestinian factions, Syria fills in the gaps. Syrian support for the Palestinian armed movements has tended to align with “the most ‘rejectionist’ [factions]” who often lack support from Iran, including the leftists, nationalists and Ba’athist forces (Byman, 2005, p. 132). Syria also supports a variety of Palestinian nationalist, Islamist and leftist factions by allowing their exiled political leaders to operate with diplomatic protection in Damascus offices.

The Statecraft of Labeling & Legitimizing Tactics & ‘Ideologies’

States maintain great influence not only as the creators of violence, but also as the narrators of conflict. States possess the power to communicate with their citizenry through a variety of means, crafting explanative narratives through propaganda. The State’s choice to term a violent act as an act of *terrorism* is intentional, serving to add a value-laden label, to frame the action as opposing the aspirations of the State and its citizenry. Calling a bombing or assassination an act of *terrorism*, the State detracts political legitimacy from that action, framing it as *extremism*, an invalid method of Statecraft. In their analysis of political terrorism entitled “You Can’t Blow Up An Social Relationship: The Anarchist Case Against Terrorism,” the revolutionary, clandestine authors rhetorically respond to the Sydney Hilton Bombings, arguing that the labeling of actions as terrorism was designed to defame an enemy whose actions ran counter to a Statist agenda. The authors add, “Around the world the word ‘terrorism’ is used indiscriminately by politicians and police with the intention of arousing hostility to any phenomenon of resistance or preparedness for armed defense against their own terroristic acts” (LSO, 1979, p. 7). This point is unexceptional within the preceding analysis but noteworthy none the less. When a State-level entity (i.e., CIA sniper, air force bomber pilot, Governor of Texas, cop) assassinates an enemy, they do not call it a terrorist act; however, a bomb placed in a police station by separatists is destined to be called a *terrorist* attack by any State targeted. The State seeks to identify acts of political violence that it did not create, that fall outside of its “monopoly,” as *terrorism* (Weber, 1946; Wimmer, 2003, p. 4). Here rests the rhetorical power of State propaganda in its maintenance of the Weberian “monopoly of violence.” In terming extra-national acts of violence *terrorism*, the State inhibits justifiable political discourse concerning the legitimacy of the action. In other words, by calling a bombing an act of terrorism, the State creates a site wherein it becomes politically unfeasible to ask if the grievance of the bombers is genuine, and if the tactics chosen were proportional (Heradstveit & Pugh, 2003, p. 8).

This rhetorical Statist power to label can be used to delegitimize specific tactics of political violence, movement strategies, and even entire frameworks of analysis. In the case of anti-Statist analysis, such as that offered by contemporary anarchism, the totality of the

critique condemning violence and domination can be summarily dismissed through a flippant comparison between anarchism and contemporary jihadi movements. Whereas such a comparison would be absurdist satire to those with a grasp on anarchism's core tenants, one need not look far to find an example within the centrist, pro-business press. In an article contained in the neo-conservative publication *The Economist* (2005), the authors write:

The spasm of anarchist violence that was at its most convulsive in the 1880s and 1890s was felt, if indirectly, in every continent. It claimed hundreds of lives, including those of several heads of government, aroused widespread fear and prompted quantities of new laws and restrictions. But it passed. Jihadism is certainly not a lineal descendant of anarchism: far from it. Even so, the parallels between the anarchist bombings of the 19th century and the Islamist ones of today may be instructive.

The article proceeds to recount incidents of anarchist-lined violence throughout centuries past and, while not making an explicit comparison, weaves these examples alongside discussions of Osama Bin Laden and his jihadi ilk. The not-so-subtle function of this style of argumentation is to imply that all "violent ideologies" (i.e., Islamist jihadi, anarchism, neo-Nazism . . .) are the same, and that an ideology that challenges the State's claim as the sole producer of violence is automatically the product of sociopathic, incorrigible zealots. The State's strategy of rhetorically dismissing its opposition, in terms of analytical frameworks, ideologies, tactics and strategies, is integral to its larger assimilationist project. This process seeks to proscribe methods of protest (to the governed) that serve to fulfill the population's need to feel engaged, but fail to challenge the systemic inequalities ever-present in authoritarian Statehood. In this sense, the State's controlling of the language of "terrorism" and "violence" allows the regulation of dissent in a way that serves to quell the threat of insurrection, while preserving the veneer of potential political engagement by the governed.

Subjective ‘Othering’: Israel’s Operation Cast Lead

State strategy relies on a subjective and asymmetric labeling of terrorist methods. It relies on an attempted maintenance of the “monopoly of violence” and the *othering* of one’s enemies. These rhetorical processes are essential for State violence to exist within a legitimate framework. In order to discuss the process of *othering* and the use of labeling, the 2008–2009 Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip will be examined. Operation Cast Lead is the term given by the Israeli military to describe the war between Israel and the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip occurring during the final weeks of 2008 and into January 2009. Over the course of 23 days, between 1,200 and 1,400 Palestinians, and 13 Israelis, were killed. Tactically, the Israeli State relied on rapid air force bombardments targeting Palestinian infrastructure and Hamas-affiliated institutions, and artillery shelling from tank batteries stationed on the Gaza border. These attacks were done in conjunction with limited ground incursions from the east, north and south. The Palestinians fired barrages of mortars and homemade rockets to the north and east of the Gaza Strip, targeting Israeli civilian and military sites, and attempted to repel Israeli ground forces entering Gaza with small arms fire, IEDs and other guerilla-style tactics.

In a discussion of Operation Cast Lead, Henry Siegman (2009, p. 4) explains that within the Israeli-Palestinian context, a process of *othering* the enemy is carried out in familiar ways, writing: “when Jews target and kill innocent civilians to advance their national struggle, they are patriots. When their adversaries do so, they are terrorists.” Within the setting of Operation Cast Lead, one can look at the aerial bombing of Palestinian police buildings carried out in the first minutes of the air strikes, which resulted in the death of 136 to 248² members of the civil police and national security forces (Al-Haq, 2009; B’Tselem, 2009). These fatalities occurred when Israeli air strikes targeted a Palestinian police academy during its graduation ceremony, and subsequent bombings struck twenty-four additional police stations (UN, 2009). The Israeli State was able to carry out these strikes by reporting that the police stations were not housing

² This casualty range represents the divergent findings by the two sources surveyed — al-Haq, a Palestinian legal organization, and B’Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization. Both studies were conducted in 2009.

civil servants, but instead “harboring Hamas terrorists” (IDF, 2009). The official Israeli government report on their actions through Operation Cast Lead entitled, “The Operation In Gaza: 27 December 2008 – 18 January 2009: Factual and Legal Aspects,” argues at length that Hamas-affiliated security forces are not protected as other civilian police would be under the laws of armed conflict (*ibid*).

In the government report, numerous arguments are given which fall outside the scope of this study, but all are based on the understanding that as a NSA, Hamas forces hold a different distinction than police from a nation-State. Those killed in the initial air strikes and identified in Israeli figures as “Hamas security forces” or “Hamas terrorist operatives” include not only the Palestinian civil police (Civil Defense Service), but also members of the Executive Force, the National Security Force, the Preventative Security Force, the Intelligence Service, the Coastal Authority, the Naval Police, the Rapid Intervention Force, the Internal Security Service and the Security and Protection Force. Within the Israeli war narrative these causalities were legitimated as the Israeli State reported itself targeting “Hamas terrorists” not Palestinian *police*. As the only State-level entity in the Israeli-Gazan war, Israel was the sole provider of an accepted national narrative. Through its use of authoritative language Israel demonstrated that only States can carry out acts of war, whilst non-States carry out acts of terrorism (Pedahzur and Ranstorp, 2001, p. 4, 6). Furthermore, Israel argued that only States possess legal security forces, and thus Hamas-affiliated police could not be members of the legalized civil services because they lack employment from a nation-State (IDF, 2009). In the Gazan war, Israel was able to use its nation-Statehood to label the entirety of its opponents as terrorists since they were armed persons outside of an accepted national security body.

The Israeli-Gazan example shows localized *othering* for political ends, but the *othering* of entire regions also exists in State narratives. One example can be seen in the “axis of evil” labeling promoted by former US President George W. Bush. In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush described the “axis of evil” as consisting of Iran, Iraq and North Korea. Later, in May 2002, in a speech entitled “Beyond the Axis of Evil,” former US representative to the United Nations, John Bolton added the nations of Cuba, Libya and Syria to the list of countries identified in the “axis.” In a subsequent speech delivered in 2005, former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice coined the term “outposts of tyranny” to identify repressive States, and added to the

list the nations of Belarus, Zimbabwe and Myanmar/Burma. The decisions to define the opponents of US policy as aligned in an “axis” should be understood as a calculated action by the US to ‘other’ these nations, presenting the US as a liberal, peace-loving nation on one side, and describing the other nations pejoratively, linking them with themes of fundamentalism and barbarism. When the US included Iran in that list, it highlighted a disagreement felt between the US’s “War on Terrorism” and other international relations processes occurring between Iran and European allies of the US (Bahgat, 2003, p. 99). In this regard, the US sought to *isolate* Iran through its labeling, while some European elements sought to *engage*. Through the “axis of evil” argument the US was able to ‘other’ its entire multinational opposition, and use its national authority to identify all acts of violence carried out against it as acts of extremism supporting terrorism.

No Need to Explain Why: The Killing of Osama Bin Laden

The presumption of the State’s ‘legitimate’ wielding of lethal violence can once again be examined in President Obama’s speech to the nation that announced the killing of Osama Bin Laden. On May 1, 2011, President Obama stated that US forces were responsible for the killing of Bin Laden while he resided in Pakistan. In the only section of the speech to detail the attack itself, Obama (2011) stated:

Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound [where Osama Bin Laden was residing] in Abbottabad, Pakistan. A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability. No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties. After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.

Note that Obama states that American forces “took care to avoid civilian casualties,” and that after a “firefight” Bin Laden was killed. This description of events makes no attempt to justify the killing of Bin Laden, implying that such an act of violence required zero accountability or justification. It makes no mention of the four other individuals killed by US forces, nor of those who were injured including at least two female noncombatants who worked as maids (Garamone, 2011). It makes no mention of the violation of Pakistani

sovereignty, or the acknowledged use of an extra-judicial assassination. Subsequent interviews with US officials have plainly stated that the Navy SEAL team that killed Bin Laden (and the four other individuals) had no intention of capturing the al-Qaeda leader, despite the fact that he was unarmed (Shear, 2011). Initially, it was stated that Bin Laden “put up a fight” and “participated” in the “firefight,” and White House statements released the evening of the raid reported that Bin Laden was armed, attacked US troops, and used a female relative as a human shield (Mozgovaya, 2011). These reports, initially published as blow-by-blow observations, were later retracted. This report-retract illustrates the power of Statist narratives as the historical record is solely the product of the Department of Defense, and public is positioned as passive actors forced to either believe or reject the Statist narrative, despite the unavailability of alternative information.

In a globally televised, live speech, the President of the United States saw no need to try to persuade his audience why Bin Laden was killed rather than arrested. Instead, viewers are told that Bin Laden is dead and the US “took custody of his body” and “buried” it in the North Arabian Sea (Garamore, 2011). As an historical footnote, this announcement comes only one day after US-led NATO forces killed the son and three grandchildren of the besieged Libyan President, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. These cases of extra-judicial assassination exemplify the presumption that State violence is enshrined in the minds of the governed as warranted with unflinching necessity. Following the killing of Bin Laden, and provoked by accusations that such an action was “illegal,” Harold Koh, the Legal Advisor for the US Department of State, stated that such strikes were enshrined in perpetuity via the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists, which was rapidly adopted as law following the 9/11 attacks. The Act was passed into law three days after the 9/11 attacks on September 14, 2001. In House Joint Resolution 64, only Barbara Lee (D-CA) voted against the act and in the Senate, via Senate Joint Resolution 23, zero Senators opposed the Act. This reactionary legislation legalized nearly any military action taken by the US State in pursuit of the “Global War on Terror.” In its broad language, the Act states:

The President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist

attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons. (107th Congress, 2001)

Based in the broad legal framework of the 2001 Authorization, Koh (2011) argued that as long as the US continues the “Global War on Terror” against “al-Qaeda and its associated forces,” the State maintains the legal right to act within its “inherent right to self-defense” and thus can violently strike in sovereign nations at will. Koh continues this logic arguing that as the US is in a perpetual war, it maintains the perpetual right to use lethal force without predicating such attacks on a case-by-case legalistic framework. It should be noted that the Orwellian ‘perpetual war for perpetual peace’ is not simply a hyperbolic reference but actual US policy. On September 14, 2001, former President G.W. Bush (2001) issued Proclamation 7463, “Declaration of National Emergency by Reason of Certain Terrorist Attacks.” This ‘state of emergency’ was later extended twice by President Obama (2010) as recently as September 10, 2010. Thus the perpetual authorization argued by Koh is firmly situated in the federal actions of both the former President as well as his predecessor. When examining the legality of the Bin Laden assassination within this state of “armed conflict,” Koh (2011) states:

Some have argued that the use of lethal force against specific individuals fails to provide adequate process and thus constitutes unlawful extrajudicial killing. But a state that is engaged in an armed conflict or in legitimate self-defense is not required to provide targets with legal process before the state may use lethal force . . . Precision targeting of specific high-level belligerent leaders when acting in self-defense or during an armed conflict is not unlawful, and hence does not constitute “assassination.”

Thus Koh, as a spokesman for the State, asserts that the State maintains the mindset of being “at war” with an unrestricted pool of NSAs, that military force is “authorized” in the fight against these foes, and that such an authorization eliminates the need to provide additional oversight to specific acts of violence in pursuit of the larger cause.

Koh’s comments, taken as Statecraft legalistic rhetoric, demonstrate that those producing violence (i.e., assassination, air strikes,

proxy wars, 'low intensity' conflict) need not explain their actions, but simply report them to the governed after the fact. If one requires additional examples from the modern historical record, we can examine the framing of the Sudanese air strikes that killed scores of people in January 2009. In this attack, an unnamed air force (presumed to be Israeli) bombed a convoy of trucks reportedly delivering weapons to the Hamas government in Gaza. At least 39 people were killed, including smugglers and civilians (Harel, Melman, & Ravid, 2009; "Sudan convoy bombing," 2009).³ Once again, no hurried statement was issued mourning the loss of life, no State-level articulation of a justified defense. The dead were presumed to be deserving of their fate, and the operation was steeped in military legitimacy and explained by Israeli heads of State not as an act of preemptive aggression, but one of necessary self-defense. The air strikes in Sudan and the assassination of Osama Bin Laden share exemplary aspects of Statist methods of legitimizing violence. In both examples violent action is taken against a non-State enemy, framed as within the military toolbox of appropriate means, and therefore not requiring public justification. Neither President Obama nor the clandestine air force that attacked Sudan issued subsequent statements to convince the governed of the necessity of the attacks. On the contrary, the populace is urged to assume that since the act of violence came from a State source, it exists outside of a sphere of critique.

Conclusion

Terrorism is best understood as a collection of *tactics*, employed within a political *strategy* for a specified end. Terrorism can thus be adopted by actors of any size, including States and non-State actors. The history of nation-States is punctuated with examples of the use of terrorist means. From the European fascists of the 1940s to the US proxy wars in Latin America decades later, one can observe States employing terrorist means. Tactics such as assassination are often employed by States in terrorist attacks as well as by non-States in similar actions. Not only do nations use terrorist

³ Though most fatality reports from Western media cluster around 39–41 deaths, in a report to the national Parliament, Sudanese Defense Minister Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein stated, "119 people were killed; among them were 56 smugglers and 63 smuggled persons from Ethiopian, Somali and other nationalities" (Reuters, 2009).

means themselves, they often sponsor others to employ these means in foreign theatres within the service of the sponsoring State. The power of State violence is derived not only from the State's ability to "monopolize" the production of such attacks, but also its ability to rhetorically legitimize and delegitimize similar actions carried out by it and others.

Within the modern academic discourse surrounding Terrorism Studies, the era of violence from around 1880 to the 1920s is characterized as the "anarchist wave of terrorism," namely from actions such as the assassination of President McKinley in 1901 and attacks of groups such as Russia's *Narodnaya Volya* (The People's Will/Freedom) who killed Tsar Alexander II in 1881 (Rapoport, 2002). During this time anarchist and other leftist movements were responsible for attacks targeting politicians, capitalists, police and others. If we are to define an era by an actor's use of extra-judicial assassination and violence, are we to then call the 2010s the Era of the Predator Drone, the Period of the Proxy War, or possibly the Wave of Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace?

The power of the nation-State extends far beyond its logistical support provided to violent NSAs — allowing sovereigns to narrate and conclude what constitutes terrorism, authoritatively label entire eras of history, and critically defame complete intellectual histories that challenge their authority. This act of Statecraft is integral to a policy that allows for the conducting of foreign wars, while simultaneously condemning extra-legal violence produced outside of the State's realm of control. Therefore, it would appear as if the greatest power of the sovereign nation-State is neither its ability to assassinate enemies, nor its ability to send weapons to its allies, but rather its ability to exude propaganda-laden messaging that serves to label its allies as defenders of freedom, and its enemies as freedom-hating terrorists.

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