

***Terrorism & Biology:
The Reciprocal Signalling Cascade Between State and Non-State Actors
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A discussion paper for the Pugwash Conference, Seoul, Korea October 2004

The intent of this paper is **i**) to reclaim the language used in “terrorism” discourse in order that terrorism on a global scale be resituated as an activity carried out predominantly by State actors and **ii**) to illustrate that a reciprocal relationship exists between State actors and non-State actors in maintaining the justification of the massive terrorist methods by the State.

The Lexicon of Terrorism.

Terrorism and the so-called “War on Terror” have come to dominate the media and have had profound impacts on legislation, governance, policing and security measures around the world. As articulated by scholars such as Michael Ignatieff¹, the dominant representation of terrorism follows from one early usage in which a terrorist is “a member of a clandestine or expatriate organization aiming to coerce an established government by acts of violence against it or its subjects.”² This usage, exemplified in Ignatieff’s article, precludes State activities as “terrorist” in nature (although he allows for human right violations by states) and further delegitimizes violent resistance to state “terrorism”. Returning to Ignatieff in his talk based on his Gifford lectures, for example, he states: “A terrorist targets non-combatant civilians to achieve a political goal. Those who undertake political actions that target civilians are terrorists.” In his analysis referring to Palestinian-Israel conflict, he does not drift beyond the notion that terrorists are a Palestinian phenomenon. So, as he states “Israeli defense forces defending small clusters of civilians in places where the only possibility, once you’ve put those settlers in, is endless conflict, human rights violations, death, and horror -- I still believe that settlers are entitled to the Geneva Convention protections on civilian immunity,”. And while he grants the possibility that the violence of armed “settlers” may preclude them from protection as civilians, they are never referred to as terrorists. However, more fundamentally, the military forces in the occupied territories responsible for the violent maintenance and expansion of the occupation are not referred to in the context of terrorism.

It is the latter aspect that requires a fundamental shift in discussion, specifically, the notion that State actors/forces are principally responsible for terrorism. Returning to Ignatieff’s usage that “A terrorist targets non-combatant civilians to achieve a political goal.” This point is consistent with the Oxford Dictionary’s generalized articulation “Terrorism: **2. gen.** A policy intended to strike with terror those against whom it is adopted; the employment of methods of intimidation; the fact of terrorizing or condition of being terrorized.” So, considering Gaza and the West Bank, data reveals that the most vulnerable population in those regions, children, have been subject to a disproportionate level of violence³. Importantly, murder of children in homes and during school by Israeli military forces in the documented absence of open conflict

¹ Ignatieff, M. *The Lesser Evil: Hard Choices in the War on Terror*. Gifford Lecture

² Oxford English Dictionary

³ Graff, J. A. Palestinian Children and Israeli State Violence; Mail and Guardian (South Africa) Death and disorientation for children of Gaza 17 Sept. 2004; B’Tselem The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories www.btselem.org

represent a profound method of terrorizing the Palestinian population. The psychological effects on Palestinian children and women of these policies have been well documented⁴⁵⁶, and point to the long term societal consequences of such terrorist activities .

Projecting the use terror by (State) actors with overwhelming access to force leads one to reconsider the use of “terrorism” as being an activity used principally on a global scale by States. These large-scale “methods of intimidation” and “polic[ies] intended to strike with terror” have been well documented. Adopting the system worked out in South East Asia by the U.S., to which I will return, the military dictatorships which ruled Guatemala after the overthrow in 1956 of the democratically elected Arbenz government, conducted a massive campaign of oppression against the rural population in that country. As documented in detail in the Historical Clarification Commission Report, a systematic policy of disappearances, torture and destruction of entire villages was used to suppress any democratic aspirations or even the human rights of the (mostly) indigenous population. Over 200,000 persons were identified as having been disappeared or murdered, 93% by the Guatemalan military or their associated paramilitary forces. As was usual throughout Latin America during this period, bodies of those tortured and murdered were often purposefully returned to their communities in order to further terrorize the living population. Guatemala is further illustrative of the overwhelming and disproportionate level of violence available to the State in order to terrorize the population.

The Apartheid system in South Africa represents a variation of the means of terrorism at the disposal of States. Here a social structure was imposed resulting in the intimidation of 30 million South Africans by the “elected” white-only South African Government, the latter derived from a minority population of less than 5 million white South Africans. It was clearly manifested by overt and covert military and paramilitary means and designed specifically to intimidate the majority population to achieve and maintain political, economic, military and cultural dominance. “Apartheid government” rather than some variation of “Terrorist regime” was almost universally applied to the white South African Government. In contrast, the considerably weaker forces attempting to overthrow this regime, such as the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress, were deemed terrorist entities. Indeed, that the government of South Africa also instituted a system of occupation and intimidation in neighboring Namibia (formally South-West Africa) as well as coordinating, supplying and participating in an irregular war against the elected Angolan government did not elicit the term “terrorist” for the South African government or its activities.

As is well known, similar conditions to those outlined for Guatemala have been regular fare throughout Latin America for several centuries, the 1960 to 1990’s representing one particular crescendo in an overall state of terrorism. These examples of “internal State terrorism” are, however, typically described in the context of oppression, military dictatorships and human

⁴ Thabet AA, Abed Y, Vostanis P. Emotional problems in Palestinian children living in a war zone: a cross-sectional study. *Lancet* 2002;359:1801–4.;

⁵ Miller T, El-Masri M, Allodi F, Quota S. Emotional and behavioural problems and trauma exposure of school-aged Palestinian children in Gaza: some preliminary findings, *Medicine. Conflict and Survival* 1999;15:368 –78.

⁶ Graff J. A., Abdoell M. Palestinian children and Israeli state violence. Toronto: Near East Cultural and Education Foundation of Canada; 1991.

rights violations. The operational definition of terrorism is, however, not applied to the State actors in the mainstream description of these systems of overt, coercive violence. Similarly, “external State terrorism” accounts for a body count orders of magnitude greater than the terrorism inflicted by “extreme revolutionary groups”. So, for example, coincident with the methods applied in Guatemala, the people of Vietnam were intimidated on a massive scale by the overwhelming force applied by an external state actor, the United States. Terrorizing of the rural population in order to coerce them to “migrate” to “safe centres” was systematically instituted. Both ground forces and air forces, massively equipped with sophisticated military means of violence, routinely terrorized an essentially undefended population. These actions produced an extreme ratio of deaths, relative even to that in Guatemala; where more than 2 million Vietnamese were killed compared to the 58,000 personnel in the US forces. Despite the massive use of force coercing and intimidating the people of Vietnam, no US military personnel let alone administration officials, have been referred to as “terrorists”. Yet, as well documented, the methods employed by these forces were, in fact, a massive application of the methods of terrorism.

While, methods of suppression of acknowledgement and discussion of large-scale State terrorist activities is beyond the scope of this paper, previous examples provide some elements which will serve an introduction to the relationship between State and non-/State terrorism. Hermann Goering alluded to this clearly during the Nuremberg Trials in an off-the-record statement where he said:

“But after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.”⁷

Naomi Klein in a recent article in the Guardian Weekly⁸ pursued this notion when she called the current methods of State terrorism by the US (Bush) and Russian (Putin) Administrations the “Likudisation of the world”, referring to the tactics of Ariel Sharon of Israel. Following from the “Goering’s Doctrine” in which the starting point is that Palestinians “are actually only interested in the annihilation of Israel”, it follows that all acts by the State are in self-defense and opposition to State methods makes one an enemy also. Use of this doctrine conveniently absolves these States, who each employ overwhelming military power, of the application of the term “terrorism” to their activities despite the demonstrable coercive effects and intimidation on the target populations.

Reciprocal Signalling Cascades and Terrorism

I have attempted above to develop the notion that discourse on terrorism does not remotely reflect the global nature of these coercive activities and their usage as primarily a State activity.

⁷ www.snopes.com/quotes/goering.htm

⁸ The Guardian Weekly Vol 171 No. 13 page 3.

From the last examples in the previous section, I wish to pursue a mechanism which usefully describes the need for non-State terrorists for the manifestation of the considerably more violent (in terms of scale) State terrorism.

In this model, I propose that a reciprocal relationship exists between State and non-State actors in manifesting their own “brands” of terrorism. Specifically, I propose that overwhelming, massive State terrorism is dependent on the relatively small scale terrorism perpetrated by non-State actors. This State-directed terrorism further provides the impetus for recruitment to and operations of small-scale non-State terrorist organizations.

I would like to consider, then, how this reciprocal signalling system can serve as a framework to understand “the War on Terrorism” and restrict my analysis to the US case given the focus of this workshop. I propose that the inductive signal in the “terrorist context” originates with State policy. As has been discussed in detail since the events in New York City on September 11, 2001, an apparent long term geopolitical goal of the US appears to be control of the resources in Eurasia. This goal was laid out in considerable detail by former Secretary of State Zbigniew Brzezinski in 1997 in his book *The Grand Chessboard - American Primacy And It's Geostrategic Imperatives*.⁹ Brzezinski points out the massive subterranean wealth of the Eurasia, most of which remains undeveloped, as well as presence of the largest populations of the world. In his opinion, control of the exploitation of these resources relies on the control of specific subregions within Eurasia, specifically a number of the independent states of the former Soviet Union and, especially, Afghanistan.

Sticking to theme of this workshop, I propose that the initial signal originates in series of State-organized events in 1979 which lead directly to the “War on Terror”. As articulated in Brzezinski’s analysis described above, the initial “signal” is desire access to and control of resources in a major part of Asia and mechanistically involves the destabilization of the principle US adversary, the USSR. As Brzezinski has articulated, the tools for this destabilization included the organization of an irregular fighting force meant to draw the Soviet Union into a protracted war (Russia’s “Vietnam” as Brzezinski suggested to President Carter¹⁰) in Afghanistan (note that this strategy was not reactive to the Soviet invasion but proactive in drawing the Soviet to invade). This force of Muslim “fundamentalists” became highly trained to operate with the most sophisticated weaponry supplied by various means from the US. For example, the US-manufactured mobile “Stinger” missile system was central to this operation, effectively neutralizing the most important Soviet weapon in the region, their Hind helicopter gunship¹¹. Overall, this operation became the most highly funded CIA operation ever organized. As is well known, this trained group came to dominate Afghanistan. Importantly, while the leaders of the group supposedly responsible for the 9-11 attacks were not among these US-trained fighters, this region remained a centre for terrorist activities directed towards the US.

Thus, the organization and training of these terrorist groups had the benefit **i**) initially of

⁹ Brzezinski, Zbigniew (1997) *The Grand Chessboard - American Primacy And It's Geostrategic Imperatives*," Basic Books

¹⁰ Brigniew, Z. The CIA’s Intervention in Afghanistan in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 15-21 July 1998

¹¹ Johnson, C The Largest Covert Operation in CIA History at the Center of History and New Media, George Mason University <http://hnn.us>

destabilizing the Soviet Union and **ii**) subsequently providing the basis upon which the US later invaded Afghanistan and Iraq as well as developing forward military bases in previously inaccessible regions. Borrowing from John McMurtry's analysis of the 9-11 wars¹² where he posits the question of "who benefits" from the events of 9-11, we observe that the principle beneficiaries of the terrorist activities originating in this region and initially organized by the US were US administrations (Reagan and Bush Jr.). For the latter administration (the subject of this workshop), the "security state" agenda articulated prior to 2000 Presidential election was in fact implemented. Close examination of this agenda supports the notion that some sort of precipitating event (a "new Pearl Harbor") was considered as mechanism for rapid implementation of this domestic and foreign policy scheme.

Turning then to the basis of the misnamed "War *On* Terrorism", the tactical aspects were outlined in a number of reports originating at the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). Principle among these is "Rebuilding America's Defenses".¹³ In the principle conclusion on page IV it states the US should:

"REPOSITION U.S. FORCES to respond to 21st century strategic realities by shifting permanently-based forces to Southeast Europe and Southeast Asia, and by changing naval deployment patterns to reflect growing U.S. strategic concerns in East Asia."

As members of this group are well aware, repositioning of these forces has taken place with the introduction of a number of features also outlined directly in this report. So, for example, the authors wish to:

"DEVELOP AND DEPLOY GLOBAL MISSILE DEFENSES to defend the American homeland and American allies, and to provide a secure basis for U.S. power projection around the world."

The point here is to not detail the list of policy initiatives which have arisen following the installation of the authors of this report into the administration of the US government, but rather to discuss how terrorism by non-state actors propelled these initiatives forward, providing a basis for a massive State terrorist response. Indeed, the very same document suggests that:

"the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event – like a new Pearl Harbor."

Such a catalyzing event occurred in New York City on the morning of September 11, 2001, a year after the release of the PNAC report. The results of the horrific attacks in New York were **i**) a massive violent response which directly terrorized the populations of Afghanistan and Iraq, **ii**) death of more than 10 times as many civilians as died in New York, and **iii**) maintenance of both of these countries in a state of chaos, where viable security and a functioning government are not possible. Furthermore, these events propelled an otherwise unlikely massive budget

¹² McMurtry, J. Understanding 9-11 and the 9-11 Wars. <http://scienceforpeace.sa.utoronto.ca>

¹³ Project for the New American Century Report: Rebuilding America Defenses at www.newamericancentury.org

increase for the US military and facilitated the introduction of “security” legislation (The Patriot Act) that, under normal circumstances, would never have been seriously considered in the US Congress in the absence of these events.

While a relatively straightforward task in the case of Afghanistan, linking Iraq to the terrorist attacks in the US was the immediate preoccupation of the Bush administration¹⁴. Here, then represents the sort of reciprocal signal generated from the attacks in New York- producing conditions in which the people of the US feel directly threatened. The well documented shift of public belief that Iraq was intimately involved in the events of September 11, 2001, despite evidence to the contrary and now totally discredited, also strongly supports the Goering “patriotism” doctrine. The routine issuance of terrorist alerts in the US serves as one of the many obvious mechanisms of terrorizing the population by the State.

Despite the public predictions of the invaders being welcomed as liberators, more sober analysis suggested that the illegal occupation of Iraq, privatization of its assets, and ongoing terrorization of its population would be met with internal Iraqi resistance. This condition precisely creates the condition of maintaining the terrorist activities (occupation) by the State (US) since the insurgency can be presented as terrorist activities against the “Iraqi liberators” and are easily portrayed as such given the methods available to the insurgents. To counter these terrorists, harsher methods by the State actors can now be employed which further terrorizes the population under occupation. One of these is the traditional method alluded to above for Guatemala in which individuals are incarcerated without charge, communication, medical or legal access, tortured for a period of time and released back into the population. As summarized by Jim Lobe¹⁵ and revealed in, for example, the Los Angeles Times¹⁶ and the Guardian¹⁷, this system of incarceration currently detains and abuses/tortures thousands individuals who often return to their communities. This system has the two-fold effect of terrorizing the population into which these tortured prisoners are released as well as providing the impetus for retaliation following the incarceration.

Would State actors (terrorists) actually promote small-scale terrorist activities in order to provide a “signal” for the massive State reciprocal response? An agency charged with this role has been revealed in the US. As was reported by William Arkin¹⁸, John Pilger¹⁹ and discussed by the Federation of American Scientists (www.fas.org). The Proactive Preemptive Operations Group (P2OG) has the mandate to conduct the “War on Terror” with “off the book” operations which will incite small terrorist groups into action. Further supporting the notion that States actors attempt to incite small-scale terrorist activities, John Pilger also reports that Bush advisor Condoleezza Rice asked members of the National Security Council to “to think about 'how do you capitalise on these opportunities'”, referring to the September 11, 2001 attacks.

¹⁴ for example see Woodward, Bob (2004) *Plan of Attack*. Simon & Schuster

¹⁵ Lobe, J. (2004) *Human Dignity, Crazy Mike and Indian Country* at www.antiwar.com/lobe/?articleid=3650

¹⁶ www.oaklandtribune.com/Stories/0,1413,82%257E1865%257E2416361,00.html

¹⁷ observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,1237589,00.html

¹⁸ Arkin, W., *The Secret War* 27 October 2002 Los Angeles Times

¹⁹ Pilger, J., *America’s Bid for Global Dominance* *The New Statesman* December 12, 2002

Thus, I return to the model in which State actors, conducting large-scale terrorist activities, depend on the presence of a certain level of terrorism performed on a significantly small scale (“recreational” or “retail” terrorism). The State then produces a response which is amplified by orders of magnitude (“wholesale” terrorism) through State actions. It answers in the affirmative the question posed by the PNAC “Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?” I propose that the so called “War on Terrorism” is shaping fundamentally the century along the lines of an oppressive security state. I suggest further that this “shaping” **i)** includes framing the limits of “terrorism” discourse and **ii)** that the State benefits from low levels of terrorist activities which, once amplified through its media system, justifies “wholesale” terrorist activities of the State but suppresses any notion that these actions are terrorist in nature.