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Security Council (SC)

# Research Report

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Topic 2: Developing a framework to actively combat acts of terrorism and threats to international security.



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## Introduction

This research report will discuss the definitions of terror, different types of terror as well as the underlying causes of what enables a human to commit acts of horror. Discussions about the definition of terror are an invitation for critical thought and reflection and are not meant to condone any acts of violence. Terrorism is a global phenomenon, and the scope of this research report is limited to only a few examples. This report should therefore be seen as an introduction to the topic that invites further research into terror organizations and its ambiguities.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Terror** and, to a greater extent, **terrorism** are disputed terms. Both originate from the French *terreur* and the Latin *terror*, translating to “*the state of being greatly frightened*” as well as “*the cause of that state*”<sup>1</sup>. An individual can experience terror as a sensation, and this appears to be a much less disputed fact. However, when it comes to defining the *cause* and classifying it as an **act of terrorism**, there is no widely recognized definition. In the book *Harry's Game* written by Gerald Seymour about the Northern Ireland Conflict, it is written: “*one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.*”<sup>2</sup> The extent to which this is true is debatable. On the one hand, to cause terror can be a side effect of legitimate military action, thus fighting for freedom can be interpreted as terror. On the other, the methods with which one ‘fights for freedom’ is what characterizes it as terror. The closest thing to an internationally agreed upon definition only exists for transnational terrorism, which requires the presence of all three “*key elements*”<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) “*the perpetration of a criminal act (such as murder, kidnapping, hostage-taking, arson, and so on), or threatening such an act*”: All these are sure to create terror, especially to the victims or potential victims. But one could ask the question if war is not murder? This is discussed in an article<sup>4</sup> in which there is a distinction between lawful and unlawful killing. The Geneva Convention defined a set of rules of when it is lawful to kill. It is not murder for a soldier to kill a soldier, but it is murder to kill a surrendering soldier. However, one could argue that any killing, whether lawful or unlawful, creates terror, it's just not defined as *terrorism*. This supports the interpretation that “*one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter*”, because the only difference between the two is the “un-“ in front of “lawful”.
- 2) “*the intent to spread fear among the population (which would generally entail the creation of public danger) or directly or indirectly coerce a national or international authority to take some action, or to refrain from taking it*”: It is legally problematic to discuss intent. In criminal law, this requires direct evidence, such as a confession, or circumstantial evidence, in which it can be inferred from other actions that a criminal act was intentional<sup>5</sup>. This also raises the question of morality versus legality. An illegal

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<sup>1</sup> <https://blog.oup.com/2018/12/evolution-of-terror/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.monash.edu/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/563823/Anne-Aly-paper.pdf](https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/563823/Anne-Aly-paper.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-4/key-issues/defining-terrorism.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://science.howstuffworks.com/is-war-murder.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.shouselaw.com/ca/blog/how-to-prove-intent-in-court/>

act might be viewed as morally justifiable by the perpetrator. The opposite is also true. This further supports the claim that terrorism is relative, because if “*spreading fear*” was a side effect of an action viewed as necessary, it might not be viewed as terrorism by the perpetrator.

- 3) “*when the act involves a transnational element*”: This is a requirement because these definitions only cover transnational terrorism. There is no intentionally agreed upon definition of terrorism in general. This means that domestic terrorism or civil war atrocities are not covered by these definitions.

One could argue that it is not the legal definition of terrorism that is relevant for real world issues. It is the perception of terror. If one party commits acts that are legal under international law, and the victim experiences terror, it might incite the victim to commit acts that are recognized as terror by the perpetrator. This section urges reflection about what is considered terrorism.

**Lone wolves** in relation to terrorism are terrorists who act individually. They are self-enabled, plan their terroristic acts alone and are not directed by any foreign power or organization<sup>6</sup>. This makes lone wolf terrorism much harder to predict than organized terrorism. According to a study by Mark Hamm and Ramon Spaaj for the Department of Justice<sup>7</sup>, lone wolf terrorists experience a so-called *triggering event*, in which radicalization culminates and leads to an attack. The study also defines the *loci of radicalization*, meaning the forum in which the individual has been radicalized to an extent to which he or she is willing to commit acts of terroristic violence. Such forums include the workplace, the internet, and the media. The number of lone wolf terrorist incidents has been increasing since around 2014, with the far-right terrorism seeing a 320% increase in Western Europe, Oceania and North America<sup>8</sup>.

**International Security** is not strictly defined, since security itself is somewhat vague. In an article for the United Nations, national security is defined as “*the preservation of the norms, rules, institutions and values of society*”. With vastly different norms around the world, it follows that international security is difficult to maintain. Still, international security entails cooperation between countries in maintaining national security<sup>9</sup>. Due to globalization, few member nations are fully isolated, and thus the vast majority of member nations must collaborate with others to ensure their own domestic security.

## Background Information

Historically, acts of terrorism have been associated with political, religious and ideological motivations.

An example of political terrorism is from the conflict known as the Troubles, which took place between the 1960s and 1998 in Northern Ireland. A central event in this fight

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=px-lhuA1ZgA>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/248691.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/increase-in-self-radicalised-lone-wolf-attackers-2019-global-terrorism-index/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/national-security-versus-global-security>

for Northern Ireland's independence from the United Kingdom was Bloody Sunday. What started as a peaceful protest on January 30, 1972, advocating for civil rights, turned into a violent clash between protesters and British parachute regiment troops. An order to shoot at the protesters was given, which left 14 dead and 13 wounded. This sparked rage amongst the people of Northern Ireland<sup>10</sup>. It also attracted support for the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), a faction of the Irish Republic Army (IRA), who saw themselves as the legitimate army of the Irish people, according to its Green Book<sup>11</sup>. This document also stated that the IRA felt morally justified in forcing the Northern Irish independence through violent measures. In retaliation for Bloody Sunday, the Official IRA, another faction of the IRA, set off a car bomb containing 130kg of explosives outside the Headquarters of the Parachute Regiment in Aldershot on February 22, 1972. Car bombs were later heavily used by the PIRA. They are characterized by being indiscriminate and imprecise, which showed in the bombing in 1972 where only civilians were killed. An IRA spokesman would later express his regret of the situation, saying that the targets were "*officers responsible for the Derry outrages.*"<sup>12</sup> On the March 8, 1973, the PIRA would set off bombs in Central London, claiming one life and injuring 240. This was in an effort to pressure the British Government to give Northern Ireland independence. According to the definition from the section above, both bombings would fulfil the first two criteria, and they had the intention of pressuring action from the Government, hence they qualify as terrorism. However, one could argue that Bloody Sunday was also terroristic in nature or at least was a terrorizing event that sparked rage. Prime Minister Tony Blair would later delegitimize the actions of the British troops on Bloody Sunday and apologize for the event<sup>13</sup>. In this sense, terrorism originated from a feeling of terror.

Arguably, few countries have more experience fighting religiously enabled terrorism than Israel. In a research paper published in 2003<sup>14</sup>, Bruce Hoffman discusses specifically the modern take on terrorism: the suicide vest. Invented in Lebanon in 1983, suicide bombing as a concept is efficient, because it eliminates the step of escape. Suicide vests specifically are easily disguised. The paper describes how nails, bolts and metal scraps are packaged with the explosive device, such that upon triggering the device, the scraps turn into projectiles that pierce its victims. Furthermore, suicide bombers can be placed inside buses to incite a chain reaction with the gasoline in fuel tanks. Suicide bombings can occur anywhere at any time, which is exactly their purpose, to spread uncertainty and fear among a population. This is covered in the second criteria for terrorism above. According to the paper, there is a false sentiment that suicide bombing is necessarily rooted in desperation. In fact, Israeli journalist Ronni Shaked points out that Hamas' leadership is well educated, and that suicide bombing is seen as a prestigious death. Another daunting observation made by surviving victims of suicide bombings in Israel is, that perpetrators appear to be smiling upon entering their soon-to-be crime scene. This is described as the "*smile of joy*", i.e. the joy of impending martyrdom. Martyrdom in Islamic belief relates to dying for god's cause, also referred to as

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGo17SIvMRM>

<sup>11</sup> [https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira\\_green\\_book.htm](https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira_green_book.htm)

<sup>12</sup> <https://theparachuteregimentalassociation.com/hermes/an-overdue-memorial/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bloody-Sunday-Northern-Ireland-1972>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP1187.html>

Jihad. This is the cause for the betterment of humanity<sup>15</sup>. This definition is greatly up to interpretation. It might be interpreted as a justification and glorification of dying as a martyr. However, according to strict reading of the Islamic holy texts, this interpretation is wrong. Islam forbids the killing of oneself and of “*non-aggressive*” peoples, i.e. civilians. Still, Islam is used to justify suicide bombings in Israel, and suicide bombers have been coerced into believing that they serve the betterment of humanity, when in reality their actions will send them to hell, according to Islamic teachings<sup>16</sup>. So how do groups such as Hamas convince men and women to blow themselves to pieces? One possibility is that groups such as Hamas are extremely efficient at channelling the resentment from suffering towards specific targets, such as Israeli civilians. When the Israeli Defence Forces respond militarily, they risk creating more resentment, thus increasing the terror threat. As one Dennis Zinn points out in the research paper: “*Yes, there is a drop-off [in suicide bombings]. When you have bombs coming down on your heads, you can't carry out planning and suicide attacks. But that doesn't take away their motivation. It only increases it.*”

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The **European Union** currently lists sanctions against the **Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh)** and **al-Qaeda**, operating mainly in Iraq and Syria but has also inspired and orchestrated attacks abroad<sup>17</sup>, as well as **Hamas** and the **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**, who were put on the list after the October 7 attacks in Israel. Sanctions include travel bans, asset freezes, and “*prohibition on making funds or economic resources available*” to said organizations. Furthermore, the **United States** recognizes the Lebanese paramilitary group **Hezbollah** as a terrorist organization<sup>18</sup>.

**Israel's General Security Service (Shin Bet)** is responsible for collecting intelligence regarding the domestic security of Israel<sup>19</sup>, and has worked alongside members of the **Israeli Defence Force** in counter-terrorism operations in the West Bank<sup>20</sup>. The organization has previously been under scrutiny for its methods of conduct. In the 1980's, it had beaten two detained Palestinians to death after they allegedly hijacked a bus.

**Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** is the main foreign intelligence collection body of the United States of America, collecting intelligence on matters “*ranging from counterintelligence to counterterrorism.*”<sup>21</sup> A team of **Navy SEALs** assassinated al-Qaeda leader Osama bin-Laden, who orchestrated the terror attack on September 11<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrJZ05ae6SY>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.alislam.org/question/is-suicide-allowed-in-islam/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/isil.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.state.gov/policy-issues/countering-terrorism/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intelligence-international-relations/France#ref42307>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/11/20/israeli-forces-continue-counterterrorism-operations-in-the-west-bank/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/about/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2239558/fall-of-a-tyrant-the-death-of-osama-bin-laden/>

## Relevant UN Resolutions

**Security Council Resolution 2482<sup>23</sup>:** Adopted on July 19, 2019, this resolution had a similar objective as to this research report, namely, to address “*threats international peace and security caused by international terrorism and organized crime.*” The resolution condemns terror organizations such as al-Qaeda and ISIL as well as urging Member Nations to increase their efforts to combat transnational terrorism. It also addresses the need to stop illicit arms trade, which is a main enabler of terrorist groups.

**General Assembly Resolution 71/291<sup>24</sup>:** On June 15, 2017, the General Assembly passed this resolution, which established the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. According to its page, this organization works to facilitate corporation between the counter-terrorist efforts of Member Nations<sup>25</sup>.

**Security Council Resolution 2178<sup>26</sup>:** This resolution established on September 24, 2014, that Member Nations should “*intensify and accelerate the exchange of operational information regarding actions or movements of terrorist networks*” and further established that “*terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality or civilization.*”

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

One attempt to crack down on global terrorism, is the organization The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), established in 1989, which initially was responsible for preventing money laundering and corruption. After the 9/11 attacks, its responsibilities were extended to include counter terrorism. Their initiatives primarily consist of the 40 recommendations, which are policy recommendations for its members<sup>27</sup>. There has been concern, however, that these recommendations do more harm than good. If a country is compliant with the recommendations, it gains a “*high grade*”, and its economy appears secure and open to investment. The opposite is also true. Furthermore, the recommendations make it more difficult to be a non-governmental organization (NGO). In some cases, FATF members have shut down NGOs in order to comply with the recommendations, and in order to gain a “*high grade*”. One such example is from India, where 4000 NGOs were shut down. A developing country who chooses not to comply would also risk losing the engagement of foreign NGOs<sup>28</sup>. Although this web of intelligence is in theory effective at combatting terrorism and cutting down money laundering schemes, it fails to consider the root of terrorism: desperation. One might consider if shutting down NGOs ends up creating more desperation. One could also argue that, in order to fight desperation and thus terrorism, governments should create an NGO-friendly environment.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n19/224/98/pdf/n1922498.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n17/172/58/pdf/n1717258.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n14/547/98/pdf/n1454798.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Fatfrecommendations/Fatf-recommendations.html>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pj6TyN35GIE>

In an effort to combat online radicalization, which could lead to acts of terrorism, the EU's *Regulation on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online*<sup>29</sup>, which entered into effect on June 7, 2022, demands that 'hosting service providers' remove radical content online no later than 1 hour after it being reported. According to the regulation, such content is defined as: "*material that incites or solicits someone to commit, or to contribute to the commission of, terrorist offences, solicits someone to participate in activities of a terrorist group, or glorifies terrorist activities including by disseminating material depicting a terrorist attack.*" An article on the Royal United Services Institute, a think tank, raises concerns of the effectiveness of such regulation<sup>30</sup>. The regulation fails to take into consideration other means of communication that are not accessible to the public. Increasing online surveillance might also cause perpetrators to move their communications to more secure and encrypted sites, thus making radicalization harder to monitor.

## Possible Solutions

American philosopher Noam Chomsky argues<sup>31</sup> that the modern approach to fight terrorism is flawed. He argues that the United States and the United Kingdom have acted in a manner that increases the threat of terror – whilst fighting terror. This is because Mr. Chomsky argues that the definition of terror is skewed to only applying to 'others', thus inhibiting reflection on the terroristic characteristics of one's own actions:

- When the United States invaded Iraq as retaliation for the terrorist attack on 9/11, the United States government expected an increase in the terror threat against the US. As Dennis Zinn points out, fighting terror with 'more terror' only increase the motivation to commit terror.
- When the US intimidates al-Qaeda in Iraq, they inevitably keep al-Qaeda's narrative that the west is evil alive, thus fuelling radicalization.
- This creates a dilemma of how to fight terrorism: Passiveness may be seen as a sign of weakness, but action may fuel further radicalization.
- Treating the symptoms of terroristic tendencies is a matter of building barriers in the streets to prevent ramming, assassinating terrorist leaders, increasing airport security etc, but does this address the underlying causes of terror, which include radicalization?

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<sup>29</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2021:172:FULL&from=EN>

<sup>30</sup> <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/against-clock-can-eus-new-strategy-terrorist-content-removal-work>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWuT8d78yts>



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