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ACCESS TO AN IDENTIFICATION OF "TERRORISM": WORDS AND ACTIONS[*/]

 [NOTE DS: This article was written in Winter 2001/02 and only slightly added to later, so it does not incorporate the results and consequences of anything after the Second Gulf or Iraqi War.]

> ...neque hi... ueritatem querunt, sed pugnam.
> [Neither are they after truth but after a fight.]
>> Petrus Abaelardus, *Theologia "summi boni"*
>
> What will we do now that the barbarians are gone?
> Those people were a kind of solution.
>> Konstantin Cavafy, *Waiting for the Barbarians*
>
> [As in Orwell's *1984*, the] "war on terrorism" <u>is</u> terrorism.
>> John Pilger, *The New Rulers of the World*

While millions of words, bytes, and airwave hours talk about terrorism, and the powerful are acting in the name of combating it, it is a word and concept used almost universally to whip up polluted emotions in order to spread polluted reasoning. Nonetheless, it is not possible to simply deny this term, tempting as this may be. It is not only practically unavoidable but my hypothesis is that there is a useful kernel to it. Furthermore, denying the word might be associated with denying, in the vein of Baudrillard, the existence of acts it is designed to point at. To the contrary, such acts are a product of what one might call "really existing globalization," and there are strong chances they won't go away before such globalization goes away. Modifying Lévi-Strauss, we might see it as the asymmetrical obverse of globalization.

Amid such systematic obfuscation, I wish to recall Dorothy Dinnerstein's great confession of faith: "...we must try to understand what is threatening to kill us off as fully and clearly as we can.... And... to fight what seems about to destroy everything earthly that you love--to fight it... intelligently, armed with your central resource, which is passionate curiosity--is for me the human way to live until you die." (viii) I shall be unable here to go, as she did, into the murky psychic depths of what drives the lust to power, profit, and killing. These are initial notes of one who would accept Nietzsche's wish to have his gravestone say "a philologist."

1. What Is Terror?

The English word comes from the Latin root **terrēre,** meaning "to frighten," and the nominal root **terror** (probably mediated through French, thence the early spelling "terrour"). Its meanings are glossed in the OED as: 1. *intense fear, fright or dread*; with an adjective, or in the form "a terror" or "terrors," it was used for an instance thereof.   The *Geneva Bible* of 1560 translates *Psalms* lv.4 as "The terrors of death are fallen upon me," and it was often used with portentous, supernatural events such as the death of Christ or the irruption of Pan. This provides a bridge to the second main meaning: 2. *"The action or quality of causing [such] dread"; "terribleness";*

and "a thing or person that excites terror," as in Addison's "The Messiah appears cloathed with so much terrour and majesty" (1712).

Such fossile remnants in English point to the strong argument that at the basis of many, perhaps all religions lies what the Old Testament (Torah) calls **emat Jahveh**, the uncanny "God-dread" or "terror consubstantial with God," and the Greek tradition calls **deîma panikón** ("panic terror"). Faith begins with terror, it seems. Rudolf Otto, who dug this tradition up, glosses it as a combination of unutterable terror with ensnaring fascination, a numbing and paralyzing surprise that simultaneously also attracts. That terrible force engenders in people attempts at propitiating and domesticating it by means of either magical participation or of religious devotion, conjuration, and consecration (13-16, 32, 42-43, and see the comment in Türcke 135-37). This can easily be also found in non-religious events of both wide and profound impact, so that Yeats glosses the Easter 1916 Irish insurrection and attempt at revolution as "a terrible beauty." As in his eponymous poem, "All, all is changed utterly": such events portend an utter annihilation of all known orientations, akin to Death, which was called "king of terrors," as in the 1611 *Bible*: "His confidence... shall bring him to the king of terrours" (*Job* lviii.14).

Instead of divine and supernal, terror grew with the waning of religious feeling lay and/or democratic, potentially lurking everywhere. Already in Juvenal's railings against popular religion, one can find a Stoic refusal of death's terrors (Satire X: 357, **mortis terrore carentem**). Toward the end of C18, terribleness and induction of extreme dread becomes the staple of a whole range of prose fiction, called tales of terror, well represented by the OED quote from Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: "The terrors with which I was seized... were extreme" (1794). Arguably it is such novels, with their insistence on death as lustful carnage and rape of the body, that prepared a double conversion of the divine and supernatural connotation of "terror": first, into an inimical and evil connotation, laicised but suffused with a satanic numinosity; second, into an action that was no longer the exclusive property of the superiors (divinities, rulers, generals -- see *Dictionnaire...1835)* but could be exercised by marginal individuals too. Thus, already in 1788 Gibbon could write: "The ferocious Bedoweens, the terror of the desert." It is quite characteristic that this first negative use was applied to warlike non-European barbarians within a discussion of "the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"!

The British "Gothic novels" (but their fashion spread throughout Europe) thus gave their safe readers a homeopathic dose of the evil connotation of "terror," usually located in feudal Catholic venues far in space and/or time. This delicious fright ceased when it was transferred to the political arch-bugbears of conservative England, the Jacobins in the French Revolution whose months in power (ca. March 1793 to July 1794) were dubbed "the Reign of Terror," "the Terror" or indeed "the Red Terror," and later popularised by a whole range of melodramatic fiction, from Dickens to D'Orczy (the "White Terror" of the Royalists against the revolutionaries in 1794-96 was not popularised). Thence the term of (capitalised) Terror, as a rule provided with an adjective identifying the evil enemy, was applied to all armed suppression of internal enemies in a revolution, especially one with anti-bourgeois leanings, such as the Red Terror and the White Terror in the Paris Commune of 1871. This became a staple argument and then cliché of newspaper and other propaganda in the UK and USA at the time of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war in Russia, including the White Terror after the putdown of revolutions and uprisings in Berlin, Bavaria or Hungary at the same time. It can be seen in the primly shrill OED definition of the Jacobin Terror as "the period... when the ruling faction remorselessly shed the blood of persons of both sexes and of all ages and conditions whom they regarded as obnoxious."

The derived word "terrorism" comes from the French. It was a neologism of the 1790s, alongside of **terroriste** and **terroriser** (*Dictionnaire...1798*, Partridge 708), but it was

immediately picked up in England as indicating the policy of systematic intimidation by the government in power in revolutionary France. This became seamlessly transferable to any policy intended to strike the victims with terror or strong dread. Two remarkable arguments from such debates, the questions about _the reasons for_ and the _indiscriminate governmental abuse of the term_ "terrorism," echo down to our days. The favourite English charge of terrorism, after French Jacobins, was to Irish insurgencies; from the Irish side, the following was recorded by the writer Brendan Behan: "He said it was the fault of the British boss class that the Irish were forced always into terrorism to get their demands" _(Borstal Boy_ 1958). And applied to Mandela's ANC: "The Minister [of the South African apartheid government] cannot expect journalists to do violence to the English language by describing guerrilla warfare as terrorism at all times and in all circumstances" (the _Cape Times_ of 1977).

The lexeme "terror" was then applied in different combinations, of which perhaps the most frequent is "terror-stricken," but the two most interesting ones relate to _abuses by jailors_ and to _bombing_. Already in 1897 convicts "sweat terror-drops beneath their blankets" (that is, at night), and in 1970 this is sardonically explained in G. Jackson's letter from a US jail, which runs in part: "...our cells were being invaded by the goon squad: you wake up, take your licks, get skin-searched.... Rehabilitational terror." (_Soledad Brother_)

"Terror-bombing" is documented in print in 1941 for Hitler's use against Rotterdam, but it was surely used also to describe the Luftwaffe bombing of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War and its subsequent "blitzes" (lightning strikes) against Warsaw, England, Belgrade, etc. The OED definition is "intensive and indiscriminate bombing designed to frighten a country into surrender," and from 1940 on, terror bombing of German cities was deliberate British (and then US) military policy, estimated to have killed over half a million people (Walzer 255-62). It had its roots in Italian, Spanish, French, and British imperial uses against colonial uprisings before 1940 in Libya, Morocco, Irak, Somalia, and Ethiopia (see Lindqvist and Davis). It has gone on in spades in subsequent US and allied ventures -- advancing from Dresden and Hamburg, then Tokyo and Hiroshima, to Hanoi, the Gulf War, Serbia, and our days -- as well as in imitators, as a technoscientific form of mass murder. It should be mentioned that while today the US government practices are the main problem, historically the US are not responsible (except perhaps by example) for many other terrorisms, from air or ground -- for more recent examples, the Iraki government gassing Kurds, or Russian armed forces vs. the "Islamist" counter-terrorists in Chechnya. In that sense, Hitler has won.

2. Who Is a Terrorist?

The Conservative English historian and politician Harold Nicolson confided to his diary for 1968: "When people rise against foreign oppression, they are hailed as patriots and heroes; but the Greeks whom we are shooting and hanging on Cyprus are dismissed as terrorists. What cant!" (OED s.v. "terrorist"). Today the (non-)definition according to the US government and all the consensual NATO media is very simple, if circular: as Uri Avnery notes, terrorists are all the armed enemies of the US-led coalition against bin Laden and his (not further delimited) "terrorists." Notoriously, the official US literature on terrorism for the last 30 years or so "evades definition.... [It doesn't] define terrorism because definitions involve a commitment to analysis, comprehension, and adherence to some norms of consistency." (Ahmad) It can never be repeated too often that bin Laden's network was brought about and (among other proxies all around the globe) used for guerrilla warfare, including terrorism, by the USA and its allies, so that it would not have existed but for the murderous cynicism of the morally and materially responsible

States; Ronald Reagan called a delegation of Afghani anti-Soviet fighters in 1985 "the moral equivalent of America's founding fathers," and spent four billion US dollars to train and arm their zealots. And even today, as Chomsky put it, "there is plenty of bin Ladens" (as well as murdered civilians) on both sides of the present conflict (*9-11* 34).

The US is not alone in self-interested dodging of a definition of terrorism: its clarification renders all strong States uneasy. For an example, this was dropped from the jurisdiction of the proposed International Criminal Court in 1998 precisely because of the deadlock in defining, which seems to stem from the powerful being unwilling to accord any--even totally negative-- precise and legal status to that notion. For on its heels would come the possibility of recalling the term's original meaning, which pertains to governmental actions. Avnery's own, only semi-ironical definition is: "The difference between freedom-fighters and terrorists is that the freedom-fighters are on my side and the terrorists are on the other side." After Clinton bombed Sudan and Afghanistan, Solomon mimicked the official nonsense more fully: " When they put bombs into cars and kill people, they're uncivilized killers. When we put bombs on missiles and kill people, we're upholding civilized values. -- When they kill, they're terrorists. When we kill, we're striking against terror."

This type of defining is easy, for it rests on an argument by authority and ostension reducible to: "terrorism is what I point to when I say that word"; this can be thoughtlessly reproduced on the basis of one or a very few visible and televisable instances of undoubted terror attacks. Such is the case with the crashing of planes into the WTC towers. (It is interesting to note that pictures of the damaged Pentagon have disappeared from all TV screens and other media follow-ups. The reasons may include army sensitivity plus smaller spectacularity, but I'd think another factor is that it was of   dubious efficiency as thought-suppressing propaganda, since it raised the argument whether all those working in the Pentagon are to be considered soldiers or not. If yes, this would be an act of aggression and killing in an undeclared war--such as there have been plenty in these last years--but an act of terror/ism only insofar the plane passengers were concerned. And propaganda cannot face arguments.) Terrorists are then "people I say have committed the act I'm pointing to (trust me, I know)."

Nonetheless, defining-by-fiat-and-pointing transgresses so offensively against elementary rules of reasoning and understanding that it eventually runs up against grave disadvantages. The well-known US columnist Michael Kinsley noted that the disadvantages were already felt in the 1980s when defining terrorism was (inconclusively) a major industry in Washington because "a definition was badly needed to explain why [the US government was] supporting a guerrilla movement against the government of Nicaragua and doing the opposite in El Salvador"--and in very many other places. He also reported that "Reuters has banned the word in reference to Sept. 11 and CNN officially discourages it." This dilemma has, for a small example, led to at least one European newspaper, quite supportive of the US war but still grasping for some elementary logic, calling its daily rubric "War against bin Laden."

An important ingredient of the Bush rhetoric is the systematic slippage between, and finally equation of, "terror" as a quality or action and as the personification of this quality and/or action; such a personification was in the OED examples (see part 1 above) also called "terror" but the US Government Newspeak has settled on "terrorism." The reason for this, I suspect, is that "-isms" are by unargued assumption foreign, ideological, and non- or Un-American (except for patriotism to the "Homeland," another Newspeak coinage unfortunately similar to the Nazi Germans' "Heimatsfront"). Even "terror" in the sense that implies political killings of civilians is in fact a British semantic import aimed at aliens: it is always something "they" do and "we" do not. At any rate such a terrorism is a transcendental, evil or satanic quality, rather than a group of people. "Terrorists" are therefore not people who have such-and-such views for such-and-such

reasons--both of which might be totally wrong, but one would have had to argue it clearly and convincingly. Rather, "terrorists" are people who participate in the evil totemic essence of "terrorism."

Although we are by now in an unholy alloy of heretic theology, tribal myth-ritual, and Machiavellian pragmatics, I'd agree with Kinsley that Bush's slogan of "war against terror"[1/] has the obvious political advantage of rallying the citizens of USA and other nations to whatever armed actions may be proclaimed as being anti-terrorist. The undefined status of the target, the satanic ubiquity of the evil (a mutated or cloned successor to Reagan's Evil Empire), means that this can be extended at will to whatever State or group a huge propaganda campaign can successfully present as terrorists. The authority for this is derived not primarily from law but from a theological pretence at global omniscience (see Ahmad for a small list of instances where US knowledge was insufficient or wrong, but the career of bin Laden is proof enough). Thus the US government, while semantically incoherent, has at any point in time had clear practical or pragmatic delimitations as to who was and who was not a terrorist, in order to decide who is to be respectively helped, neglected, or attacked. The delimitation was based on use of armed force against US government and corporation interests, and will be discussed further in Section 3.

However, Kinsley rightly points out an equally obvious disadvantage: "a war against terrorism cannot be won. Terrorism is like a chronic disease that can be controlled and suppressed, but not cured [by war]." In Avnery's example, the Nov. 2001 "blockade against Palestinian villages by the Israeli army, which... denied them water and food, does not isolate the 'terrorists,' but on the contrary turns them into national heroes. The devastation caused by the Russians in Chechnya did not break–indeed, it strengthened--the opposing guerrilla forces." Thus, Avnery is right to say that "Since terrorism is always a political instrument, the right way to combat it is always political. Solve the problem that breeds terrorism and you get rid of terrorism." It can only be durably cured by removing its root causes, psychological, political, and finally economical (humiliation, poverty, and hunger). If the Talebans are to be lastingly defeated, which would be in the interest primarily of the Afghani people, they will have to do it-- with a lot of mainly economic help from outside. Otherwise, some analog to the Talebans, in or out of Afghanistan, will recur.

The question arises what will happen if the Taleban armed forces go underground, into guerrilla warfare or indeed into abeyance, but the terror attacks do not cease. How will the war be continued? Proxies, similar to the terrorist Contras or the murderous Northern Alliance, can easily be found and paid. A little bombing here and there, as has been going on against Irak for 10 years, can easily be arranged. But would this suffice for US government psychological warfare at home and abroad or for US corporations' profits (which finally subtend the government actions)?

Clearly, the temptation is huge to fabricate another "rogue State" for full-scale bombing (Irak?--or a number of other possibilities between Libya and the Philippines). In that case we would be outside a believable link to terrorism. Other demands, such as giving up ABC weapons, would have to be adjoined. But then one wonders what would be either the legal or the moral case for keeping them by US, Russia, and other powers? Would any strong enough force be entitled to bomb their ABC stocks? If not, those of us who are against murders for political-- as for other--purposes would have to find out why not (other than "I say so and if you don't obey me I'll kill you")?

Kinsley also notes that the definition of terrorism is a problem for civil liberties. The problem has been brought about by President Bush and the US government defining its response as "a war against 'terrorism,' not just against the perpetrators of the particular crime of Sept. 11." What liberals like Kinsley pretend not to see, however, is that the "'war on terrorism' ... is

the long-sought-after replacement for the 'red scare', justifying a permanent war footing and paranoia, and construction of the greatest military machine ever:... the 'full spectrum dominance' of the world" (Pilger 10). If the "war against terrorism" will be, as it seems to be intended to be, an ongoing affair of years or even entire generations, and if--given the lack of definition--in a "broad" or elastic sense anybody who opposes or even hampers "the war effort" may be identified as a terrorist or helper and associate of terrorists, this practically assures a militarised Fortress North America -- and a docilely following Fortress (West-Central) Europe. Since continent-sized impermeable fortresses are not possible, a patchwork of smaller "gated" security areas for the rich has already been appearing long enough for J.G. Ballard to have written several canny (or is it uncanny?) sarcastic novels about it. As it becomes clear this war cannot be won or finished once and for all but may go on to include other strikes against resurgent or even threatening evil, a constantly strengthened police State, including private mercenaries, will be required. It is already well under way.

That this stress on the huge threat to civil liberties is not simply crying wolf is confirmed by Bush's executive order of Nov. 13, 2001, allowing the unlimited detention of foreign suspects and the setting up of military tribunals to judge people accused of terrorism, and moreover demanding the right for those tribunals to judge anybody anywhere in the world. This may remind us that 90% of world investment and trade are already contained within the "North" (meaning North America, western Europe, Oceania, Japan, and the Asian "Little Tigers"), so that the rest of the world can be economically neglected. The whole world may increasingly look like a bloated, racially over-determined version of rich suburbs vs. sprawling slums for the poor. In such a context, imposing martial law at will is a move toward a global Iron Heel: the slogan "no to globalization" suddenly acquires new dimensions.

Thus, since US citizens are not the only people in the world, the definition of terrorism should, to my mind, be _as precise as possible_: narrow as concerns civil liberties in the USA and its allies, broad as concerns preventing killings of civilians abroad.

3. Exemplary Killing of Civilians for Political Purposes

What then may reasonably be called terrorism, without reducing this word to an empty noise of brainless condemnation and blind self-congratulation? As Kinsley asked: "So what distinguishes terrorism? Is it the scope of the harm? Most terrorist actions are fairly small-scale compared with the death and destruction committed by nation-states acting in their official capacities. Even Sept. 11 killed fewer people than, say, the bomb on Hiroshima--an act that many Americans find easy to defend. So can terrorism mean acts of violence in support of political goals except when committed by a government?" (This would mean, I add, that George Washington was but Adolf Hitler was not a terrorist.) What about "State-sponsored terrorism"? This too does not distinguish the "rebel groups that [USA is] flooding with help from other groups that [USA is] trying to destroy." The Hiroshima and other World War bombings of civilians may seem both far away and responses to an urgent danger (they're in fact neither) against clearly terrorist Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. But what about US-sponsored murders and tortures of tens of thousands of civilians in Central America, or in Chile beginning on Sept. 11, 1973? Has any administration after Kissinger disavowed them or asked forgiveness from the Latin American peoples? Do the American people know that the World Court condemned the USA for mining Nicaraguan harbours in 1986?

In that sense, where Kinsley, as a good liberal, finally throws up his hands in facetious despair, I think Avnery is right but incomplete when he defines terrorism as "a method of

attaining political goals by frightening the civilian population." As he argues, bombing or otherwise killing soldiers is not terrorism: nobody has tried to apply it to the Japanese at Pearl Harbour, the Germans or English fighting in North Africa, the US at Okinawa or Normandy, the Soviets in Stalingrad or taking Berlin, and so on. When the British called terrorists Jewish guerrillas in Palestine or the Nazis called terrorists the Yugoslav or Soviet or Polish or Greek guerrillas killing Wehrmacht soldiers, and hanged or shot them out of hand whenever captured, they were doing violence to their--English or German--language as well as to the occupied and (truly) terrorised populations; conversely, the Nazi killing of civilian hostages as reprisal for guerrilla actions, or the Japanese Imperial Army's "rape of Nanking," was terrorism within a war. Both the White armies and the Red Army in the Russian Civil War 1917-21 "liquidated" political enemies in or out of army wear, while Stalin's liquidations of richer peasants or Old Bolsheviks carried this practice on in huge proportions and without the excuse of armed conflict. On the other hand, the policy of Mandela's ANC did not preclude terrorism, the Maccabees killing Hellenised Jews were clearly terrorists, early ethnic cleansers, and so were the Irgun insurgents (says Avnery, who was himself an Irgun member) throwing bombs in 1938 into Arab bazaars in Palestine or shooting up a bus full of Arab civilians. Being a dissident Israeli patriot, Avnery points out that

> Israel has used this method [terrorism] from the day of its inception. In the early 50s the IDF [Israeli army] committed "retaliation raids" designed to frighten the villagers beyond the border in order to induce then to put pressure on the Jordanian and Egyptian governments to prevent the infiltration of Palestinians into Israel.... In the 1996 "Grapes of Wrath" operation, Prime Minister Shimon Peres terrorized half a million inhabitants of South Lebanon by aerial bombardments into fleeing North in order to pressurize the Beirut government into stopping the Shiite guerillas from attacking the Israeli occupation force and its mercenaries.

However, Avnery's definition lacks the element of exemplary killings in order to cow the rest of civilians for a political objective. Without this, we'd get to the unhelpful conclusion that, say, gangster/ mafioso killings aiming for advantages such as turf domination, or sociopathological individual killers, both of which lack an agenda of full political domination, would also be terrorist. While there are grey zones here, my provisional definition would therefore run: *terrorism is a strategy which consists in pursuing political power by striking dread into the civilian population through exemplary killings among them*.[2/]

It follows that terrorism is a matter of influencing through huge bodily harm the collective imagination by transfer contagion: an exasperated form of psychophysical warfare grafted upon techniques of economic and political propaganda in the media age.[3/]

As to differentiations within terrorism, *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* put it nicely: terrorism is "the use of terrorizing methods of governing or resisting a government" (cited in Ahmad). A first typology of terrorist entities should differentiate between *State terrorism* and two main contemporary forms of non-State terrorism, *religious group terrorism* and *political group terrorism*[4/]. The types overlap and intertwine: States use paramilitary or gangster vigilante groups for murders (most often in Latin America) when they don't want to acknowledge what they do; religion is nowadays consubstantial with the self-identification of a community aspiring to political power or sovereignty (Northern Ireland, the Shiites vs. the Sunnis in the Moslem world); apparently purely political terrorists have since the Russian Narodniki exercised a lay absolutism that is a hidden religion. Nonetheless, when one adds a second, nowadays absolutely necessary set of criteria, the *politico-technoscientific ways* of carrying out terror/ism or being

terrorists, it may become apparent that there is a good reason for differentiating State and non-State terror/ists: States can use terror-bombings (and shelling by heavy artillery), the others don't have such means--yet. That's why the Sept. 11 terrorists had to improvise flying mega-bombs by recategorising passenger airplanes as such.

Politically, and even corporeally, there are two main technoscientific ways of carrying out terror/ism or being terrorists: terror-bombing, and all other terror killings. Insofar as the US/ NATO bombings of Serbia and Irak were not pointed at their armed forces but against the infrastructure of daily life--power stations, bridges, non-military factories, etc.--for the purpose of getting the civilian population to turn against a government obnoxious to the bombers (which succeeded in a sufficiently democratic Serbia but failed in a fully dictatorial Irak), they were terror-bombings and their perpetrators terrorists. This leaves open the vexed question of intent, that is: can "collateral" killings of civilians, when unintended, be exempt of the charge of terrorism? To my mind, in this field of systematic muddying of waters and PR spin-doctors, proclamations of intent count for very little: it is a matter of reasonably weighing both political evidence and number of victims. Bombing from high altitudes looks rather like "substituting Afghan [or Iraki or Serbian, note PMM] civilian for US military casualties" (Milward 164). As to the number of civilian victims, the most nearly believable sources speak about 2-3,000 in Serbia and 5-6,000 so far in Afghanistan: entirely too much to be defensible. As Herman and O'Sullivan concluded about Vietnam: "Killings are not 'inadvertent' [or 'collateral', note PMM] if they are a systematic and inevitable result of calculated military policy" (51).

By far the largest number of victims of terrorism is due to State activities backed by territorial control and/or heavy weaponry: up to one million of "communists" assassinated in Indonesia 1965-66; over half a million each by South African (and French and US) proxies against Angola and Mozambique; ca. 300,000 by the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea; ca. 200,000 in Guatemala 1966-85; ca. 200,000 by Indonesian army in East Timor; tens of thousands in other Latin American countries from Chile and Argentina to El Salvador; and thousands killed by the Israeli army or their proxies in Lebanon and Palestine. In contrast (little as such figures may mean in human terms), the largest number of non-State terrorist victims was ca. 300 during 1968-81 in Italy and ca. 700 Israelis in the Palestinian Intifada.[5/] The al-Qaeda "airliner rammings" of 2001 were thus the largest not perpetrated directly or indirectly by an organised State. The non-airforce terror of the political and religious groups (let me call it lamely "ground terrorism") is often a weapon of the weak--a Palestinian is quoted by Avnery as saying: "Give me tanks and airplanes, and I shall stop sending suicide-bombers into Israel"--or simply diplomatically and strategically convenient, such as the Contras as imperial proxies in Latin America or the Serbian paramilitary killings in Sarajevo. This does not make it better. Neither the ground nor the air terrorists blasting civilians have any justification except political calculation of the most cynical kind.

4. Parting Considerations

The overriding criterion that emerges is *preventing killing*: in the particular case of terrorism, killing *civilians for purposes of political domination*, which is by a ratio of about 100,000:1 or more the most prevalent one in this century. I would strongly argue for extending this criterion to include the only slightly, if at all, less horrible cases of maiming, wounding, and indeed--drawing on my personal experiences as a child -- of psychic terrorizing by horrible fear of killing which always accompanies and often precedes bodily injury. I believe we should reject the Al Qaeda justification that the Sept. 11 victims are a minimal vengeance for the thousands, or

indeed hundreds of thousands, of dead in Irak, Palestine, and so on, because any "an eye for an eye" logic increases rather than diminishes killing. (Al Qaeda doesn't talk about the 500,000 to one million people killed after the Indonesian army coup of 1965, because those were infidel Leftists.) But I believe we should equally reject the undercurrent of such logic in the "Western" justifications.

This means rejecting both horns of the definition dilemma. First, the view according to which nothing definite can be said about terrorism: this only shows up the final sterility of fully free-floating cultural relativism. Second, the attempt by powerful States to define terrorism in such a way that only their enemies but not themselves would be subject to it: this simply shows the arrogance of power where might is right. In both cases, terrorism cannot be persuasively delimited or fought. Any discussion such as one I'm arguing for presupposes a post-Enlightenment attempt to reduce the scope of killings allowable under any name. That religious fanatics should refuse distinctions such as those argued for here (for example between military and civilians) is understandable: they are at least sincere and above-board. But when governments whose Constitution comes out of the Enlightenment obfuscate those distinctions-- so as to be in practice, because of their power, even more murderous--they too return to pre-Enlightenment absolutism, a kind of State religion. A strong doubt then arises whether they eit her know or mean what they say. Therefore, we have to call with Shakespeare for "a plague on both your houses" and with Fidel and the Confédération Paysanne (and Pope John Paul II) for "No to terrorism, no to war."

In order to do this with any consistency and therefore a chance of success, we need to focus first of all on the causes of terrorism; or better, on the motivations of terrorist groups. The State groups do not need much debating, only a popularization of their evident reasons: furthering the power of the State and its objectives of domination. The non-State groups' motivations are complex and different in any particular case, especially as between those who invoke religion and those who do not. But their common denominators might include (I'm trying to systematise Ahmad's splendid discussion here): a/ the experience of physical violence, hunger, and humiliation, a "mix of anger and helplessness [which] produces an urge to strike out.... to wreak retributive justice"; b/ the identification of an external enemy responsible for this, which can politicise gang or ghetto violence; after the waning of class politics, the rich and powerful humiliators are identified as ethnic and/or religious foreigners, primarily as Americans and their helpers; c/ a chance that retributive terrorism could have some noticeable effect; and d/ the absence of a horizon for revolutionary seizure of State power. Revolutionary movements, especially Marxist ones, have historically discouraged and even morally condemned terrorism, though most of them probably also allowed its use at rare occasions of arguable–and often furiously debated--necessity. It was only after World War 2 that revolutionary movements began increasingly copying State terrorism as a strategy (cf. Walzer 198).

The above initial considerations do not "solve" or even enter into many other questions. Terrorism is a rare case where both moral and political criteria coincide to bring into sharp focus its inadmissibility. Even there, who are civilians? Policemen are not, to my mind, but further discussions would be necessary, for ex., in the case of high government officials (in the Tsarist Empire they overtly had rankings equivalent to military ones -- cf. Walzer 200-01). But most glaringly, what about other forms of today's mass killings? I may be too optimistic, but straightforward genocide (as of Armenians or European Jews) seems to have left so many scars on public opinion that it is difficult to return to it, unless we get into another world conflict. Terrorism obviously borders on guerrilla warfare, which I would consider morally admissible whenever not accompanied by terrorism, while politically one would have to judge it case by case--the old labels of revolutionary vs. counter-revolutionary are by now too simple (for ex. in

Iran or Kosovo). Drug peddling is a constant Siamese twin of terrorism, from Latin America through Asia to Kosovo, its results are morally killings, and it is to my mind also unambiguously inadmissible (but then, what is a drug? alcohol or tobacco, anyone?). What is to be done about the equally murderous undeclared wars between States and the potentially much more murderous ABC weapons, further huge setbacks for civilization and victories for Hitler? War crimes kill far more people than terrorist ones.

Furthermore, these notes do not speak at all about the perhaps even more terrible, and certainly even more important, slow killing of over 500 million people on this wonderful globalised globe on their way to dying soon from chronical malnourishment (hunger) and preventable diseases, while over 800 million people live in "absolute poverty", that is on the borders of famine and dying a bit more slowly (Drèze-Sen 35 and <u>Human</u> 20), and fully 3,000 millions are subject to "dramatic malnutrition" greatly shortening their lives (Robin). The ratio of killings for political domination vs. killing for other reasons would drastically change if we figured in deaths from hunger and preventable diseases, and also from drugs; but then, a cynic might argue these also happen for indirect political domination...

At any rate, nothing in these notes implies approval of other forms of mass (or for that matter individual) killings. It simply does not take them as its subject-matter. My position would at the outset be that Thomas of Aquinas's difference between just and unjust wars has to be significantly revised, though not necessarily fully abandoned, in the light of new technological capabilities.

Crucially, these notes don't go into a depth discussion of the economic and psychological necessities of war for the ruling classes in today's capitalism: by the time of the Gulf War, a conservative estimate of global spending for military purposes was between 2 and 2.5 billion (thousand millions) dollars daily... This would probably be decisive to clear up my own dilemma between Marxism and pacifism in the age of modern annihilation weaponry. Even historically, terror has always been a twin of aggressive warfare: the Jacobins were sublated (overcome but also continued) by Napoleon. But I hope that by focussing on exemplary killings of civilians to induce political domination by terror, my discussion may at least begin to throw light on what we right now urgently need.

We need, first, elementary semantic hygiene in order to understand that this is what is afoot. True, this will be an uphill or against the stream endeavour, for it is faced with a variant of the systematic Madison-Avenue obfuscation deeply rooted in the commodity culture and politics. Nonetheless, second, our understanding might open up a possibility that action to stop <u>this</u> morally indefensible and politically unachievable "war on terrorism," while intensifying the struggle against terrorism on all sides by political and non-murderous means, may follow upon understanding.

Note

*/ I would like to thank a number of US, UK, Australian, European, and Canadian friends who helped to improve this text, but cannot as I do not want them to modify their names or be questioned by military tribunals.

1/ I shall not enter into the thickets of legal debates, which on the whole seem mealy-mouthed and self-serving; cf. the survey of major international agreements on this subject in Elagab, of their application to present day in *Le Monde*, Nov. 18-19, 2001, and Brown for the present-day European governmental attempts to use Sept. 11 in order to incriminate even non-violent

political contestation (the pioneer intimidator Thatcher tried to apply the anti-terrorist law to British miners on strike). As Brown remarks, the imprecision in defining so as to give maximum interpretative latitude to authorities violates the fundamental legal principle "no crime without law," that is without clearly defined infraction. The prevailing opinion at least among European legal comments seems to be that Bush's war is "legally false and loaded with dangers for the future" (Pellet).

On the contrary, however, there seems to exist at least a strong presumption (in the Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 about victims of armed conflicts) that killings for purpose of terror are war crimes. Are the old norms of international law really obsolete--or should they be? According to them, the US war against the Talebans -- or vice versa -- is not a war without a declaration of war. (There was no declaration either in the normatively illegal case of the attack on Serbia, never accused of terrorism or aggression against the bombing nations and left alone during years of organizing terrorism in Bosnia, but bombed for fake "humanitarian" reasons.) Does ending it without a peace agreement or formal surrender imply that, if the Talebans--or some analogy to them--re-emerge, the war may be restarted without further ado? Since Al Qaeda exists, we are told, in 60 countries, can any of them be subjected to the fate of Afghanistan if the US government so decides? And so on.

2/ I gather similar horizons exist in the US 1984 Code (see Chomsky, *Pirates* 177) and in the EU convention of Jan. 2000 against the financing of terrorist acts (see *Le Monde* 15). And of course arguments similar to mine have been insistently made for the last 20 years by Walzer, Chomsky, Herman, and many others. I do not much care about being original, I care about being clear and consistent in view of the new escalation.

3/ Outside of the indirect light thrown by Otto and Türcke, I haven't come across any notable contribution to the understanding of the psychic springs of terror. The only other pointer I know of is Ann Radcliffe's argument in 1826 that terror is the diametrical opposite of *imaginative* (fictional or hypothetical) considerations of horrible possibilities: the latter "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (unfortunately, her terminology was topsy-turvy to our present usages, that is, "terror" was the good term and "horror" the bad one for her).

4/ Cf. Ahmad, whose typology is wider than I'd defend, and Tigar. On State terrorism see the indispensable works by Chomsky, Herman, George, and Stohl below, full of startling data.

5/ See on this at least Herman-O'Sullivan, from whom I take my figures (except for the Intifada). They do not include terrorism and war crimes in Vietnam, which seem to run to more than 3,000.000 Vietnamese killed by bullet or chemical warfare, and in the first war on Irak, which seem to run to more than 1,200.000 Iraki dead of bombs or the subsequent embargo. Of course, were we to take in killings between 1914 and 1960 in practically all European and many Asian countries, we would find even larger figures.

<div align="right">Europe, Winter of the first year of the new century</div>

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All translations into English are mine.

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