

# Revolutionary, Government Official, or Terrorist? “Terrorism” as a Term in the Early 20th Century

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“Terrorist” was originally coined to describe radical movements during the French Revolution that inspired fear in the elite and ruling class, but today, is used today with a similar application as “criminal.” How did the association of the word “terrorism” change so much throughout the 19th and 20th centuries? This paper analyzes early 20th century definitions of “terrorism” and “terrorist(s)” and the use of these terms by British and American media and by government officials of various countries during World War I. The lacking universal definitions of the term allowed subjective uses of the term; while it was applied as a title of revolutionary honor in Russia, the British and Irish used it as a shaming critique to describe the other’s tactics against civilians. Contrary to the documented uses of “terrorism” to fulfill political agendas by colonizing powers as early as the 1960s, just a few decades later, the term held less political weight in the early 20th century. The eventual creation of definitions by modern-day governments changed how the term was applied in the later 20th century and how it is still applied today, and directly created the ease with which modern governments identify and kill “terrorists” without challenges from their domestic populations.

“YOU’RE A TERRORIST” on Friday, and on Tuesday, “I WILL KILL YOU.” Clumsy handwriting outlined the death threats left in the cubby of a 10-year-old Muslim girl at Hemenway Elementary School in Framingham, Massachusetts in November 2018. Parents of the targeted fifth grader met with the school administration to discuss a safety plan while the identity of the perpetrator, believed to be one of her fellow students, is still unknown.<sup>1</sup>

The term “terrorist” today is a buzzword, an insult, a reason for internment, and a justification for war. “Terrorists” have come to describe individuals who are socially acceptable to kill, whose execution is considered necessary and might be celebrated without charges, evidence, or trial. Even people in proximity to terrorists, whether through relation or geography, are considered collateral damage in the “war on terror.”<sup>2</sup> This view of terrorism and its inaccurate, modern-day application to Muslims seems to have permeated even at the elementary level.

Domestic support for such a blatantly unconstitutional approach to criminalization is often assumed to be a product of the post 9/11 era, but “terrorism” has been an excuse for military occupation and execution

decades before 2001. The Troubles of Northern Ireland sparked debates over the use of the word “terrorism,” as the first civilians to die were at the hands of the British military and as both major fighting factions killed more civilians than militants.<sup>3</sup> A recorded transcript of the U.S. National Security Advisor encouraging President Lyndon B. Johnson to portray the Vietnamese as terrorists in order to garner domestic support for the war, coupled with descriptions of Vietnamese militia as “terrorists” in the Pentagon Papers, illustrate the American precedent of using the term “terrorism” to justify military occupation and violence.<sup>4</sup>

Although it was coined during the French Revolution, the term “terrorism” began to be used heavily in the early 20th century and its use has only increased into the 21st century. How did the use of the word in the early 20th century affect how European and American journalists and politicians use the term today? What can scholars, politicians, and civilians learn from our predecessors in how to use the term and respond to “terrorism” responsibly? This paper examines the use of the words “terrorism” and “terrorist(s)” during World War I by British and American newspapers and from government officials of various coun-

1. “‘You’re a Terrorist’: 10-Year-Old Muslim Girl Threatened At Framingham School.” *CBS Boston*. 13 November 2018. <https://boston.cbslocal.com/2018/11/13/framingham-elementary-school-student-threat-notes-terrorist/>. Accessed 17 November 2018.

2. Neta C. Crawford, “Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency,” Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, Brown University. November 2018.

3. Corrine Purill, “What Northern Ireland teaches us about today’s war on terror,” Public Radio International, 15 July 2015. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-07-15/what-northern-ireland-teaches-us-about-todays-war-terror>. Accessed on 9 November 2018.

4. Tatiana Nigh, “Red Terrorists, or Red, White and Blue Terrorists? A Closer Look at How the Word ‘Terrorism’ Was Applied to the Vietnam War,” *The Onyx Review*, 2018, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 105–112.

tries. In examination of definitions of terrorism in the early 20th century, it concludes that “terrorism” was not used during World War I as the term is used in Europe and the United States today. The lack of formal definitions of the word, both by 20th century governments and scholars, contributed to the arbitrary uses of the term in Europe and the United States during World War I; the eventual creation of definitions written by governments changed how the term is applied today and the ease with which modern American and European governments identify and kill “terrorists” without challenges from their domestic populations.

### Definitions and Terms

There is currently no international legal definition for “terrorism,” as the term is so hotly contested and as each government has its own agenda to protect in how it approaches the “terrorist” issue. Scholars and political scientists Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman examined more than 100 definitions of terrorism to understand consistent themes throughout different perceptions of the term. They identify important components of “terrorism”, which includes the use or threat of violence, the presence of political motivation, the targeting of civilians, perpetrators who are not recognized combatants, and a purpose of inspiring fear and ideological change instead of direct policy or political goals.<sup>5</sup>

Much debate has occurred in the political and the academic sphere as to any existing difference between resistance fighters and terrorists. Scholars Lutz and Lutz attempt to clarify this difference, and argue that resistance fighters attack governments that have been rejected by the people and cause less damage to said people than the government does. “Terrorists, on the other hand, attack governments that are legitimate and accepted by the people they govern. They seek to undermine and destroy a political system and even a way of life that is desirable or good. Their attacks are frequently directed against innocent civilians and designed to cause indiscriminate casualties among them.”<sup>6</sup> When considered with Schmid’s and Jongman’s components of terrorism, one can consider a revolutionary to focus their attacks on governments instead of civilians and to have specific policy goals,

while a terrorist works with political ideology and focuses their violence on civilians. The perspectives on the difference between resistance or revolutionary fighters in the early 20th century in the United States and Europe will be considered in this paper as uses of the term “terrorism” are examined, and it is important to note that this debate continues on still today.

Most European and Western governments did not begin writing official definitions of “terrorism” until the 1980s. In order to understand how “terrorism” was conceptualized in the years leading up to World War I, changing definitions are examined from Webster’s Dictionary in 1879, 1884, and 1900. In 1879, the word “terrorist” is not found in Webster’s, and the word “terrorism” describes only “a state of impressing terror.”<sup>7</sup> By 1884, “terrorism” had altered to include “a state of being terrified, or a state of impressing terror” and the word “terrorist” is defined by the word’s origins: “an agent or partisan of the revolutionary tribunal during the reign of terror in France.”<sup>8</sup> It is not until 1900 that “terrorism” is defined as an action: “the act of terrorizing, or state of being terrorized; a mode of government by terror or intimidation.” In turn, “terrorist” is expanded to include “one who governs by terrorism or intimidation; specifically, an agent or partisan of the revolutionary tribunal during the Reign of Terror in France.”<sup>9</sup>

Compared to our modern-day, government-proposed definitions of “terrorism” or the components outlined by academics like Schmid and Jongman, these are simplistic definitions of what is now a complex and loaded term. The basic nature of these definitions illustrates how differently the term was applied in the early 20th century; no mention is made of political motivation, the intentional targeting of non-combatants, or even a threat of violence. The element that describes “a mode of government” added in 1900 is even contrary to the modern-day push from governments to leave any government action out of potential definitions of terrorism. As this paper examines media examples of the use of “terrorism” as a term, it will specifically analyze cases in which the term is applied to government actions.

The development of this term to incorporate “the act of terrorizing” and “a mode of government

5. “Terrorism: Concepts, Causes and Conflict Resolution,” Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, *Defense Threat Reduction Agency*, (Fort Belvoir, Virginia, January 2003) [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/dtra/terrorism\\_concepts.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/dtra/terrorism_concepts.pdf), pp. 6-11.

6. James M. Lutz and Brenda J. Lutz, “What Is Terrorism? Definition and Classification,” 2004, *Global Terrorism*, January, pg. 8.

7. *Webster’s Handy Dictionary and the People’s Manual in Two Parts*, New York: Nelson and Phipps, 1879. Print.

8. *Webster’s Complete Dictionary of the English Language*, London: Bell, 1884. Print.

9. *Webster’s International Dictionary of the English Language*, Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1900.

by terror or intimidation” is swift, considering that only 21 years passed between the first and third definitions. While “terrorism” was originally identified with the feeling of being terrified, in just a manner of decades its use changes to encompass inspiring fear in another and attempting to rule or control them through fear. Because governments globally would see the need for official definitions of “terrorism” less than eight decades later, “terrorism” continued to develop rapidly throughout the 20th century.

### Ireland and Britain

The struggle to establish the Republic of Ireland in the early 20th century has been described by many authors and politicians as “terrorism,” and so has the British response to Irish resistance. The Irish War for Independence was a guerilla style conflict between Irish paramilitary groups and occupying British forces that lasted between 1919 and 1921. In 1921, *The Christian Science Monitor* quoted the British Chief Secretary for Ireland as assuring law enforcement that the “terrorism that was ruling Ireland was being broken” and the headline read “IRISH TERRORISM BEING SUPPRESSED.”<sup>10</sup> While the article exclusively refers to the Irish as being “terrorists,” it recounts that the “[British] government’s policies of reprisals, involving the destruction of property and the loss of innocent lives” is encouraging people to join the Irish resistance to British rule. The article estimates that over 48,000 civilian homes were raided by the British in this crackdown on “terrorism.”

This article’s use of the term “terrorism” suggests a heavy political leaning in favor of the British government. Despite the specific instances of violence that targeted civilians and was perpetrated by the British government, it is the Irish Republican movement that is described as “terrorism” at four different points in the article. In contrast, the previous year *The Atlanta Constitution* headlined “Terrorism Charged to British Soldiers Massed in Ireland.”<sup>11</sup> The article describes the burning of civilian homes, additional destruction of

property, and the beating of non-combatants by British soldiers as retaliation for the shooting of several officers earlier that week. While it is unusual to apply the term “terrorism” in a modern day context to government forces (though not unheard of), this article describes in detail the crimes against civilians that these soldiers participated in and labels it as “terrorism.”

Both the Irish resistance and the British military campaign in Ireland were deemed as “terrorism” according to different characters. These two depictions are consistent with the 20th century definitions of the term (as aiming to inspire fear) and do arguably meet the criteria set out by Schmid and Jongman (threat of violence, politically motivated, targeted as civilians, etc.). The exception to these modern-day academic criteria is found in the term’s application to British soldiers; are they considered combatants at a time of conflict in which war has not been declared? If they are considered combatants, are the Irish Republican Army and its supporters considered combatants as well? These are debated areas around our modern-day definitions of “terrorism.” While there doesn’t seem to be much debate as to the application of the word in the early 20th century, it’s notable that it is being applied to both parties without regard for their government or military affiliation.

The fight for Ireland was not the only circumstance in Britain to warrant the word “terrorism.” Coal mining unions went on strike in 1921, and the newspaper *Barron’s* referred to the “wanton strikes” as “practically amount[ing] to terrorism.”<sup>12</sup> When their campaign expanded to include several unions, *Barron’s* called it a “policy of terrorism.”<sup>13</sup> In 1913, one letter to the editor at *The Saturday Review* headlined “MILITANT TERRORISM,” though the author was describing protests of the suffragette movement.<sup>14</sup> This example describes a use of the word “terrorism” that is commonly employed in modern-day media; there is no attempt to argue any technical use of the word, and instead the author has chosen “terrorism” to describe the actions of a group he does not identify with, that he disagrees with, and whose methods he identifies to be too “militant,” even if no conflict, fear, or threat of violence is involved.

10. Special correspondent of *The Christian Science Monitor*, 1921, “IRISH TERRORISM BEING SUPPRESSED: Sir H. Greenwood Expresses Confidence That Terrorism Is Being Broken and Predicts a ‘New and Happier Ireland’ Mrs. Despard’s Views Incredibly Bad” Houses Raided.” *The Christian Science Monitor*; Boston, Mass., February 26, 1921.

11. *The Atlanta Constitution* (1881-1945); Atlanta, Ga. 1920, “Terrorism Charged To British Soldiers Massed in Ireland: John Derham, Town Commissioner of Balbriggan, and Americans Recently in Ireland Give Evidence.” November 20, 1920.

12. *Barron’s* (1921-1942); Boston, Mass. 1926, “With the Editor: Secret Strike Ballots,” November 1, 1926.

13. Herbert N. Casson, 1921, “British Soviet Smashed.” *Barron’s* (1921-1942); Boston, Mass., May 9, 1921.

14. C. F. 1913, “Militant Terrorism,” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*; London 115 (3008): 775.

## Russia

Similar to the revolutionary movement in Ireland (though without the same colonial history), Russia's revolutionary groups were also described as "terrorists" in the early 20th century. The Russian Revolution of 1905 marked a period of citizen protests and strikes that turned violent on all sides; the Revolution of 1917 brought an end to the Romanov dynasty as the Bolsheviks struggled and eventually won political power.

One 1906 article from *The Arizona Republican* refers to "terrorists" in St. Petersburg because they were attempting to kill high-level government and military officials.<sup>15</sup> The same newspaper distinguishes between terrorism as instigated by non-governmental forces instead of a government: "...it would be a great mistake to suppose that revolutionary terrorism will be met by terrorism on the part of the government, which will be able to distinguish between legal opposition and enemies determined to nullify the law..."<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the revolutionary groups themselves, the harsh responses of the government forces to the Russian rebellion was referred to as "terrorism" by multiple authors in the early decades of the 20th century. In 1908, *The New-York Tribune* reported that the Duma (a Russian legislative assembly) had finally condemned "terrorism" (as committed by the government as retaliation) after the first two Dumas had refused to condemn it.<sup>17</sup>

The Bolsheviks also described their own work as "terrorism" as multiple points, even after they had seized power in 1917. Vladimir Lenin was quoted in 1919 as saying that "Red Terror" was the only efficient weapon against the calls for moderation of the Bolshevik party.<sup>18</sup> His Bolshevik counterpart, Leon Trotsky, gave a clarification and defense of terrorism, saying that a true revolutionary would strive to "achieve their purpose by any means at their disposal...if necessary, by terrorism."<sup>19</sup> But the means

that Trotsky describes in the same piece—establishing an army to fight the established military, political assassinations—do not necessarily constitute our modern-day view of "terrorism" as violence that targets civilians; it is more consistent with the term "revolution," which he uses in the piece more often. Trotsky clarifies why he uses the word "terrorism": he considers fear to be an important part of war: "But terror may be extremely effective against a reactionary class that does not want to quit the scene of action. Fear is a mighty instrument of both foreign and domestic policy. War, like revolution, is based on frightening people. A victorious war as a rule destroys only an insignificant part of the beaten army, but frightens the rest and breaks their will. A revolution acts in just the same way: killing one, it frightens a thousand. In this sense the Red Terror is not in principle different from an armed rising, of which it is the direct continuation. He only can "morally" condemn state terrorism by a revolutionary class who on principle denies (in words) every kind of force — that is, every war and every rising."<sup>20</sup>

The use of "terrorism" as describing British troops in Ireland and the revolutionary movement in Russia highlights a distinct difference in the early 20th century use of the term and our modern-day employment: the line between violence during conflict or war and terrorism appears to be much more blurred in the early 1900s than the way American and British journalists use the term today. Today, "terrorism" distinctly excludes military campaigns during wartime, and mostly encompasses only civilian targeted violence perpetrated by those identified as "non-combatants."

## Belgium

One particularly interesting study of the use of "terrorism" is how the term was applied to the German military campaign in Belgium in August of 1914. The Bryce Report, an investigative report conducted by a former British Ambassador into alleged crimes committed by Germans during their invasion of Belgium, uses the phrases "career of terrorism," "general terrorization" (used twice), and "terrorizing policy" to de-

15. *Arizona Republican* (1890 - 1922); Phoenix, Ariz. 1906, "Terrorism Rising," August 12, 1906.

16. *Arizona Republican* (1890 - 1922); Phoenix, Ariz. 1906, "GOVERNMENT'S ACTION WILL BE MODERATE: Russia Will Not Meet Terrorism With Terrorism," August 29, 1906.

17. *New - York Tribune* (1900-1910); New York, N.Y. 1908, "Terrorism Denounced," February 22, 1908.

18. *The Shanghai Times* (1914-1921); Shanghai, 1919, "Lenin & Terrorism," September 2, 1919.

19. Leon Trotsky, 1920, "TROTZKY'S DEFENSE OF RED TERRORISM: Lurid Light Thrown on Fanatical Aims of Extremists by Exclusive Statement from Co-Dictator of Russia Rule of Blood and Fire Upheld by War Minister There Is No Half-Way House for Socialism,

Declares Trotzky, Who Claims Militant Communism Has Right to Overturn Capitalistic Government by Every Means in Its Power. Trotzky's Defense of Terrorism." *The Atlanta Constitution* (1881-1945); Atlanta, Ga., November 21, 1920.

20. Ibid.

scribe the German troops' conduct in Belgium.<sup>21</sup> The Bryce Report is acknowledged to be biased in support of Britain's agenda against Germany and has been criticized for focusing on rare acts of brutality to paint German troops as particularly violent, but it is not the only account to describe German actions as "terrorism."

Since the initial response to Germany's campaign in Belgium, more recent analysis has also described the actions of German troops as acts of "terrorism." Australian historian Trevor Wilson, in his review of the committee that put together the Bryce Report, accused Germany of "a deliberate policy of terrorism against Belgian civilians."<sup>22</sup> Some scholars have suggested that the Germans were acting on 19th-century Prussian military philosopher's, Karl von Clausewitz's, theory that civilians should be terrorized as a part of war in order to put pressure on their government.<sup>23</sup> In his book *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium*, August 1914, historian Jeff Lipkes argues that German treatment of civilians was "part of a deliberate campaign of terrorism ordered by military authorities"<sup>24</sup>. He gives multiple accounts of local and regional terrorism, including the mass executions of civilians and destruction of property to inspire fear, and quotes German General Julius von Hartmann as saying "Where there is a popular uprising, terrorism becomes a necessary military principle."<sup>25</sup> The intentional use of fear or terrorism to establish power over civilians and military groups in a time of conflict is similar to the theory of war that Leon Trotsky described in his justification of terrorism during a revolution.

### The United States

Many examples of "terrorism" in the United States as described by the early 20th century American media do not address violent instances that would, in any way today, be described as "terrorism." These examples include the "terrorism of man" as described by a man lamenting the present-day's wom-

an's "haughtiness"<sup>26</sup>; a case of "medical terrorism" in which the author argues that people should not be so frightened of contracting consumption<sup>27</sup>; and the use of "gallery terrorism" to describe a play that the author particularly disliked<sup>28</sup>. While these are acknowledged to be satirical uses of the term, it is important to note the casual use of the word to describe a movement as "terrorism" simply because the author disliked it. Today, most writers are more cautious with the term. A modern-day newspaper that headlined "Gallery Terrorism" might receive complaints that their readers were initially concerned a violent act against civilians had been committed at a gallery.

More serious uses of the term "terrorism" are seen in the early decades of the 1900s as well; these include a description of police brutality against an African-American woman under the headline "Police Terrorism"<sup>29</sup>; a record of African-American disenfranchisement under the title "Government by Terrorism"<sup>30</sup>; a characterization of a general strike as "class terrorism"<sup>31</sup>; and a critique of the U.S. government's attempt to inspire support for the war through fear described as "unparalleled terrorism"<sup>32</sup>. These are circumstances that do not necessarily meet Schmid's and Jongman's criteria for modern-day terrorism, but there is a political motivation present in all four articles that clarifies the intention behind its use here. Circumstances of "terrorism" that may constitute the modern-day use of the term include a description of the shooting of civilian J.P. Morgan by Eric Muentner (under the alias Frank Holt) as an occurrence of "German terrorism"<sup>33</sup> and an abandonment of threats

21. James Bryce, "Primary Documents - Bryce Report into German Atrocities in Belgium, 12 May 1915," <https://www.firstworldwar.com/source/brycereport.htm>. Accessed 4 December 2018.

22. Jeff Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914*, Leuven University Press, 2007. 649.

23. Editors, History.com. n.d. "Germans Burn Belgian Town of Louvain." HISTORY. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/germans-burn-belgian-town-of-louvain>. Accessed 4 December 2018.

24. Jeff Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914*. 649.

25. Ibid 558.

26. James Wright, 1926, "'Terrorism' of Man." *New York Times*, 1926, sec. DRAMA MUSIC SCHOOL FASHION SCREEN RESORT STEAMSHIPS TRAVEL.

27. W. H. M. 1908, "Medical Terrorism," *St. Louis Post - Dispatch* (1879-1922); St. Louis, Mo., July 11, 1908.

28. *The Stage* (Archive: 1880-1959); London. 1904, "Gallery Terrorism," May 12, 1904.

29. *The New York Amsterdam News* (1922-1938); New York, N.Y. 1929, "Police Terrorism," March 13, 1929, sec. Editorial Special Articles.

30. *The Independent ... Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* (1848-1921); New York, 1900, "Government by Terrorism.," August 16, 1900.

31. *New York Tribune* (1911-1922); New York, 1919, "Class Terrorism," June 26, 1919.

32. *New York Times*, 1917, "BERLIN WAR AIMS TO BE HELD BACK, MICHAELIS SAYS: To Reveal Them Now Would Bind Negotiators, He Tells Reichstag Committee. CHARGES TERRORISM HERE America, He Asserts, Attempts by 'Unparalleled' Methods to Stir Up War Spirit," 1917.

33. ENQUIRER, SPECIAL CABLE TO THE, 1915,

of violence by Bolshevik supporters in the U.S. referred to as “terrified terrorism”<sup>34</sup>. The application of “terrorism” against law enforcement and government policies suggests a greater inclination among American journalists to apply the term to their own government than what is seen in the modern era.

### Synthesis: “Terrorism” preceding and during World War I

“Terrorism” was used in a myriad of ways in the early 20th century by American and European media and politicians. Debates around “terrorism” versus revolutionary action are illustrated in descriptions of the Irish Republican movement and the Russian Revolutions. Because of the conflict in Ireland and in Russia, “terrorism” can be seen as liberally applied to describe groups and events depending on the author’s political leanings and agenda. The satirical applications seen in some of the examples of American circumstances may suggest that authors were more willing to apply the term casually when no definitive terrorist, revolutionary or conflict-heavy activity was actually occurring.

British officials seemed willing to address German military activity in Belgium that may be considered “terrorism” but were less eager, unsurprisingly, to apply the term to their own military occupation of Ireland. This application to British troops still occurred however, when the author was sympathetic to the Irish Republican cause.

“Terrorism” is seen to describe a military or a government strategy strikingly often in the cases of the British forces in Ireland, the Bolshevik forces (particularly after they had seized power), and the German troops in Belgium. While this is not something that a government would likely openly admit to today, this use of the term is consistent with the 1900 definition of “terrorism” as potentially including a “mode of government by terror.” This hesitancy to apply an incriminating term like “terrorist” to a government entity may result from the fact that governments had not begun defining the term individually by this point in the 20th century. When asked to help write the U.S. government’s definitions of terrorism in 1985, former Deputy Director of the White House Task Force on Terrorism, Edward Peck said:

“...They asked us...to come up with a definition of terrorism that could be used throughout the

“German Terrorism.” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (1872-1922); Cincinnati, Ohio, July 6, 1915.

34. *Detroit Free Press* (1858-1922); Detroit, Mich. 1919, “Terrified Terrorism,” July 7, 1919.

government. We produced about six, and each and every case, they were rejected, because careful reading would indicate that our own country had been involved in some of those activities.”<sup>35</sup>

The changing definitions of “terrorism” and the move away from describing government actions as acts of terrorism may be a direct result of various governments’ agendas in how they define the term. Scholars Lutz and Lutz also acknowledge the problematic agenda that governments reinforce when they write their own definitions of an incriminating term that has been historically applied to governments by their own peoples: “Governments provide definitions, but they are often self-serving at least to some degree. Opponents of the government are defined as terrorists while irregular allies of the government fail to meet the definitional standards as terrorists.”<sup>36</sup>

In general, the uses of the term “terrorism” as applied by government officials and media sources in the early 20th century is inconsistent with the specific components intended when the term is used today, namely, the use of force, the targeting of civilians, the perpetrators being non-combatants, and the presence of political motivation. Many of the cases in which the term was applied consisted of forms of revolutionary action or government action that our modern-day definitions intentionally exclude. The debate around revolutionary fighters being identified as terrorists is still raging today, while government agencies appeared to have moved the conversation away from their own actions by intentionally shaping the definitions of “terrorism” that they adhere to.

### Conclusion

“One person’s freedom fighter is another person’s terrorist.”<sup>37</sup> Political scientists may tire of hearing this phrase, but it is irresponsible to discuss “terrorism” without acknowledging the conflict surrounding the word, the stark political agenda that governments serve when they control how the word is perceived, and the participation of the media in labeling certain individuals and groups as “terrorists.” Can such a

35. “Democracy Now! | NATIONAL EXCLUSIVE: Hezbollah Leader Hassan Nasrallah Talks With Former US Diplomats on Israel, Prisoners and Hezbollah’s Founding.” 31 July 2006. <https://web.archive.org/web/20060731140522/http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=06%2F07%2F28%2F1440244>. Accessed 4 December 2018.

36. James M. Lutz and Brenda J. Lutz. “What Is Terrorism? Definition and Classification.”

37. Ibid.

word be trusted? When governments have intentionally moved the word from a discussion that includes accountability for their own actions to define it and apply it on their own terms, the use of the word should always be taken with a grain of salt. Part of using this term responsibly in the modern-age is acknowledging the agenda that various governments have pursued in defining “terrorism” to protect their own reputations and in selecting who constitutes a “terrorist” to serve their own political ends. Understanding that government officials once admittedly used “terrorism” as a military strategy and policy during times of conflict should make citizens more skeptical of a government that refuses to acknowledge ways that their own violence might be perceived as “terrorism.”

This paper examined colloquial definitions of “terrorism” and “terrorist” as well as applications of the term by American and European media sources and various government figures of the early 20th century to conclude that the lack of formal definitions of the word contributed to its arbitrary usage during World War I; and that the eventual creation of definitions by governments changed how the term is applied today and the ease with which modern governments identify and kill “terrorists” without challenges from their domestic populations. The uses of “terrorism” in the early 1900s sheds light on the subjectivity and complexity of the term “terrorism” and its problematic development throughout the 20th century.

Further research should also be done into the development of the term “terrorism” from the period examined here at the end of World War I until its increasingly heavy applications in the 1960s and 70s. Considering that the U.S. would intentionally use the term “terrorism” to describe the Vietnamese resistance to their military occupation just four decades later, the social and political development of this term is incredibly rapid. What assisted in the development of this term? How much of the development of “terrorism” is due to intentional government interference to maintain their own international and domestic reputations? Answers to these questions will help us understand how the word “terrorism” is received and used today, and how modern citizens can use such a loaded term more responsibly in heightened climates.

More terms are also needed to describe the various kinds of terrorism and the myriad of motivations behind it. 20th century references to “revolutionary terrorism” highlight a potential gap in the academic approaches to understanding terrorism. Does “revolutionary ter-

rorism” differ greatly in its manifestation from other sorts of terrorism? Does its support vary widely from the support for a government’s acts of terrorism? Does the level of domestic support for a potential “terrorist” group differentiate between a terrorist and a revolutionary? Should state-sponsored terrorism be studied differently than “revolutionary terror”? As government’s have written their definitions of terrorism specifically to protect themselves from incriminating discussions, is separate legislation (perhaps international legislation) needed to address state-sponsored terrorism?

The death threats faced by an elementary school girl identified as a “terrorist” because of her religion leave little to the imagination as to the extreme reactions toward “terrorists” that have been normalized in our society today. This analysis shows how differently “terrorism” was perceived just 100 years ago, when government officials spouted and defended “terrorism” as an unavoidable aspect of war and an acceptable military strategy in response to insurgency. Understanding the development of this term within this century is essential to ensuring that civilian populations are not further manipulated by governments using the term to justify their own violent agenda. ♦

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