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# Terrorism As Defense, Defense As Terrorism

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Abstract. This article describes some definitional complexities of the construct terrorism.

One defense argument in the trial of individuals accused of participation in the bombings of United States Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania focuses on the definition of terrorism. The argument stipulates that terrorism is the use of violence for political ends, that government representatives engage in violence for political ends, and that, therefore, governments (and their representatives) are also terrorists, or, perhaps, terrorists are also in some ways functionally equivalent to governments (and their representatives).

The prosecution rebuttal is that what terrorists do is terrorism, and what the government does is warfare. The first part of this argument is correct up to a point, until one is confronted with having to identify who the terrorists are so that terrorism can be defined in terms of what they do. The second part of this argument is also correct up to a point, until one is confronted with the notion that governments engage in more than just warfare and that if all government violence for political ends is warfare, then terrorists may differ only in terms of who they are not in terms of what they do. This last conclusion, of course, subverts the first part of the argument that what terrorists do is terrorism, if non-terrorists can do what terrorists do and not be terrorists.

Perhaps, the most significant inference to be made from the prosecution argument is that--implicitly, according to the prosecution--governments can legally engage in certain behaviors that non-governments cannot. This inference may have less moral and ethical weight, but more importantly, suggests that the difference between war and terrorism rests solely on the perquisites that differentiate governments from non-governments. Given that there certainly are governments that can be deemed illegitimate and non-governments that can be deemed legitimate representatives of some entity labeled as "the people," the inference is tenuous at best. Moreover, it does away with the evil, horror, and beyond-the-pale atrocity that terrorism purportedly has that other types of political violence do not.

It may well be that a government's fervent attempt to brand others as terrorist has less to do with the differences between it and the others but the similarities. (See Cimbala, S.J. (1998). Armies, states, and terrorism. *Strategic Review*, 26, 46-53; Clutterback, R. (Ed.). (1986). *The future of political violence: Destabilization, disorder, and terrorism*. Macmillan; Feuer, A. (March 30, 2001). Bomb case debate focuses on penalty phase. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; McSherry, J.P., & Mejia, R.M. (Eds.). (1999). *Shadows of state terrorism: Impunity in Latin America*. *Social Justice*, 26, 1-191; Simon, J.D. (1994). *The terrorist trap: America's experience with terrorism*. Indiana University Press; Terrorism: Image and reality. (2000). *Global Dialogue*, 2, 1-136; Wieviorka, M. (Ed.). (1998). *Un nouveau paradigme de la violence? Cultures et Conflits*, 29/30, 9-468.) (Keywords: Political Violence, Terrorism.)