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# Trends. Iraq and the Implosion of the Terrorism Construct

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses assorted definitions of terrorism to determine which definitions could practically be applied to military action as a way of reducing violence against United States military personnel in Iraq.

Can one effect terrorism against United States military personnel in Iraq? To do so one would have to posit that several aspects of a definition of terrorism were germane.

There would need to be violence or the threat of violence. The violence or threat would need to be intentionally and directly against military personnel and/or against other people or materiel that would psychologically affect the military personnel in question. The psychological effect would directly or indirectly lead to political consequences desired by the ultimate source of the violence or threat even if not by the proximal cause of the violence or threat.

How would the above differ from any application of violence? There would have to be some attribute of innocence among the military personnel or materiel and/or people against which violence and/or threat was effected. It is at this criterion of innocence that the construct of terrorism becomes most problematic. Some attributers would assume that any violence or threat against military personnel is unjustified because the personnel's cause is right--i.e., the personnel and innocence are always conjoined. Or that the innocence applies only if the personnel are not actively engaged in military activity at the moment of violence or threat. Or only if there is no violence or threat from the personnel even if the relevant military function also does not comprise violence or threat.

On the other hand, there are attributers who would assume not only that innocence and military personnel are never conjoined but also that there is a lack of conjunction between innocence and intermediaries against whom violence and/or threat would be effected. Here, nonmilitary men and women and all children would be legitimate targets of violence and/or threat because innocence could only roll off them and not stick.

The notion that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist is really not the issue because one could use whatever terrorism is to fight for freedom or anything else. And one could fight for freedom using all sorts of things besides that which might be terrorism. Instead, the terrorism label is used--in most cases--to delegitimize and deprive specific instances and types of violence and/or threat. It is for this reason that there are so many definitions of terrorism and so many differences in labeling examples of violence and/or threat.

One last point. The terrorism label can take over the social cognition concerning an individual, group, or organization--including the social cognition of the self. That is, someone or something that engages in what is called terrorism becomes a terrorist entity through and through, as opposed to someone or something that engages in terrorism but also engages in many other activities and has many other attributes.

## International Bulletin of Political Psychology

And so, the Iraqi regime is or isn't terrorist. As is the United States Government. What does this mean? That instead of engaging in terrorism about who and what is terrorist, one should identify one's values and interests and engage in violence and/or threat when there is no other appropriate way. (See Akhtar, S. (1999). The psychodynamic dimension of terrorism. *Psychiatric Annals*, 29, 350-355; Cassimatis, E.G. (2002). Terrorism, our world and our way of life. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 30, 531-543; Crenshaw, M. (1992). Current research on terrorism: The academic perspective. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 15, 1-11; Powell: Iraq and terrorism go back decades. MSNBC News. <http://www.msnbc.com/local/wrc/A1482983.asp?cp1=1>; Terrorism: Questions and answers. Council of Foreign Relations. <http://www.terrorismanswers.com/sponsors/iraq.html>.) (Keywords: Iraq, Terrorism.)