

solid framework in defining terrorism. What is called LIC in military parlance thus may itself be the same thing as terrorism.

Violence begets violence and is not its own cure. Modern-day states celebrate the success of their violence in one guise or another. Yet, no genuine problems can be solved by labeling others with the word “terrorist” when the universal definition of the word has been unachievable—for the selfish reasons of governments, who would have to agree on such a definition. If a consensus is reached on a definition, one would hope that it would hold states culpable for the terrorism (and unconstitutional or illegal violence, mayhem, etc.) they are responsible for. Until then, it is perhaps best not to be swayed by the subjective and mostly manipulative use of the word.

### **Beyond Terrorism as We Know It**

The term “terrorisme” was coined in France at the time of the French Revolution. It signified a sense of government intimidation of people. For reasons that serve the state and other political interests, the denotation of the expression has been turned on its head. Currently, the “terrorism” label is reserved almost exclusively for non-state actors who engage in a certain type of violence (as well as those governments that are on the “wrong” side of the desired track). Such meaning and usage of the term, while dubious, provides highly useful discretionary tools to governments who can now label any undesirable element as “terroristic” and can craft special laws for such elements. Maybe that’s why no universal consensus has been achieved in defining the term.

This approach (to a subjective definition of terrorism) also extends an open license for exploitation in different ways all over the world. And such a license is readily leveraged, especially by those in power. There is the situation where Richard Perle, an influential political intellectual and a Pentagon official, accused Seymour Hersh, the Pulitzer-winning legendary journalist, of being “a terrorist.”<sup>109</sup> Hersh’s crime? Writing an exposé for the *New Yorker* magazine in which he “accused Perle of inappropriately mixing business and public office in dealings with Saudi Arabia.”<sup>110</sup> *The Independent*, a British paper, goes on to point out that, after much denial of

wrongdoing, Perle's situation became untenable, and he suddenly resigned his official post as chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board (DPB). Such blatantly false use of the word "terrorist," however, was not invented by Perle and would not end with his resignation.

In the geopolitical arena, all kinds of players are involved in the sponsorship or direct execution of what would be objectively classified as "terroristic" activity. This includes governments all over the world. Operation Satanique,<sup>111</sup> the 1985 sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*, a Greenpeace ship, by the French government is a good example of state-executed terrorism that gets hushed up within the geopolitical system. There is strong evidence that the authorization for this act of terrorism came from Francois Mitterand, the French president at the time. Mitterand was said to have personally authorized the operation<sup>112</sup> by Pierre Lacoste, the head of the French DGSE<sup>113</sup> spy agency, who was involved in the plan's execution. Yet, this global scandal was swiftly swept under the rug. Operation Northwoods<sup>114</sup> would be another interesting example. How many Americans are aware that, in the 1960s, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought JFK's approval to execute this operation?

Regarding Operation Satanique, we have to keep in mind that it is just one example of terrorism by one government.<sup>115</sup> Besides, the disclosure of its terrorism did not seem to shake the conscience of the French government. Colonel Jean-Claude Lesquer, the "brain" behind the operation at DGSE headquarters in Paris, was promoted to major-general and commanded the Daguet division in the 1991 Gulf War. And in 1995 he was given the honorific title of "grand officier de la Légion d'honneur."<sup>116</sup>

Who should the "terrorist" label be applied to in the Operation Satanique situation? Given the loss of human life involved in this instance, would it be fair to use the word "murderer" to describe everyone involved? What percentage of the French people would be fully informed about this instance of terrorism committed by their government? What percentage would entertain the possibility that this may not be the only instance of terrorism their government has engaged in, presumably on their behalf? Some would surely

defend President Mitterand or his government for having authorized the operation. Would the same people accept similar apologetics or excuse-making by supporters of non-French state-sponsored terrorism?

When the source and implementor of the legal system has to resort to terrorism despite all the laws available to it, it becomes reasonable for those without such power to argue that terrorism is justified. The way the human psyche works can sometimes be rather strange. (This can be understood using the concept of attribution bias, see chapter 1, section “Extremist Ideologies Hijacking Religion.”)

Another example is much more intricate in terms of the allocation of responsibility. As mentioned in chapter 1, the United States supplied the Stinger ground-to-air missiles to the Afghan guerillas in the mid-80s. The SAS (the British equivalent of the US Delta Force) is believed to have been directly involved in training the guerillas in using these missiles,<sup>117</sup> which were used not just against the Soviet forces, and not just against military targets. “These missiles were used by the mujahideen to shoot down several passenger aircraft, with heavy loss of life.”<sup>118</sup>

Would the use of Stingers to shoot down passenger airplanes be considered terrorism or a war crime? Should the two sponsoring governments share the responsibility for such activity? (A latter section, “Multi-dimensionality of the Sources of Extremism ...,” further highlights this aspect of the terrorism phenomenon.)

## **Understanding the Geopolitical Roots of Religious Extremism**

The prevalent image in many parts of the world today is that extremism is limited to Islam. This viewpoint, especially its systematic propagation in Europe, North America, South Asia, and the Middle East, creates dangerous complacency in terms of solving related problems and ignoring extremism in other religions and ideologies in these and other regions—not to mention the denial of the geopolitical drivers of such extremism.

The acceptance of the outcomes and unintended consequences of geopolitical power play become unsettling when we try to delve into the complexity and interconnectedness of global affairs. The