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CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TERRORISM*

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Many issues and problems surround the conceptualization of terrorism. Most definitions of the term are indefensible if only because they do not speak to those issues and problems. An assessment of contending definitions can transcend purely personal opinions; and an assessment can be undertaken without a theory, even though an impressive theory is the ultimate justification of its constituent definitions. The present conceptualization goes beyond a definition of terrorism by emphasizing the definition's bearing on five major conceptual questions, each of which introduces a major issue and/or problem. Then it is argued that thinking of terrorism and other sociological phenomena in terms of control promotes recognition of logical connections and/or empirical associations, each of which could become a component of a theory.

Definitions of terrorism are controversial for reasons other than conceptual issues and problems. Because labeling actions as "terrorism" promotes condemnation of the actors, a definition may reflect ideological or political bias (for lengthy elaboration, see Rubenstein 1987). Given such considerations, all of which discourage attempts to define terrorism, it is not surprising that Laqueur (1977, p. 5) argued that

a comprehensive definition of terrorism . . . does not exist nor will it be found in the foreseeable future. To argue that terrorism cannot be studied without such a definition is manifestly absurd.

Even granting what Laqueur implies—that terrorism is somehow out there awaiting definition—it is no less "manifestly absurd" to pretend to study terrorism without at least some kind of definition of it. Leaving the definition implicit is the road to obscurantism.

Even if sociologists should overcome their ostensible reluctance to study terrorism (for a rare exception, see Lee 1983), they are unlikely to contribute to its conceptualization. The situation has been described succinctly by Tallman (1984, p. 1121): "Efforts to explicate key concepts in sociology have been met with stifling indifference by members of our discipline."

There are at least two reasons why

sociologists commonly appear indifferent to conceptualizations. First, Weber and Parsons gave the work a bad name in the eyes of those sociologists who insist (rightly) on a distinction between substantive theory and conceptual analysis. Second, conclusive resolutions of conceptual issues are improbable because the *ultimate* justification of any definition is an impressive theory that incorporates the definition. Nonetheless, it is crippling to assume that productive research and impressive theories are possible without confronting conceptual issues and problems. The argument is not just that theorizing without definitions is sterile, nor merely recognition that theory construction and conceptualization should go hand in hand. Additionally, one can assess definitions without descending to purely personal opinion, even when not guided by a theory.

Systematic tests of a theory require definitions of at least *some* of the theory's constituent terms; but test findings, even those based on the same units of comparison, will diverge if each definition's empirical applicability is negligible, meaning if independent observers disagree when applying the definition to identify events or things. To illustrate, contemplate a question about any definition of terrorism: How much do independent observers agree in judging whether or not President Kennedy's assassination was terrorism in light of the definition? As subsequent illustrations show, simple definitions may promote agreement in answers to the Kennedy question and yet be objectionable for theoretical reasons; but the immediate

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point is that an empirically applicable definition does not require a theory. By contrast, given evidence that a definition promises negligible empirical applicability, no theory can justify that definition.

Still another "atheoretical" criterion is the definition's consistency with convention. That criterion cannot be decisive, because it would preclude novel definitions; but it is important when the field's professionals must rely on "outsiders" for data and, hence, presume appreciable congruence between their definitions and those of the outsiders. That consideration is particularly relevant here, because in analyzing terrorism social scientists often rely on reports of government officials, journalists, and historians.

Conceptual issues and problems haunt virtually all major terms in the social and behavioral sciences, and any definition is ambiguous if it does not answer questions bearing on those issues and problems. There are at least five such questions about terrorism. First, is terrorism *necessarily* illegal (a crime)? Second, is terrorism *necessarily* undertaken to realize some particular type of goal and, if so, what is it? Third, how does terrorism *necessarily* differ from conventional military operations in a war, a civil war, or so-called guerrilla warfare? Fourth, is it *necessarily* the case that only opponents of the government engage in terrorism? Fifth, is terrorism *necessarily* a distinctive strategy in the use of violence and, if so, what is that strategy?

The questions are answered in light of a subsequent definition of terrorism, but more than a definition is needed. The pursuit of a theory about terrorism will be furthered by describing and thinking about terrorism and all other sociological phenomena in terms of one particular notion, thereby promoting the recognition of logical and empirical associations. The most appropriate notion is identified subsequently as "control," but a defense of that identification requires a definition of terrorism (*not* of "terror").

A DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

Terrorism is illegal violence or threatened violence directed against human or nonhuman objects, provided that it:

- (1) was undertaken or ordered with a view to altering or maintaining at least one putative

norm in at least one particular territorial unit or population;

- (2) had secretive, furtive, and/or clandestine features that were expected by the participants to conceal their personal identity and/or their future location;
- (3) was not undertaken or ordered to further the permanent defense of some area;
- (4) was not conventional warfare and because of their concealed personal identity, concealment of their future location, their threats, and/or their spatial mobility, the participants perceived themselves as less vulnerable to conventional military action; *and*
- (5) was perceived by the participants as contributing to the normative goal previously described (*supra*) by inculcating fear of violence in persons (perhaps an indefinite category of them) other than the immediate target of the actual or threatened violence and/or by publicizing some cause.

Clarification, Issues, and Problems

In keeping with a social science tradition, most definitions of terrorism are set forth in a fairly brief sentence (see, e.g., surveys by Oots 1986, pp. 5-8, and Schmid and Jongman 1988, pp. 32-38). Such definitions do not tax the reader's intellect or patience, but it is inconsistent to grant that human behavior is complex and then demand simple definitions of behavioral types.

The illegality of terrorism. Rubenstein's definition (1987, p. 31) is noteworthy if only because it makes no reference to crime or illegality: "I use the term 'terrorism' . . . to denote *acts of small-group violence for which arguable claims of mass representation can be made.*" However, even granting that terrorism is an illegal action, there are two contending conceptions of crime, one emphasizing the *reactions* of officials as the criterion and the other emphasizing normative considerations (e.g., statutory law). Because of space limitations, it is not feasible to go much beyond recognizing the two contending conceptions. It must suffice to point out that an action may be illegal or criminal (in light of statutes and/or reactions by state officials) because of (1) where it was planned; (2) where it commenced; and/or (3) where it continued, especially in connection with crossing a political boundary. Such distinctions are relevant even when contemplating the incidence of terrorism.

One likely reaction: But why is terrorism

necessarily a crime? The question suggests that *classes* of events or things exist independently of definitions. Thus, it may appear that "stones" and "humans" denote ontologically *given* classes, but in the context of gravitational theory stones and humans are *not* different. However, to insist that all definitions are *nominal* is not to imply that conventional usage should be ignored; and, again, the point takes on special significance when defining terrorism. The initial (unnumbered) part of the present definition is consistent with most other definitions and also with this claim: most journalists, officials, and historians who label an action as "terrorism" evidently regard the action as illegal or criminal. However, it is not denied that two populations may differ sharply as to whether or not a particular action was a crime. As a *necessary* condition for an action to be terrorism, only the statutes and/or reactions of officials in the political unit where the action was planned or took place (in whole or in part) need identify the action as criminal or illegal.

Violence and terrorism. Something like the phrase "violence or threatened violence" appears in most definitions of terrorism (see Schmid and Jongman 1988, p. 5). As in those definitions, the phrase's key terms are here left as primitives; and whether they must be defined to realize sufficient empirical applicability can be determined only by actual attempts to apply the definition.

Despite consensus about violence as a *necessary* feature of terrorism, there is a related issue. Writers often suggest that only humans can be targets of violence, but many journalists, officials, and historians have identified instances of destruction or damage of nonhuman objects (e.g., buildings, domesticated animals, crops) as terrorism. Moreover, terrorists pursue their ultimate goal through inculcation of fear and humans do fear damage or destruction of particular nonhuman objects.

The ultimate goal of terrorists. The present definition indicates that terrorists *necessarily* have a goal. Even though it is difficult to think of a human action that is not goal oriented, the consideration is controversial for two reasons. One reason is the allegation that terrorists are irrational or mentally ill (see, e.g., Livingston 1978, pp. 224-39; and Livingstone's commentary, 1982, p. 31 on Parry), which raises doubts as to whether

terrorists have identifiable goals. The second reason why part 1 of the definition is controversial: many sociologists, especially Durkheimians, do not emphasize the purposive quality of human behavior, perhaps because they view the emphasis as reductionism. In any case, a defensible definition of virtually any term in sociology's vocabulary requires recognition of the relevance of internal behavior (e.g., perception, beliefs, purpose). Thus, without part 1 of the present definition, the distinction between terrorism and the *typical* robbery becomes obscure. The typical robber does not threaten violence to maintain or alter a putative norm; he or she is concerned only with behavioral control in a particular situation.

A defensible definition of a norm is not presumed (see Gibbs 1981, pp. 9-18, for a litany of difficulties). Rather, it is necessary only that at least one of the participants (those who undertake the violent action or order it) view the action as contributing to the maintenance or alteration of some law, policy, arrangement, practice, institution, or shared belief.

Part 1 of the definition is unconventional only in that goals of terrorists are *not* necessarily political. Many definitions create the impression that all terrorism is political (for a contrary view, see Wilkinson 1986, p. 51), but the very term "political terrorism" suggests at least two types.¹ The concern of social scientists with terrorism typologies is premature (see, e.g., the commentary by Oots [1986, pp. 11, 30] on Mickolus's notions of international, transnational, domestic, and interstate terrorism). No terrorism typology amounts to a *generic* definition (see the survey in Schmid and Jongman 1988, pp.

¹ As pointed out by Laqueur (1987, pp. 19, 118), much of the terrorism in the American labor movement (e.g., the bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* building in 1910) was attacked even by the left as "commercial, not idealistic"; and "there was no intention of overthrowing the government, killing the political leadership or changing the political system." To insist that an effort (violent or otherwise) to alter working conditions or wages in a particular context (e.g., a publishing corporation) is "political" only illustrates indiscriminate use of that term. To be sure, it may be that an impressive theory about terrorism must be limited to "political terrorism," but the necessity for such limitation cannot be known *a priori*.

39–59), and without the latter the former is bound to be unsatisfactory.

Military operations and terrorism. To repeat a previous question: How does terrorism necessarily differ, if at all, from conventional military operations in a war, civil war, or so-called guerrilla warfare? The question cannot be answered readily because there are no clearly accepted definitions of conventional military operation, war, civil war, and guerrilla warfare.² "Guerrilla" is especially troublesome because journalists are prone to use the word without defining it but such as to suggest that it is synonymous with terrorism (a usage emphatically rejected by Laqueur 1987 and Wilkinson 1986).

Conventional military operations differ from terrorism along the lines indicated by parts 2, 3, and 4 of the definition.³ However, the definition does not preclude the possibility of a transition from terrorism to civil war. One tragic instance was the Easter Rising in Ireland (1916), when rather than perpetuate the terrorism tradition, a small group of Irish seized and attempted a permanent defense of government buildings in Dublin, vainly hoping that the populace would join them in open warfare. Today, it is terrorism rather than civil war that haunts Northern Ireland, and the term "guerrilla warfare" has no descriptive utility in that context.

Terrorism as a special strategy. One feature of terrorism makes it a distinctive (though not unique) strategy in violence. That feature is described in part 5 of the definition.

² The question is *not* how terrorists differ from military personnel, insurgents, rebels, revolutionaries, or guerrillas. The distinction is irrelevant for present purposes because the concern is not with defining "a terrorist." The terms "terrorist" and "terrorists" are used occasionally in this paper in the loose sense of "an individual or individuals who have engaged in terrorism," but it is recognized that a more elaborate definition is needed.

³ The secretive, furtive, and/or clandestine features of terrorism (part 2 of the present definition) are not limited to the violent action itself. They also pertain to previous and subsequent actions (nonviolent), even the lifestyle of the participants. Consider Clark's observation (1986, p. 300) on members of a terrorist organization dedicated to Basque separatism: "The great majority of the members of ETA continue to live at home, either with their parents or (if they were married) with their spouses and children, and to work at their regular employment. . . ."

Part 5 is controversial primarily because it would exclude action such as this threat: "Senator, if you vote for that bill, it will be your death warrant." Why would such a threat not be terrorism? A more theoretically significant answer is given subsequently. Here it must suffice to point out that scores of writers have emphasized "third-party" or "general" intimidation as an essential feature of terrorism;⁴ and journalists, officials, or historians only rarely identify "dyadic intimidation" (*X* acts violently toward *Y* but *not* to control *Z*'s behavior) as terrorism.

"State terrorism" as a special issue. Zinam's definition (1978, pp. 244–45) illustrates one of many reasons why definitions of terrorism are so disputable: "[Terrorism is] the use or threat of violence by individuals or organized groups to evoke fear and submission to obtain some economic, political, sociopsychological, ideological, or other objective." Because the definition would extend to the imposition of legal punishments by government officials to prevent crimes through *general* deterrence, in virtually all jurisdictions (see Morris 1966, p. 631) some aspects of criminal justice would qualify as terrorism; and Zinam's definition provides no basis for denying that it would be "state terrorism."⁵ Even granting that a state agent or employee acts for the state only when acting in the direction or with the consent of a superordi-

⁴ For example, Oots (1986, p. 81) makes intimidation central in his definition of terrorism, but numerous writers suggest that "seeking publicity" is also an essential strategy in terrorism. Hence, reference is made in the present definition (the last part of it) to "publicizing some cause." Actually, the two strategies—intimidation and publicization—are virtually inseparable.

⁵ Should it be argued (see, e.g., Wilkinson 1986, p. 23, and Zinam 1978, p. 241) that violence is *by definition* illegal, what of a killing in an Anglo-American case of undisputed justifiable homicide? To deny that the killing was violence would be arbitrary in the extreme and contrary to conventional use of the term "violence." Indeed, why submit to an unconventional usage that makes "illegitimate violence" redundant and "legitimate violence" contradictory? Perhaps more importantly, what term is the appropriate descriptive label for undisputed justifiable homicide or the *legitimate* use of force by a police officer? If the answer is "coercion," there is no corresponding convention; and when kidnappers bind their victims, surely that action is coercion.

nate, there is still no ostensible difference between the use or threat of violence in law enforcement and Zinam's terrorism.

Had Zinam defined terrorism as being necessarily illegal or criminal, then many instances of violence by a state agent or employee at the direction or with the consent of a superordinate would not be terrorism. However, think of the numerous killings in Nazi Germany (Ernst Roehm, the Storm Troop head being a well-known victim) during the Night of the Long Knives (June 30, 1934). Hitler ordered the slaughter, and *at the time* the killings were illegal in light of German statutes; but Hitler publicly acknowledged responsibility, and the only concealment was that perceived as necessary to surprise the victims.⁶ Surely there is a significant difference between such open, blatant use of coercion by a state official (dictator or not) and the situation where regime opponents are assassinated but officials disavow responsibility and the murders are so secretive that official complicity is difficult to prove. The "rule of terror" of Shaka, the famous Zulu chief, is also relevant. Shaka frequently ordered the execution of tribal members on a seemingly whimsical basis, but the orders were glaringly public (see Walter 1969). Shaka's regime illustrates another point: in some social units there may be no obvious "law" other than the will of a despot, in which case there is no basis to describe the despot's violence as illegal. The general point: because various aspects of government may be *public* violence, to label all of those aspects "terrorism" is to deny that terrorism has any secretive, furtive, or clandestine features.

Given the conceptual issues and problems that haunt the notion of state terrorism, it is hardly surprising that some writers attribute great significance to the notion, while others (e.g., Laqueur 1987, pp. 145-46) seem to reject it. The notion is not rejected here, and the following definition does not make it an

extremely rare phenomenon. State terrorism occurs when and only when a government official (or agent or employee) engages in terrorism, as previously defined, at the direction or with the consent of a superordinate, but one who does *not* publicly acknowledge such direction or consent.

The foregoing notwithstanding, for theoretical reasons it may prove desirable to limit the proposed definition of terrorism (*supra*) to *nonstate* terrorism and to seek a quite different definition of *state* terrorism. Even so, it will not do to presume that all violence by state agents is terrorism. The immediate reason is that the presumption blurs the distinction between terrorism and various kinds or aspects of law enforcement. Moreover, it is grossly unrealistic to assume that all instances of genocide or persecution along racial, ethnic, religious, or class lines by state agents (including the military) are terrorism regardless of the means, goals, or circumstances. Nor is it defensible to speak of particular regimes (e.g., Stalin's, Hitler's, Pol Pot's) as though all of the related violence must have been state terrorism. For that matter, granted that the regimes were monstrous bloodbaths, it does not follow that the state agents in question made no effort whatever to conceal any of their activities and/or their identity.⁷ Readers who reject the argument should confer with American journalists who attempted to cover Stalin's Soviet Union, Hitler's Germany, or Pol Pot's Cambodia. Similarly, it is pointless to deny that secretive, clandestine, or furtive actions have been characteristic of "death squads" (many allegedly "state") in numerous Latin American countries over recent decades. It is commonly very difficult to prove that such groups murder with the knowledge and/or consent of state officials; but the difficulty is one justification for identifying the murders as terrorism, even though the state-nonstate distinction may be debatable in particular instances.

⁶ The suggestion is not that Nazi state terrorism ended with the Night of the Long Knives (June 30, 1934). Note, however, that writers on "Nazi terror" (e.g., Noakes 1986) are prone to avoid an explicit definition of terrorism. Such phrases as "use of terror" (Noakes 1986, p. 67) and "seige of terror" (Walter 1969, p. 7) should not be equated with "terrorism," and they are conducive to misunderstandings.

⁷ When perpetrators of violence attempt to conceal their personal identity, the attempt alone is indicative of illegality; and the secretive, furtive, and/or clandestine features of terrorism (part 2 of the definition) are more decisive than conjectures about legality. When there are doubts on the part of observers as to the legality of some violent act, the concealment of the personal identity of the actor or actors should be treated as evidence of illegality.

Difficulties in Empirical Application

One likely objection to the present definition of terrorism is its complexity; but, again, demands for simplicity are inconsistent with human behavior's complexity. Nonetheless, application of the definition does call for kinds of information that may not be readily available. Reconsider a previous question: Was President Kennedy's assassination terrorism? The present definition does not permit an unequivocal answer, largely because there are doubts about the goals of the assassination and whether or not it was intimidation. If terrorism were defined as simply "the illegal use or threat of violence," an affirmative answer to the Kennedy question could be given; but the definition would also admit (*inter alia*) all robberies and many child abuses. Similarly, the phrase "for political purposes" would justify an affirmative answer to the Kennedy question; but the implication would be a tacit denial of *apolitical* terrorism, and divergent interpretations of "political" are legion. Finally, although a definition that specifically includes "murder of a state official" would maximize confidence in an affirmative answer to the Kennedy question, there must be doubts about the feasibility of such an "enumerative" definition of terrorism. And what would one make of the murder of a sheriff by his or her spouse?

The general point is that a *simple* definition of terrorism tends to delimit a class of events so broad as to defy valid generalizations about it (reconsider mixing presidential assassinations, robberies, and child abuses) or so vague that its empirical applicability is negligible. In the latter connection, the Kennedy illustration indicates the need to grant this methodological principle: the congruence dimension (but not the feasibility dimension) of a definition's empirical applicability is enhanced when independent observers agree that the definition cannot be applied in a particular instance because requisite information is not available. If that principle is not granted, sociologists will try to make do with simple definitions and whatever data are readily available.

Presumptive and possible terrorism. Comparative research on terrorism commonly is based on the use of the term "terrorism" by journalists or officials. Hence, insofar as the use of data on *presumptive* terrorism can be

justified, a definition's utility is enhanced by its correspondence with the use of the term "terrorism" by journalists and officials. Although only potentially demonstrable, my claim is that the present definition corresponds more with such use of the term than does any simpler definition, such as: terrorism is illegal violence.

Even when terrorism research is based on *descriptions* of violent events, as in newspaper stories, there may be cases that can be designated as *possible* terrorism even though the information is not complete; and a definition's empirical applicability can be assessed in terms of agreement among independent observers in such designations. In that connection, the present definition points to the kind of information needed for truly defensible research on terrorism, which is not the case when investigators try to make do with a much simpler definition, or no definition at all.

TOWARD A THEORY OF TERRORISM

The present definition of terrorism does not answer any of a multitude of questions, such as: Why does the incidence of terrorism vary among political units and over time? Although it is an illusion to suppose that any definition answers empirical questions,⁸ a definition may be much more conducive than are alternatives to thinking about phenomena; if so, the definition furthers the pursuit of a theory.

Recognizing Relations

Unlike an isolated proposition, a theory requires preliminary observations and considerable thought. The observations depend on the way the phenomenon in question has been conceptualized, and some conceptualizations facilitate recognition of logical connections and/or possible empirical associations.

When a definition comprises several distinct parts, it is commonly all the more difficult to recognize relations between the phenomenon defined and other phenomena. The solution is to think about all parts of the

⁸ It is also an illusion to suppose that social scientists have anything even approaching an adequate theory of terrorism (see commentaries by Laqueur 1987, p. 165; Schmid and Jongman 1988, p. 61; and Wilkinson 1986, p. 96).

definition in terms of a particular notion, one that can be used to think also about diverse phenomena in the field's subject matter. Explication of the strategy is furthered by this diagram: $X \leftarrow Y \rightarrow Z$, where X is the phenomenon defined, Z is any other phenomenon in the field's subject matter, and Y is the notion used to think about both X and Z . Thinking about X and Z serves no purpose unless it suggests a relation between them. If the relation is a logical connection, it furthers the field's conceptual unification; but substantive theory is advanced primarily by recognition of a possible empirical association, especially one having explanatory implications. Whether there are explanatory implications depends not just on the way that the two phenomena have been defined and on the choice of the notion but also on the explanatory mechanism.

Strategic Explanatory Mechanisms for Sociology

In formulating theories sociologists rarely identify the *type* of explanatory mechanism, and the relative merits of contenders are rarely debated. Unfortunately, space limitations permit only a few observations on three major possibilities.

Strict causation. Possibly excluding the period when functionalism was dominant, strict causation has been sociology's most common explanatory mechanism. It is also the most difficult to describe, due in part to debates (particularly from Hume onward) over the nature of causation. So a simple *residual* definition must suffice: strict causation is the mechanism if the explanation neither makes reference to selective survival nor emphasizes the purposive quality of human behavior. As such, strict causation includes direct, indirect or sequential (i.e., intervening variables), multiple, and reciprocal causation.

Doubts about strict causation as sociology's sole explanatory mechanism grow when one contemplates variation in the incidence of terrorism. Consider two illustrative assertions: (1) an increase in urbanization causes an increase in terrorism; and (2) an increase in stratification causes an increase in terrorism. Both assertions tax credulity; and credulity would not be furthered by substituting other structural variables, nor by invoking multiple, sequential, or reciprocal causation rather than

direct causation (see surveys by Laqueur 1987, pp. 72-173; Schmid and Jongman 1988, pp. 61-135; and Wilkinson 1986, pp. 93, 102, 197, 213).

Selective survival. Contemplate Durkheim's assertion (1949, especially p. 257) that an increase in material (population) density results in an increase in the division of labor. How could the relation be strict causation? One answer: it is not strict causation; rather, insofar as a positive empirical association holds between the two variables, it is through selective survival. Specifically, the probability of a society's survival is greater if an increase in material density is accompanied or followed by an increase in the division of labor, even though the association was not anticipated (i.e., it was not purposive).

A "selective survival" explanation can be described this way: some patterns or uniformities exist because exceptions to them tend to be eliminated. Although the explanatory mechanism requires no reference to the internal behavior (perception, intention, etc.) of the participants, the term "eliminated" (or "survival") is not limited to the purely biological sphere. After all, no one is confused when it is said that a particular marriage did not survive or that various 19th-century U.S. occupations have been eliminated during this century.

Functionalist theories in sociology are studies in *implicit* resort to selective survival as the explanatory mechanism; but there is no mystery as to why the mechanism is commonly left implicit, nor why Davis (1959) saw fit to defend functionalism by emphasizing "functional analysis" rather than "functional explanation." The notion of a functional explanation cannot be clarified and made distinctive without invoking selective survival; but most functionalist theories appear incredible when translated something like this: the institution or practice in question (i.e., the *explicandum*) is necessary for the survival of the larger system. Credulity would be sorely taxed by a functional theory of terrorism. Imagine someone even suggesting that terrorism is necessary for a country's survival.

The purposive quality of human behavior. Any theory that emphasizes the purposive quality of human behavior is likely to be criticized as being "teleological." That label should be avoided if only because it gives rise

to extreme arguments, as when Catton (1966, pp. 5, 11) dismisses teleological theories or explanations on the grounds that they have some *future* state (a goal) causing *present* behavior. However, the term "purposiveness" is not used here as a synonym for "teleological"; instead, it is used to denote all major types of internal behavior, such as perception and belief, the argument being that such behaviors enter into the pursuit of goals.

Identification of "purposiveness" as an explanatory mechanism is consistent with symbolic interactionism, one of sociology's perennial major perspectives. Yet the subjectivism of some versions of symbolic interactionism is so extreme as to suggest that *only one* explanatory mechanism is relevant for sociology. To the contrary, the purposiveness mechanism can be combined with the other two, and defensible sociological theories may require such combinations. Consider, for example, an explanation of "armed and organized groups," which are identified as police or military in English-speaking social units. The international ubiquity of such groups suggests that a country's survival is jeopardized by civil war or conquest without armed and organized opposition to militant secessionists or invaders. Even so, such groups are studied in purposiveness. As for combining strict causation and purposiveness, environmental features make certain human practices difficult; but the consequences may depend on whether and how the relation is perceived. Marvin Harris (1979, p. 105) unwittingly supplied an illustration: "Rainfall agriculture leads to dispersed, multicentered forms of production. Hence it is doubtful that any pristine state even developed on a rainfall base." Harris could not bring himself to recognize that would-be rulers may perceive the difficulty of controlling a dispersed population. Yet an extreme position need not be taken. A population's actual spatial distribution is a causal factor in perception, and *imperceptive* would-be rulers may be eliminated.

Conceptualization of Control

In light of the foregoing arguments, there is a need for a notion that (1) facilitates describing and thinking about not only terrorism but also any sociological subject and (2) is compatible with all three explanatory mechanisms. Con-

trol is the most promising candidate, but its conceptualization is crucial.

The immediate issue is the choice of the term "control" rather than "social control." The latter is only a subclass of the class "control over human behavior"; and unless control is defined so as to include not only that class but also biotic control (e.g., domestication of plants) and inanimate control (e.g., making or using tools), it is doubtful whether the notion facilitates describing and thinking about sociology's subject matter.

The prevailing conception of social control, the "counteraction of deviance" conception, is conducive to thinking of terrorists as *objects* but not also as *agents* of social control. Moreover, well-known advocates (e.g., Parsons 1951, pp. 297, 321) of the conception deny the relevance of internal behavior. Thus, if the practice of wearing a wedding ring is conducive to marital fidelity and infidelity is deviant, then the practice is social control even if the connection is recognized only by a sociologist observer. So the counteraction-of-deviance conception of social control is alien to terrorism's purposive quality and to *attempts* to suppress terrorism.

A generic definition of attempted control. If only because sociologists should study both successes and failures in control, *attempted control* is the key term. That point takes on special significance in the case of terrorism. Describing and thinking about terrorism require recognition more of what terrorists attempt to control than what they actually control.

Defined generically, attempted control is *overt* behavior by a human in the belief that (1) the behavior increases or decreases the probability of some subsequent condition and (2) the increase or decrease is desirable. To clarify, the commission or omission of an act is overt behavior; and "a subsequent condition" may be an organism's behavior (external or internal) or the existence, location, composition, color, size, weight, shape, odor, temperature, or texture of some object or substance, be it animate or inanimate, observable or unobservable.

Durkheim's disciples will be prone to nurse this reservation: the definition makes intention relevant. The objection ignores the point that sociologists use an army of terms that imply intention, such as *reaching*, *turning*, and *saluting*. For that matter, while some

reference to internal behavior is essential to maintain the distinction between success and failure in control (according to the counteraction-of-deviance conception, there are no failures in social control), the present definition does not limit attempted control to intentional behavior in the sense of conscious and deliberate. To illustrate, while drivers ordinarily are unaware of holding the steering wheel, who would deny that they hold *in the belief that* it reduces the probability of an undesirable subsequent condition? Recognition of an "affective" quality (i.e., desirable vs. undesirable) will antagonize both extreme behaviorists and Durkheimians, but consider the consequences of ignoring it. When someone robs a bank, he or she presumably acts in the belief that his or her behavior increases the probability of being injured, which is a cognitive belief. So when a man backs out of a bank with gun in hand and is shot by a police officer, did the gunman "control" the police officer? To answer affirmatively is to embrace an absurdity, the inevitable outcome of avoiding reference to internal behavior (in this case, an *affective* belief) when defining types of behavior.

Types of human control. For reasons given later, social control is a very important type of control when describing or thinking about terrorism. However, that is the case only if the counteraction-of-deviance conception of social control is rejected, and it is imperative to distinguish social control from other types of control over human behavior.

In attempting *self-control* and individual acts in the belief that the action increases the probability that his or her subsequent behavior will be as desired (e.g., perhaps greater diligence at work) or decreases the probability of undesirable behavior (e.g., perhaps smoking). Although that definition is consistent with the "challenge" conception of self-control (overcoming fears or vices), various mundane acts, such as lifting the phone receiver before dialing or setting an alarm clock, are also attempted self-control.

Attempted *proximate control* most commonly takes the form of a command or a request, but coercion and certain kinds of threats are also proximate control; and they are especially relevant in analyzing terrorism. However, even though the target of proximate control may be an aggregate, as when a terrorist leader shouts an order to a bomb

squad, there is no third party (i.e., no human intermediary, no reference to someone).

Attempted *sequential control* is a command or request by one human to another in the belief that (1) it increases the probability of a subsequent command or request by another human to still other humans and (2) the increase is desirable. A chain of commands is the most common form of sequential control, and sequential control warrants recognition if only because that form is virtually a defining characteristic of an organization. For that reason alone, sequential control is relevant in analyzing terrorist groups and governmental agencies that attempt to suppress terrorism.

Attempted *social control* is overt behavior by a human, the first party, in the belief that (1) the behavior increases or decreases the probability of a change in the behavior of another human or humans, the second party in either case; (2) the overt behavior involves a third party but not in the way of a sequential control; and (3) the increase or decrease is desirable. The definition is clarified by subsequent observations on terrorism; but some clarification can be realized at this point by considering one of the five inclusive types of social control (Gibbs 1981, pp. 77-109), because those types are distinguished primarily in terms of how a third party is involved. In all instances of attempted *vicarious* social control, the first party attempts to punish the third party, reward the third party, or somehow rectify the third party's behavior, always presuming that such action will influence the second party's behavior. Vicarious social control is the basis of general deterrence, which enters into criminal justice policy in virtually all jurisdictions (see Morris 1966, p. 631). Less obvious, terrorists also often resort to deterrent vicarious social control as an integral component of their intimidation strategy.

Some Logical Connections and Possible Empirical Associations

The initial (unnumbered) part of the definition (*supra*) suggests this question: Why is terrorism illegal? Terrorism is a violent act, but state officials seek a monopoly on violence, especially violence with a negligible probability or retaliation (see Weber 1978, p. 314, though note that Weber ignored the probability of retaliation). So the question's answer: Terrorism is illegal because it jeopard-

dizes the control exercised by superordinate state officials (legislators, monarchs, despots, or others) or is an attempt by those officials to realize a goal that they perceive as realizable through legal means, if at all, by incurring the loss of something they value more than the goal.

Why do terrorists—state or nonstate—resort to secretive, furtive, and/or clandestine violence? Because they seek goals that they perceive as realizable only through such violence or only through legal means that entail unacceptable losses. What are such goals? Why do terrorists pursue them? Why do terrorists perceive secretive, furtive, and/or clandestine violence as an essential means of countercontrol? A theory is needed to answer such questions; but a theory will not be realized unless social scientists take the questions seriously, and no theory will be defensible if inconsistent with Walter's statement (1969, p. 13) about violence: "the proximate aim is to instill terror; the ultimate end is control."

More on goals. In seeking to maintain or alter some putative norm, dissidents may have so little popular support in the country as a whole (e.g., the United Kingdom in the case of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland) and/or such determined opposition from state officials that the dissidents come to perceive violence as the only means of realizing that goal. However, the amount of popular support and official opposition depend not just on the *evaluative* standards of the public and/or officials but on the extent to which they view the dissidents' goal as realistic. They will not view the goal as realistic if they are baffled by related statements. Contemplate the characterization of terrorists in West Germany (see Becker 1988, p. 24) of *themselves* as fighters for "the uprooted masses" of the Third World. Even if officials should agree that West Germany is responsible for the plight of Third World countries, they are unlikely to know what would satisfy the terrorists.

Even if the "acceptability" and "realizability" of dissident goals partially determine whether the dissidents become terrorists, those considerations are not to be judged by social scientists. It is entirely a matter of the way that the public and/or officials perceive those goals. Yet sociologists can further the pursuit of a theory about terrorism by undertaking research on this question: What

conditions promote or impede perceptions by the public and officials of the goals of dissidents as acceptable and realizable?

Another major question about violence. Parts 2, 3, and 4 of the definition indicate how terrorism differs from lethal conflicts commonly identified as wars or civil wars. But why is "covertiness" so characteristic of terrorism? What writers commonly label as terrorist groups or organizations (nonstate) rarely comprise more than a few hundred members, which precludes more than electoral success. Because nonstate terrorists resort to violence, they are certain to be targets of attempted control by the police and/or the military; and their small number alone precludes successful countercontrol measures akin to open warfare. Various tactics of concealment—all types of countercontrol—offer the only hope of survival, and various features of "international terrorism" are manifestations of those tactics.

Officials engaged in state terrorism are not endangered by conventional military or police action, but they are concerned with concealing their personal identity. Although a theory is needed to specify the conditions in which state officials resort to terrorism, their reliance on concealment is not puzzling. Even a homicidal despot is likely to recognize that the *appearance* of legitimacy may be essential for the regime's survival.

Concealment is purposive behavior, and no notion rivals control when it comes to forcing recognition of purposiveness. Yet the notion does not lead to an extreme position as far as explanatory mechanisms are concerned. Should the concealment tactics of terrorists fail or should their bravado lead them to extremely reckless behavior, they are virtually certain to be killed or incapacitated; but terrorists do not just happen to be killed or incapacitated, which is to say that the notion of control remains relevant. The related question for sociology is thus: What conditions (e.g., degree of urbanization) influence the efficacy of the concealment tactics of terrorists?

The strategy of terrorism reconsidered. When terrorists inflict injuries or destroy property, they aim to promote fear throughout some population (e.g., legislators, factory owners), and thereby control that population's behavior. To what end? The answer depends on the putative norm that the terrorists are attempting to alter or maintain; but whatever

it may be, the terrorists employ deterrent vicarious social control.

Why do terrorists engage in that type of control? Their small number and vulnerability to retaliation make attempts at proximate control ineffective; indeed, social control is distinctive in that it offers a means for the few to control the many. Sequential control is not an alternative because the "normative position" of terrorists severely limits the range of their authority. Normative considerations are also relevant in contemplating this question: Why *deterrent* vicarious social control rather than some other subtype or type? Because violence (including related coercion, physical punishment, etc.) is the principal alternative when there is no normative basis (e.g., authority, appeals to evaluative standards) for control. Should it be objected that assassination may be a means to a political goal without the element of intimidation, the objection ignores a multitude of definitions that make intimidation a necessary feature of terrorism. Moreover, such a definition need not even suggest that terrorism is the only means to a political goal, not even the only violent means. Finally, by what logic are *all* assassinations instances of terrorism?

What do terrorists hope to gain through deterrent control? One common answer is "concessions" (see, e.g., Oots 1986, p. 81), but that answer ignores a strategy that several writers have attributed to terrorists (see, e.g., Laqueur 1987; Wilkinson 1986). Briefly, terrorists aim to provoke officials to such extreme repressive measures (e.g., censorship, preventive detention) that the government loses popular support and falls. The "provocational" strategy is based on modulative social control, wherein the first party (terrorists in this case) uses the influence of the third party (the public at large in this case) on the second party (government officials in this case). The immediate significance of the provocative strategy is the possibility of its failure. In employing the strategy, terrorists evidently assume that the government will fall because it increasingly departs from the rule of law, but some powerful faction may consider the rule of law secondary to suppression of terrorism and stage a *coup d'etat* because of the government's "underreaction" to terrorism. Such was the case when the military toppled Uruguay's liberal democratic government, crushed the terrorists (the *Tupamaros*), and remained in power.

The provocational strategy has implications for a theory concerning variation in the incidence of terrorism. A failure in the strategy may be more important than success. Specifically, if the outcome is an authoritarian regime, the incidence of terrorism may decline because repressive measures become more effective. That possibility poses a sociological question, but some sociologists will not be inclined to do research on the question because they evidently think of officials as thumb-twiddling spectators when the *status quo* is challenged violently (see, e.g., Skocpol 1979). To the contrary, in numerous countries officials have responded effectively to terrorism (see, e.g., Laqueur 1987). Hence, a theory's validity is jeopardized if it does not recognize that variation in terrorism may to some extent reflect variation in the effectiveness of attempts to control it. Indeed, where there is scarcely any rule of law, why would terrorists employ the provocational strategy? That question is relevant in contemplating the ostensible rarity of terrorism in Marxist countries (see Laqueur 1987, p. 302).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

An impressive theory of terrorism requires more than a conceptualization that confronts issues and problems. A definition of terrorism must promise empirical applicability and facilitate recognition of logical connections and possible empirical associations. Such recognition requires a notion that facilitates describing and thinking about terrorism; and the notion must be compatible with each of three possible explanatory mechanisms: strict causation, selective survival, and purposiveness.

The notion of control is the most promising candidate. Although that notion has no equal when it comes to underscoring human behavior's purposive quality, it is not alien to any particular explanatory mechanism. All of sociology's subject matter can be described and thought of in terms of control (at least as it has been conceptualized here), and the notion is particularly relevant in the study of terrorism. That phenomenon and attempts to prevent it are nothing less than one vast attempt at control.

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