

A Comparison of the Lethality of State and Non-state Terrorism

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Abstract

It is generally assumed in the international relations literature on terrorism that non-state actors commit terrorist acts against liberal Western democracies. To put this idea to an empirical test, the lethality of state-sponsored (the U.S. is used as a case for comparison) and non-state terrorism was compared between 1968-78. An analysis of the ten most lethal state and non-state terrorist events revealed that the mean number of people killed in state-sponsored terrorist events was significantly greater than the mean number killed in non-state terrorist events. Also, extensive case study evidence of U.S. economic, military, and diplomatic support to terrorism in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Chile, El Salvador, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and South Africa is documented. As the leader of the “war on terror”, there should not be such an abundance of cases in which the U.S. has sponsored terrorist actions. State-sponsored terrorism appears to be much more lethal than non-state terrorism, and there is evidence the U.S. is a major sponsor. The focus on non-state terrorism in the literature and the present “war on terror” may be misplaced. Future research should continue to explore the prevalence of state-sponsored terrorism over time and comparatively.

Introduction

Interest in the topic of terrorism has heightened substantially in the United States since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11th 2001. In the aftermath, President George W. Bush declared a “war on terror” and proclaimed that the United States would hunt down the “crazed and depraved opponents of civilization” that participate in terrorism. Many had already forgotten that a similar “war on terror” was proclaimed and waged by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s against terrorist groups in the Middle East and Latin America.

Lost in all the rhetoric and coverage of the “war on terror” is an in depth discussion of some key questions that should have come to mind in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11th. Not many people were asking the tough questions about defining terrorism. What separates a terrorist act from an act of legitimate resistance? Who commits terrorist acts, non-state subgroups or state governments? Has the United States ever committed or sponsored a terrorist act or is it simply the work of irrational Islamic religious fanatics?

Background Literature

Prior to the attacks of September 11th 2001, these questions and many others about terrorism were part of an ongoing debate in the journals of international relations scholars. Much of the literature has focused on acts of non-state terrorism against states (i.e., Enders & Sandler 2002, 2000, 1999; Sandler, Tschirhart, & Cauley 1983). This type of non-state terrorism against state actors is typically referred to as terrorism of the weak against the strong. Small groups of non-state actors turn to violence to advance their political goals due to a perceived lack of legitimate political actions available to them. This is clearly the dominant view of terrorism in North America and much of the scholarly literature (although some argue further that non-state terrorists are simply irrational and are therefore inherently evil, i.e., Johnson 1990). Other

scholars have claimed that the conceptualization of terrorism as primarily the tool of the weak against the strong is a fallacy. These authors claim that the lions share of terrorist acts are committed by states, or at least the actions of non-state actors are supported economically and logistically by states (i.e., Chomsky 2001; George 1991; Cline & Alexander 1986). Wilkinson (2000: 13) claims that state terror “has been vastly more lethal and has often been the antecedent to, and a contributory cause of, factional terrorism”. This study will attempt to test the predominant notion that terrorism is most often used by non-state actors against states. I will compare the number and severity of non-state terror incidents against states using the most widely used data set on the subject of terrorism – ITERATE (Mickolus 1982). I will then compare these numbers to some key instances of terrorism either directly committed by, or supported by states, and specifically the United States.

Defining Terrorism

One of the perennial issues in the international relations literature on terrorism has been the search for an appropriate definition of terrorism. According to Laqueur (1999: 5), “more than 100 definitions of terrorism exist”. Schmid and Jongman (1998) also organized more than 100 different definitions of terrorism and attempted to come to a definition that was all-encompassing. By the publication of their second volume on terrorism, the authors found that there was still considerable disagreement, which exists to this day.

Walter Enders and Todd Sandler (1999: 147-48), two of the leading researchers in international terrorism, define terrorism as “the premeditated use, or threat of use, of extra-normal violence or brutality to obtain a political objective through intimidation or fear directed at a large audience”. This definition covers much, but it is also biased toward capturing terrorism by non-state actors given that states presumably are allowed to carry out “normal” acts of

violence. Gibbs (1989: 339) comes to the conclusion that terrorism really boils down to “one vast attempt to control”. This might very well be true, but this definition does not do much to help us in labeling certain acts as terrorist or not.

One of the problems with research on terrorism is that there is a lot of ideological bias in the labeling of the phenomenon. Gibbs (1989: 329) notes that “because labeling actions as ‘terrorism’ promotes condemnation of the actors, a definition may reflect ideological or political bias”. The discussion of state-sponsored terrorism was warped to a great degree in the 1970s and 80s by the Cold War. One popular theory in the Western literature was that all terrorism could be linked to a Soviet-controlled international terror network that intended to spread revolution throughout the world (i.e., Cline & Alexander 1986). Now that the Soviet threat is gone, the focus in the West is on Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. What is considered terrorism has changed with the changing political climate. This should not occur if there is a strict definition of terrorism that is applied equally to all, allies and enemies, non-state and state actors alike. Ideology and politics make it incredibly difficult to document and collect a large, reliable data set on state terrorism. Much of the information included in terrorism data sets comes directly from the states themselves or from the media, which are not without their own partisan biases whether they be liberal or conservative.

Research on Non-state Actors

Much of the quantitative research on terrorism has focused on the incidence and severity of terrorist attacks committed by non-state actors. For example, using the ITERATE data sets Walter Enders and Todd Sandler have demonstrated that transnational terrorism has recently reduced in frequency while at the same time increasing in severity (Enders & Sandler 2000), negotiation strategies should depend on contextual variables (Sandler, Tschirhart, & Cauley

1983), terrorist attacks follow predictable cycles of upward and downward shifts (Enders & Sandler 1999), and terrorists switch their approach depending on the remedies governments institute (Enders and Sandler 2002).

Similarly, many researchers have focused their theoretical attention to explaining why non-state subgroups resort to terrorism. Johnson (1990: 64) has stressed that terrorism is the work of the “forces of savagery” in an “open and declared war against civilization itself”. The savages are represented by non-state subgroups and civilization is represented by Western liberal democracies. Bell (1990) and Crenshaw (1990) also focus on terrorism directed at Western liberal governments. Indeed, Enders and Sandler (2001: 10) claim their data demonstrates that U.S. victims are the intended targets of 40% of transnational terrorist acts. According to these researchers it makes perfect sense that the U.S is a target of terrorists given that it is the leading liberal democratic state. However, it may be the case that their particular definitions of terrorism (which often exclude the acts of Western liberal democracies) and the data used (which focuses on non-state terrorist acts) is leading to the conclusion that terrorism is committed by non-state subgroups against liberal democracies. My study is an attempt to correct for this bias in data and definitions.

International Relations Theory Applied to Terrorism

There has been a surprising lack of theory applied to the terrorism literature. This is most likely due to a tendency to focus on ideological battles, predicting and tracking terrorist events, and policy prescriptions for democratic governments in how to deal with terrorists.

Two theories of international relations that are readily applicable to the study of terrorism are constructivism and rationalism. Constructivism is helpful in understanding the controversy and difficulty in defining terrorism. According to constructivist theorists, the world is a social

construction and is concerned with showing “the socially constructed nature of agents or subjects” (Fearon & Wendt 2002: 57). Constructivism reminds us that the concept “terrorism” is constructed through language and within particular political contexts. In fact, a constructivist would have no problem with the statement “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”. States are often the ones in the position of power to define what constitutes terrorism and therefore take the opportunity to define the acts of others as “terrorist” and their own acts as “counterterrorism” or “legitimate acts of self-defense”. There is no concrete phenomenon called terrorism out in the world that exists independent of our subjective understandings and our culture. It is important to be aware that there is no ultimate truth as to what terrorism is, and instead be aware of the motivations that lie behind definitions of terrorism. We should try to be consistent in our application of definitions and data to terrorism research while remaining reflexive about the process. My study is an attempt at accomplishing this goal.

Rationalist theory also has application to explanations of terrorism. Most researchers in the terrorism literature agree that those that commit terrorist acts are not irrational or insane, even if it involves suicide. Rationalists attempt to explain actions based on the goal-seeking behavior of individuals or groups (states or subgroups). According to rational choice theory, terrorist acts can be explained by the goals and motivations of an individual or group acting within a set of contextual constraints. For example, a small non-state terrorist group may rationally resort to hijacking a plane because they have been shut out of normal political routes by a government and feel they have no other way to pursue their interests. Also, a state may choose to support terrorist acts in another country in order to avoid a visible confrontation and yet still accomplish a favorable foreign policy outcome. These actions make sense in light of particular beliefs or desires. Rationalism is helpful because if terrorist acts can be explained on the basis of

motivations, goals, and choices within particular contexts then we can use this understanding to create policies that will reduce terrorism. Therefore, I assume that both state and non-state actors are rational beings attempting to accomplish goals through the use of terrorism.

Methodology

The search for an adequate definition of terrorism has so far proved elusive in the international relations literature. However, for the purposes of this study I wanted to compare the prevalence and severity of state and non-state terrorism. Therefore, it was important to arrive at a definition of terrorism that allows for the inclusion of actions by both non-state and state actors.

This study compared incidents or terrorism by the United States against acts of terrorism by non-state actors. In this case, the definition of terrorism provided by the United States government is appropriate. According to the United States government:

an “act of terrorism, means any activity that (A) involves a violent act or an act dangerous to human life that is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or any State, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or of any State; and (B) appears to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping”

(taken from Chomsky 2001; 16).

This definition does not differentiate between the actions of states versus non-states, and therefore allows for the inclusion of state action and support for terrorism. When examining state-sponsored terrorism, it is also important to include events where a state provided support for a terrorist act without actually committing the act themselves. Therefore, the data used in this study included “providing funds, weapons, training, or political endorsement or other logistical assistance (passports, intelligence, use of diplomatic facilities, etc.) to groups that use terrorism” (Schlagheck 1990: 171).

There are several reasons to select the actions taken by the United States as the comparison with which to test the hypothesis that terrorism is primarily a tool of the weak against the strong. Of course this does not mean that the U.S. is the only state in the world that would be responsible for committing and supporting terrorist acts (other states include Iran, the former Soviet Union, Iraq, Britain, France, etc.). However, the assumption in Western literature on terrorism is that the U.S. is not capable of committing terrorist acts and is only the victim of such actions. This makes the U.S. a useful case with which to test the notion that states commit terrorist acts to a lesser extent than non-state actors. First, the United States is the leader in the so-called “war on terror”, which has the stated goal of eradicating terrorism around the world. As the leader of a war on terrorism, one would not expect the U.S. to be involved in incidents that could be labeled as terrorist. Second, the United States is also the world’s only remaining superpower, with economic interests throughout the world. Third, by far the largest military capabilities in the world also belong to the United States. For these reasons it is appropriate to look at incidents that might be labeled as “terrorist acts” involving the United States and compare these statistics to other terrorist data that measure terrorism by non-state actors.

As an index of terrorist incidents involving non-state actors I used the International Terrorism Attributes of Terrorist Events 2 (ITERATE2) data set (Mickolus 1982). This data set records the incident date, location, type of event (highjacking, assassination, kidnapping, etc.), and casualties (i.e., deaths or injuries) for non-state terrorist events from 1968-78 I was not able to obtain the more recent versions of the ITERATE data set so this analysis will be purely preliminary to see how state and non-state terrorism compare for these initial years. Further testing will be needed to determine if the same relationships hold over a longer period of time. The information contained in ITERATE2 comes from world print and electronic sources

including the Associated Press, United Press International, Reuter tickers, major U.S. newspapers (i.e., Washington Post and New York Times), and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. O'Brien (1996) used the ITERATE data set to demonstrate that terrorism is associated with authoritarian regimes when they experience a "defeat" in foreign policy, while democracies do not. However, the ITERATE data set does not include many events that would be classified as terrorist using the U.S. State Department definition of terrorism. I corrected for this by including data added by using this definition of terrorism (details to follow below).

As an index of terrorist incidents that were carried out or supported by the United States I drew upon literature that includes incidents that have reliable sources. These include academic sources that cite Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, witnesses to the incidents, American government documents released through freedom of information, and statements made by former American government officials. The terrorist acts committed by and supported by the United States were added to the data and compared with the terrorist incidents and severity of non-state actors. Table 1 provides a list of some of the examples that are included in the data (those used in the analyses are bolded). Only those specific incidents that fall within the date range of the ITERATE2 data set (1968-78) were used in the quantitative analysis. Table 2 (compiled by Herman & O'Sullivan 1991: 41-2) also lists examples and provides a comparison of non-state and state violence, some of which was carried out or supported by the U.S. (those used in the analyses are bolded). Data from this table that falls within the date range of the ITERATE2 data set were also incorporated into the analysis. Examples of U.S. state-sponsored terrorism that did not fall within the date range of the ITERATE data set were included in a second test of the prevalence of state-sponsored terrorism by the U.S. The U.S., as the leading liberal democracy and leader of the "war on terror", should not be involved in sponsoring

terrorism. If there is evidence of this we must reconsider the direction and the goals of the present war on terror.

By no means have I compiled an exhaustive list of terrorist events that the United States has been involved in. Here I use only ten examples of events where the U.S. sponsored terrorism to compare to the ten most lethal non-state terrorist events in the ITERATE2 data set. However, the point of the project is to determine whether states commit and support terrorist acts on a similar level to non-state actors. Thus, I have quantitatively compared the ten most lethal state (U.S.) and non-state terrorist events from 1968-78 to see which is more destructive. The selection of cases of state-sponsored terrorism was not random. It is possible I could have chosen the ten most lethal examples of U.S. sponsorship of terror. Therefore, I selected the ten most lethal examples of non-state terrorist events from the ITERATE2 data set to provide the strongest test of state-sponsored terrorism. If it is shown that the United States, the leader in the “war on terrorism”, is guilty of carrying out and supporting a great amount of terrorism on its own this will bring into doubt the focus that exists in the terrorism literature today. In the second descriptive case analysis I attempted to carry out a similar test of logic as Sebastian Rosato (2003) carried out to test the democratic peace theory. According to democratic peace theory and the international relations literature on terrorism, there should be no evidence of U.S. participation in terrorism.

Results and Descriptive Cases of U.S. State-sponsored Terrorism

Given the difficulty in obtaining detailed examples of individual events of state-sponsored terrorism I decided to restrict my data set to a small set of examples. I found ten well-documented examples of acts of terrorism where the U.S. provided economic, military, or diplomatic aid that occurred during the time period covered by the ITERATE2 data set (1968-78)

(a list of these events is provided in Table 3). To provide the strongest test of my hypothesis, I compared the number of civilians killed in these state-sponsored terrorist events to that of the ten most lethal non-state terrorist events contained in the ITERATE2 data set.

The mean number of people killed in state-sponsored terrorist events was significantly greater than the mean number killed in non-state terrorist events ($t(18) = -2.17, p < .05$). The mean number of people killed by state-sponsored terrorist events involving the U.S. was 497, while the mean number of people killed in the ten most lethal non-state terrorist events was only 63 (see Figure 1). Therefore, state-sponsored terrorism appears to be much more lethal for this group of terrorist events.

Another strong test of the hypothesis that state-sponsored terrorism is more lethal than non-state terrorism is to compare the sum total of people killed in the ten examples of state-sponsored terrorism to the total people killed by non-state terrorism in the full ten years of the ITERATE data set. This comparison reveals the same pattern. The total number of people killed in the ten examples of state-sponsored terrorism (4970) far exceeds the total number of people killed by non-state terrorism over the full ten years of the ITERATE data set (1695) (see Figure 2).

Based on the above two results, it appears that even the weak version of the theory that non-state terrorism is more lethal than state-sponsored terrorism does not hold up. In both comparisons state-sponsored terrorism is far more lethal than its non-state counterpart. This pattern of results makes sense when one considers that states have a vast advantage over non-state actors economically and in access to the means of destruction and war. States have a monopoly on violence and they do not hesitate to use it against civilian populations albeit usually in an indirect way in the case of liberal Western democracies like the U.S.

The strong version of the theory that terrorism is primarily carried out by non-state actors and the victims are the Western liberal democracies can also be tested in another way. The U.S., as the leader of the “war on terror” and the leading liberal Western democracy, should not participate in any way in terrorism. Moving outside of the 1968-78 date range, I have compiled a list of seven terrorist operations over the past fifty years where the U.S. has provided military, economic, and diplomatic support (a larger list with less detail is provided in Table 1). This is a similar approach to that used by Rosato (2003) to demonstrate the logical inconsistency in democratic peace theory.

1. *Nicaragua*: During the 1980s the Reagan government provided hundreds of millions of dollars to the Contras in an effort to overthrow the Sandanista government of Nicaragua. The Contras, many of whom were former members of the Somoza dictatorship that committed terrorist acts against the population, were trained by the CIA. The Contras were directed by the CIA to hit key economic targets such as power stations, bridges, dams, and trained in sabotaging crops and farming machinery (Grosscup 1987: 130). America’s Watch, Witness for Peace, and the Center for Constitutional Rights have extensive documentation of Contra terrorism including rape, torture, the destruction of schools, health clinics, hospitals, and the assassination of civilians and community leaders (Grosscup 1987: 133-34).
2. *Guatemala*: In 1954, the CIA overthrew a nationalist regime in Guatemala “in the name of anti-communism” (LaFeber 1994: 546) even though the regime was not communist. Guzman came to power by a fair election and then determined to take back some of the 50% of Guatemalan land that the United Fruit Company owned (it only used 10% of it)

(LaFeber 1994: 546). The coup inserted the dictator Arbenz into power following which the U.S.-supported regime killed an estimated 100,000 people (Wilkinson 2000: 68).

3. *Chile*: The left-leaning politician Allende seemed to be on the verge of winning election. Just before the election, Nixon ordered the CIA to prevent the Socialist's victory, "even if it cost \$10 million" (LaFeber 1994: 655). Chileans voted for Allende and chose to have a Socialist state and the U.S. again helped overthrow a democratically elected government. In reference to the election Kissinger said "I don't see why we have to let a country go Marxist just because its people are irresponsible" (LaFeber 1994: 655). A military leader, Augusto Pinochet took over and tortured and killed up to 10,000 citizens.
4. *Indonesia*: In 1965, the dictator Suharto took over Indonesia and with the military, economic, and diplomatic support of the United States conducted "army-led massacres [that] slaughtered hundreds of thousands of people, mostly landless peasants" (Chomsky 2001: 78).
5. *El Salvador*: During the 1980s the Reagan government supplied advisors to the Salvadoran dictatorship and trained thousands of their troops in the United States. During this time between 40,000 and 50,000 Salvadorian citizens were seized, tortured, and killed by U.S. trained and supported Salvadorian police, security squads, and right-wing vigilantes (LaFeber 1994: 719).
6. *Afghanistan*: The United States trained and provided military support to the Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan (Chomsky 2001; LaFeber 1994). These same fighters later coordinated the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001.
7. *South Africa*: The United States supported for apartheid government and its proxy armies that invaded Namibia, Lesotho, Angola, Mozambique, Kenya, and Zimbabwe during the

1980s. It has been estimated over 1,000,000 people were killed in these incidents (Herman & O'Sullivan 1991: 42).

In all of these descriptive cases the U.S. either provided “funds, weapons, training, or political endorsement or other logistical assistance (passports, intelligence, use of diplomatic facilities, etc.) to groups [or governments] that use terrorism” (Schlagheck 1990: 171). The U.S. was a state sponsor of terror in Guatemala, Cuba, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Indonesia, El Salvador, Chile, Sudan, Iran, South Africa, Angola, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Israel, Argentina, and Iraq. The estimated number of people killed in these acts of state-sponsored terrorism reaches an astonishing 1,400,000. These descriptive case studies further strengthen the case that states are a large contributor, if not the primary contributor (even though the number killed is large a comparative analysis is needed to establish this), to terrorism in the world over the past fifty years. As the leader of the “war on terror”, there should not be such an abundance of cases in which the U.S. has sponsored terrorist actions. Thus, both the strong and weak versions of the theory that non-state terrorism is the primary form of terrorism are not supported by the data in this study.

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study definitely bring into question the general assumptions behind the democratic peace theory. Specifically, democratic peace theory holds that democracies do not go to war with each other. However, this theory also implies that the liberal Western democracies are generally more peaceful and thus would be less likely to sponsor acts of terrorism than authoritarian states and non-state actors. This study found that the leading liberal Western democracy has supported a great deal of terrorism against civilian populations in other countries.

This behavior violates the established norms of Western liberal democratic countries who claim to be the defenders of human rights and civilization. Democracies may not have fought each other over the fifty years since WWII, however, the U.S. has consistently violated the norms which these democracies stand for.

The findings of this study on state and non-state terrorism also highlight the importance of framing, issue definition, and agenda setting in international and domestic politics. As mentioned in the background literature, states and non-state actors have very different motivations with regard to terrorist acts, and this makes them hard to compare. Non-state terrorists often crave the media attention they receive from a terrorist act, and more often than not claim responsibility immediately after the event. On the other hand, states are highly motivated to keep sponsorship of terrorism a secret. This makes it difficult to find credible evidence of states-sponsored terrorism. However, when you attempt to be objective and cut through the rhetoric of official government interpretations of events it is possible to classify some of the actions of states as terrorist and compare them to those of non-state actors.

States also seek to frame their actions for the public and they have a great amount of power to do so. The media rely heavily on the government for the raw information that they use for the news. Therefore, the government has a great deal of control over the agenda that the media follow. For example, the U.S. government did not provide the media with the details of its training and funding of the Guatemalan dictatorship. Often it is the CIA that is directly involved with the U.S. state sponsorship of terrorism and much of their behavior is kept a secret, at least until long after the events have occurred and nothing can be done about it. The U.S. government can also describe the killing of Vietnamese villagers as the destruction of “communist

sympathizers” as opposed to “innocent peasants”. The media are selective in what they choose to report and the government has a lot of power to shape that reporting.

Lastly, this study also points to the importance of the construction of issues and language. Terrorism and the “war on terrorism” are not objective and concrete objects that have objective definitions. Constructivism reminds us that the concept “terrorism” is constructed through language and within particular political contexts. States are often the ones in the position of power to define what constitutes terrorism and therefore take the opportunity to define the acts of others as “terrorist” and their own acts as “counterterrorism” or “legitimate acts of self-defense”. There is no concrete phenomenon called terrorism out in the world that exists independent of our subjective understandings and our culture. My study suggests that state terrorism is much more lethal than non-state terrorism, and thus the “war on terror” is misguided in its focus. The data also suggest that the U.S. is a consistent sponsor of state terror, but a lack of discussion in the media and popular culture about this indicates the U.S. has successfully constructed their own definition of terrorism and framed its own actions in a positive way.

Conclusions

States rather than non-states seem to be the leaders in supporting and carrying out terrorism. Therefore, many of the conclusions based on terrorism data sets like ITERATE do not seem as compelling in light of this finding. This brings into question the validity of the United States’ own data on state support for terrorism. At the moment there are only six countries listed as state sponsors of terrorism: Iran, Sudan, Libya, Cuba, North Korea, and Syria. Iraq has been removed from the list since the ousting of Saddam Hussein. It is interesting to note that all of these countries are official enemies of the United States. I have discovered extensive evidence

that not only is the U.S. a consistent sponsor of terrorism, but it also far exceeds the lethality of non-state terrorism over the time period studied.

Many of the remedies that are proposed to combat terrorism are predicated on the assumption that non-state subgroups are the main sponsors of terrorism. I have demonstrated that using the same definition of terrorism, states such as the United States commit and support a great deal of terrorist acts in comparison to non-state groups. In light of this finding, it appears remedies for curbing terrorism would have to be adjusted. Terrorism research is an extremely important field given the policy implications of the conclusions reached. The present perception is that the liberal democracies are under attack by Islamic fundamentalists and the states that support them. The evidence I have brought to bear on this issue does not support this conclusion it would be wise to pursue other policies in order to reduce terrorism. The remedy for ending terrorism may be to end state terrorism instead of non-state terrorism (Galtung & Fischer 2002). The best way for the U.S. to conduct its war on terror may be to actually stop supporting and participating in terrorism.

Limitations and Future Research

There are two inherent problems with attempting to accurately track state-sponsored terrorism. First, as discussed earlier, there are completely different motivations on the part of state and non-state actors in the use of terrorism as a political tool. Non-state groups often use terrorist acts to gain recognition for their cause or to further their political goals, and are therefore motivated to take credit for the terrorist acts. On the other hand, states do not want to be associated with terrorist acts, and therefore actively attempt to conceal any involvement or define the event as non-terrorist in nature. States seek to sponsor terrorism “covertly, allowing the state to deny its role as an aggressor and avoid retaliation” (Griset & Mahan 2003: 48).

Therefore, the evidence to substantiate the involvement of states is often “scarce, indirect, or frequently unavailable” (Schlagheck 1990: 171). Second, states often seek to define their own acts as “legitimate use of force”, “counterterrorism”, or “self-defense”. The acts of official enemies that are quite similar to those committed by allies are labeled as “terrorist”. The inherent problem with relying on states to define terrorist acts is that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”. I was unable to avoid this problem in my study as well.

I felt the best way to deal with these above mentioned difficulties and ambiguities in studying terrorism was to apply the same objective criteria to the acts of both state and non-state actors. Given that this study used the United States as a case to compare against non-state actors, it is appropriate that terrorist acts were defined with the definition used by the United States itself. This definition (as outlined previously), includes all the parameters common to definitions of terrorism in the international relations literature. Using this definition also avoided the problem of attempting to judge the behavior of the United States by the standards of another country or actor. According to the State Department, “the United States is committed to holding terrorists and those who harbor them accountable for past attacks, regardless of when the acts occurred. The U.S. government has a long memory and will not simply expunge a terrorist’s record because time has passed” (U.S. State Department 2000). I applied the same standards to past terrorist acts of states (the U.S.) as is applied to non-state actors. If the U.S. is the leading liberal democracy fighting the scourge of terrorism around the world it should have been able to live up to the standards it applies to others. The data seem to show that the U.S. government has been unable to live up to the standards it applies to others.

In future research I will compile a larger and more comprehensive list of state-sponsored terrorist events that goes beyond the U.S. as the only country. The U.S. provided an interesting

test case for this study, but of course they are not the only state involved in sponsoring terrorism and it would be interesting to comparatively assess the involvement of different states. It would be especially interesting to compare the level of state-sponsored terrorism of the leading Western liberal democracies like the U.S, Britain, France, and Germany, to the officially-labeled U.S. State Department sponsors of terror such as Iran, Syria, Cuba, North Korea, Libya, and Sudan. Any future extension of this project will also include more recent versions of the ITERATE data set that cover all non-state terrorist events up to the present (if I can figure out how to get a hold of them without paying so much money). The inclusion of this data would allow me to see if the pattern found in this study holds over a longer time period or not. This study is just the beginning of a larger research effort aimed at demonstrating that the present focus of the terrorism literature in international relations on non-state terrorism may be misplaced.

Appendix

Table 1. U.S. Sponsorship/Commission of Terrorist Acts

Country	Description of Involvement
Guatemala	CIA coup and installation of Arbenz dictatorship, 100,000 killed
Cuba	Assassination attempts, mining of harbor, bombing of plants, poisoning of crops, support for Omega 7 terrorist group
Nicaragua	Funding and training of Contras, rape, torture, murder, assassination, over 40,000 killed
Afghanistan	Funding and training of Islamic fundamentalists (Osama Bin Laden) to fight Russians
Indonesia	Funding and diplomatic support of Suharto regime, over 500,000 killed
El Salvador	Funding and CIA trained dictatorship, over 50,000 killed
Chile	CIA disruption of election, engineered coup, over 20,000 killed
Sudan	Bombing of pharmaceutical factory, resulted in thousands of deaths from lack of medication
Iran	Sent arms to government to fund Nicaraguan Contras
South Africa	Support for apartheid government, 1,000 blacks killed in several months in 1984, invasions of Namibia, Lesotho, Angola, Mozambique, Kenya, and Zimbabwe
Angola	Attempt to overthrow government in 1975, support for South African invasion
Vietnam	Support for Diem dictatorship, CIA-sponsored killing, bombing of civilians
Laos	Bombing of rural villages, dams, crops, killing of civilians
Cambodia	Bombing of rural villages, dams, crops, killing of civilians
Dominican Republic	Support and trained dictator Trujillo
Panama	Supported Noriega while he murdered and tortured political opponents
Israel	\$3 billion annual support, terrorism in Palestine and Lebanon
Argentina	Between 1976-82 estimated 11,000 citizens "disappeared", U.S. support
Iraq	Military and diplomatic support during time when Hussein gassed Kurds

Table 2. Killing by State and Non-state Terrorists

Type of killing	Time	Number killed
<i>Non-state</i>		
German: Red Army Faction, Revolutionary Cells	Jan. 1970- Apr. 1979	31
Italian: Red Brigades and all other non-state	1968-82	334
PLO: Israelis killed in all acts of terror	1968-81	282
World: all "international terrorists", CIA global aggregate	1969-80	3,368
<i>Single incidents of state terror</i>		
El Salvador: Rio Stumpel	May 14, 1980	600+
South Africa: Kassinga refugee camp	May 4, 1978	600+
Guatemala: Panzos	May 29, 1978	114
Israel: Sabra Shantila	Sept. 16-18. 1982	1,900-3,500
<i>Larger dimensions of state terror</i>		
Argentina: "disappeared"	1976-82	11,000
Chile	1973-85	20,000+
Dominican Republic	1965-72	2,000
El Salvador: Mantaza I	1932	30,000
El Salvador: Mantaza II	1980-85	50,000+
Guatemala: Rios Montt pacification campaign	March - June 1982	2,186
Guatemala	1966-1985	100,000+
Indonesia	1965-66	500,000+
Indonesia: invasion and pacification of East Timor	1980-85	200,000+
Libya: external assassination of Libyans	1980-83	10+
Cambodia: Pol Pot era	1975-78	300,000+
U.S.-sponsored Contras: civilians in Nicaragua	1981-87	3,000+
South Africa and proxies: in Angola and Mozambique	1980-89	1,000,000+

Table compiled by Edward S. Herman & Gerry O'Sullivan. 1991. "Terrorism as Ideology and Cultural Industry. In *Western State Terrorism*, edited by Alexander George. (p 41-2)

Table 3. U.S. state-sponsored terrorist events used in analyses.

Year	Country of victims	Number killed	Involvement
1978	Guatemala	114	military, economic
1978	South Africa	600	economic, diplomatic
1976	Cuba	73	economic, military, diplomatic
1976	Lebanon	1000	economic, military, diplomatic
1968	East Timor	800	economic, military, diplomatic
1973	Lebanon	31	economic, military, diplomatic
1974	Lebanon	200	economic, military, diplomatic
1977	East Timor	2000	economic, military, diplomatic
1977	East Timor	150	economic, military, diplomatic
1976	Cuba	2	economic, military, diplomatic

Figure 1. Mean number killed for ten most lethal state and non-state terrorist events.

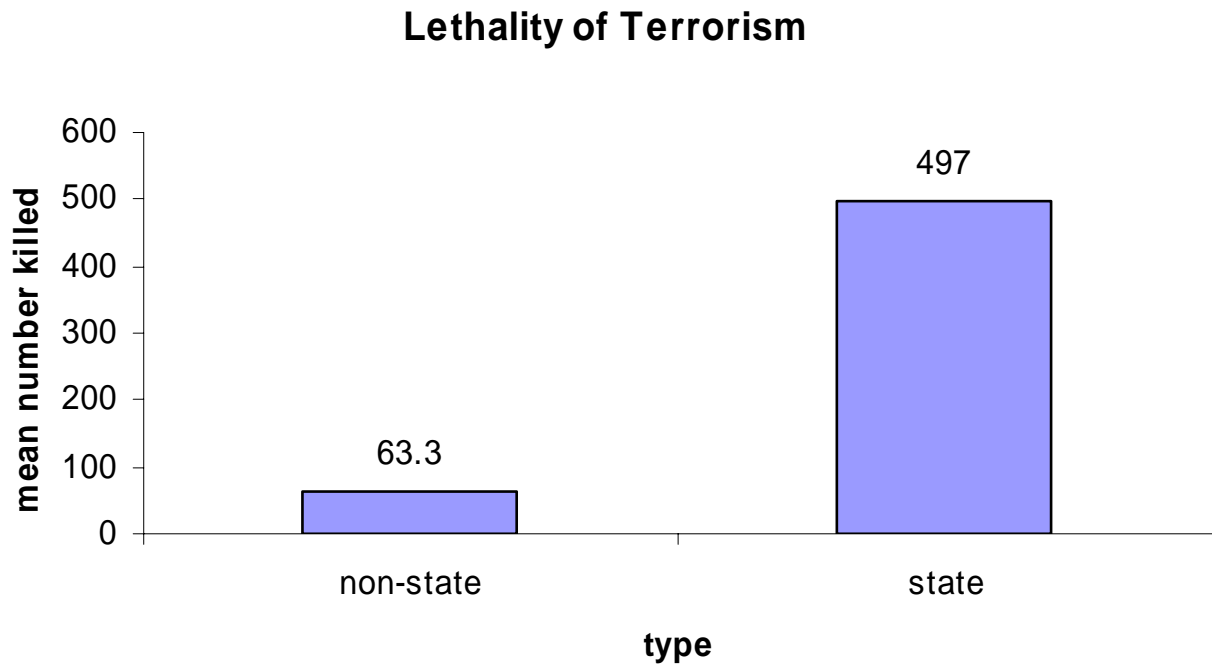
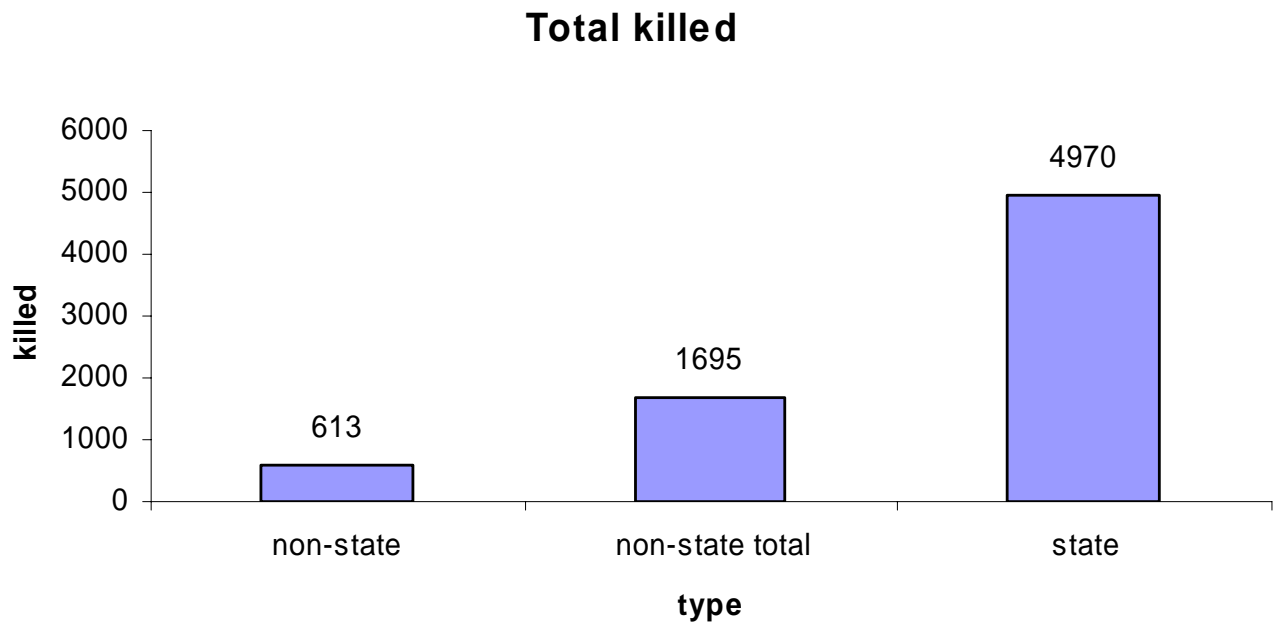


Figure 2. Total number killed by state (top ten events) and non-state (top ten events and full ten years) terrorist events



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