



FACT SHEET

REVOLUTIONARY OR TERRORIST?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

<p>Revolutionary: a person who revolts or advocates revolution (a forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favour of a new system).</p>	<p>Terrorist: a person who uses violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims.</p>
<p>Freedom Fighter: a person who takes part in a revolutionary struggle.</p>	<p>Guerrilla: a member of a small independent group taking part in irregular warfare, typically against larger regular forces.</p>

Source: Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2002

There are a variety of names that can be used to label individuals or groups who participate in oppositional activities. Which label is used depends on how their actions are viewed, by whom and whether or not they are violent. For example, people who attack a government with the aim of removing or attempting to initiate change could be seen by those who oppose it as the work of terrorists, but also could be viewed by those in favour of the action as revolutionaries. Activists and supporters may espouse a variety of political, religious, ethnic or cultural views. None has a monopoly on this type of political and social action.

Such activities, if violent, can range in scope according to:

- the number of individuals involved in the terror activities – from one individual to thousands of participants (normally with relatively limited resources in comparison to their targets)
- the targets – from specifically targeting a particular group to randomly affecting people as a consequence of the terror action.

A major aim of terrorists or revolutionaries is to generate publicity in the hope that it will undermine the governing authorities and magnify their own influence and power. The creation of unrest within a state or community draws attention to the inability of governments to maintain an adequate level of security for their community. Terrorist action highlights the vulnerability of civilian populations, who are often the victims of actions such as hijacking, kidnapping, and bombing of public places. The publicity created is vital, allowing the perpetrators to attain or retain a high profile around the world, to be seen as successful, and therefore to attract funding from those who support their cause. Most importantly, it is designed to weaken political support for the governing authorities, although this does not always happen in practice.

HISTORY

Terrorism has an ancient history and one of the earliest groups to whom this label was applied were the Jewish group the Zealots who fought against Roman occupation in the first century CE. They were involved in such acts as assassinations of Romans and Jews who co-operated with the Roman regime. The word zealot is now often used to describe a fanatic or adherent to a cause – especially a religious movement. Another prominent group in history were the Assassins active between the 10th and 12th centuries. They were Shi'a Muslims who carried out attacks on important religious and political people associated with the rival Sunni branch of Islam.

Terrorism on a global scale was particularly prevalent in the second half of the twentieth century, inspired by the break-up of colonial empires, subsequent nationalism and various ideologies (or belief systems). An obvious example of terrorism in the beginning of the 21st century is the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, which destroyed the Twin Towers in New York City and a wing of the Pentagon (Defence Department Headquarters) building near Washington DC.



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Views of 'who' is a terrorist depends on the perspectives of those using the label. For example, in the case of Iraq, the United States' supposed counter-terrorism actions have included ousting Saddam Hussein and bombing and occupying Iraq without specific authorisation from the United Nations Security Council. Thus, the legality of this occupation of Iraq is being questioned and has stirred up much debate. If a person is in opposition to US-led occupation, it is possible that s/he would define the US's occupation of that country as an act of 'state terrorism'. Also in the region, in the Israel and Palestine conflict, politically motivated violence aimed at civilians is carried out by both nations. Again, these acts on both sides can be viewed as acts of terror if one is a civilian, a recipient of the violence. In both cases, as the length and intensity of the conflict increases, a desperate climate emerges that foments extremism and terror activities on all fronts.

CASE STUDY

Another example where the term 'terrorist' continues to be used is that of Northern Ireland. As recently as 2000, the US State Department considered the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to be a 'terrorist' organization. However the IRA is no longer considered a terrorist group since its political wing has participated in peace talks and acts of reconciliation.¹ Established to end British rule in Northern Ireland and unify the province with their southern neighbour, the Republic of Ireland, the IRA sees itself as an armed force against the illegal occupation of their country. In the 1920s the predominately Catholic-south became the Republic of Ireland, an independent state, while the mostly-Protestant north stayed as a part of the United Kingdom. Catholics claimed to be treated poorly and some backed the IRA's intent to end British rule. This effort was countered by Protestants who wanted to remain a part of the British Crown, thus forming an armed opposition to the IRA. As a result of terrorist and counter-terrorist activities, more than 3,000 people on both sides have died since the late '60s. There are two 'splinter groups' or small organisations that have broken away from a larger one² ~ in this case, the IRA. The 'Real IRA' and the 'Continuity IRA' have continued with violent acts and refuse to participate in peace talks. As a result, they are considered by the US, British and Irish authorities to be 'terrorists'.³

In conclusion, the usage of the word 'terrorist' needs to be viewed critically from different perspectives. An awareness that governments, political systems and the media may use language to evoke mass emotion is important when reading news reports utilising these terms. What is one person's terrorist, is another's freedom fighter, is another's revolutionary. It depends on who is defining the actions, which side is favoured, and how reliance on violence to achieve political ends is viewed.

1 <http://www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/ira.html>

2 Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, UK, 2002.

3 <http://www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/ira.html#Q2>