



Norwegian University
of Life Sciences

Bachelor's Thesis Spring 2019 15 stp
Faculty of Landscape and Society LANDSAM

The Discourses of State Terrorism: Justifying the Iraq Invasion, Drone Strikes and Right-Wing Extremism

Marte Fugledal

Bachelor of Science in International Environment and Development Studies

The Discourses of State Terrorism: Justifying the Iraq Invasion, Drone Strikes and Right-Wing Extremism

During the twentieth century it is estimated that the number of deaths due to state-started mass murders, genocides and forcible starvations is around 170-200 million (Blakeley & Raphael, 2016). Numbers gathered for Alexander George's "Western State Terrorism" (1991) show quite the difference between state and non-state terrorism, and terrorism perpetrated by a state. According to George, the number of killings by non-state actors (CIA global aggregate between 1969-1980) were 3,368 (ibid.). However big this number seems, the number of people killed by state terrorism alone in Angola and Mozambique between 1980-1989 is over one million (George, 1991). Other numbers of killings as a result of state terrorism are: over half a million people in Indonesia between 1965-1966 and then later on over 200,000 more due to the invasion and pacification in East Timor (1980-1985), and the Pol Pot era in Cambodia where over 300,000 people were killed during the three years from 1975-1978 (Ibid.). These numbers are massive compared to the numbers of killings resulted from non-state actors. However, the general public seldom know about the extent of state terrorism. Some of the reason is that state terrorism has become subjugated knowledge amongst and within scholars, but also how the term terrorism is subjectively framed.

This paper examines the discourses of terrorism and how it the term is often defined to fit certain agendas. In doing so, the purpose of the paper is to look into if the United States of America is perpetrating state terrorism towards other states and if the current administration is also perpetrating some form of state terrorism towards the US's own citizens. Based on this purpose, the research question for the paper is as follows: Is the US perpetrating state terrorism today, and if so, what form of state terrorism and towards whom?

Definition of important terms within terrorism

In order to define state terrorism, it is important to conceptualize the term terrorism. Terrorism can be simply put: the intentional use or threat to use violence towards citizens for a political, religious or ideological aim (Ganor, 2002). However, Paul Wilkinson (1992) explains that terrorism is a term consisting of five main characteristics. These characteristics are that 1. It is intentional and its goal is to create an environment that consists of terror and extreme fear 2. It is aimed at other targets or audience other than those who are the victims 3. It essentially subsists of attacking symbolic or random targets (civilians included) 4. The terror act that occurs is seen by society as something that breaks with the social norms and

therefore causes extreme anger 5. The attack is politically motivated with the aim of influencing politics somehow.

Even though both Ganor (2002) and Wilkinson (1992) have some similarities in their definitions, such as focus on the violence or the threat of violence, other researchers have different emphasis. Other international and regional bodies emphasize aspects like the intention behind the terrorist act, or the impacts of violence itself (Beall et al., 2006). However, many of these definitions are very vague and therefore allow certain discretion that can be dangerous when it comes to protecting civil liberties (ibid.). Some of the problem is that it can be difficult separating terrorists and freedom fighters in e.g. political or ideological conflicts due to different viewpoints (Rehman, 2005 in Beall et al., 2006). Who decides what the labels are in a conflict? It is more often than not the party with the most power that decides who has 'the law' on their side or 'the most right'. However, that does not mean it is the correct labeling. In mainstream policy, academic circles and media terrorism is generally viewed as acts where democratic states in the North and their allies are targeted by non-state agents that are controlled and supplied by so-called 'rogue' states or other agents in the South (Blakeley, 2007). However, this is not completely accurate. Whilst such groups have carried out attacks on Northern democracies, such as 9/11, these Northern states have also allowed or used terrorism against a large number of citizens in the global South for a great number of years. An example of this, which will be discussed in more detail later, is the US and their hunt for terrorists in countries like Iraq and Yemen where the US is the more powerful actor and can easily adjust their deception of their acts.

Blakeley and Raphael (2016) explain that most definitions of terrorism contain three key elements. The first element is that a 'protected victim' is either threatened or subjected, or both, to violence. The second elaborates that by committing an act of violence the actor wants to spread fear to people who witness it. The witnesses are generally not in relation to the victims. The next element is that the violent actor wants or expects that the witness will change their behavior after this in some way. This definition is very much like the one proposed by Wilkinson. However, what Blakeley and Raphael also include is a fourth key element which include acts perpetrated by states, also known as state terrorism.

Ruth Blakeley (2007) describes state terrorism as 'threats or acts of violence carried out by representatives of the state against civilians to instill fear for political purposes' (p.228). There are a widespread of means to commit state terrorism. Torture, bombings, kidnapping, rape, killings of civilians by state-run militias or paramilitaries ('death squads') are examples of some. The role of the state can differ from the state being the perpetrator, to

state sponsorship of terrorism. It can also be divided into the state perpetrating violence towards its own citizens or it can use its forces abroad. State terrorism can also sometimes be hidden behind what is known as counterterrorism.

Counterterrorism is quite simply put; strategies to counter terrorism. The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) have proposed a resolution and a plan of action consisting of four pillars (United Nations, n.d.). These pillars are 1. Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; 2. Measure to prevent and combat terrorism; 3. Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; 4. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism (ibid.). However, one problem of the term counterterrorism in practice is to know when it changes towards being state terrorism. In other words, when the protection for terrorism, becomes a hunt to find possible terrorist threats. There is a shortcoming regarding scholars openly debating state terrorism. Combining this with the general lack of knowledge amongst the public about terrorism perpetrated by states, makes it easier for state to 'get away it'. When state terrorism happens, there is not enough global, legal implications. It is especially difficult for the global community to demand legal repercussions towards state who has perpetrated terrorism against its own people.

Reasons why state terrorism is subjugated knowledge

Ruth Blakeley (2007) explain that there are three main reasons why within terrorism studies state terrorism is mostly absent in the scholarly debates. The first reason has to do with the methods used by traditional terrorism scholars. The second moves on to the institutional affiliations of these scholars, and the third reason "builds on the marginalization within international relations scholarships regarding normative approaches to foreign policy" (ibid. p. 229).

The first reason consists of how terrorisms scholars define and theorize terrorism. The term terrorism is defined from a Northern perspective to fit into the framework of the global North as victims. For many terrorism scholars, the aim for their research is not focused on challenging existing power relations and institutions, but rather focus on terrorism within this already existing framework. This is what Robert W. Cox labeled in 1981 as the 'problem-solving theory' (Cox, 1981 in Blakeley, 2007). Within this theory Cox explains that the aim is to deal effectively with certain problem sources to assure a smooth functioning between the power relationships and the institutions (ibid.). Another factor that affects the analysis of

terrorism scholars is the presumption that the Northern democratic states' foreign policies are good-natured. Therefore, when these states use force it is either accepted as threat response or to protect others. However, Alexander George (1991) states in his book "Western State terrorism" that 'on any reasonable definition of terrorism, taken literally, the United States and its friends are the major supporters, sponsors, and perpetrators of terrorist incidents in the world today' (p.1).

The second reason for why state terrorism is mostly absent from scholarships are due to the institutions the terrorism scholars affiliate to. Wilkinson's definition of terrorism does not show any exclusion, or inclusion, of Northern democracies. However, when analyzing much of his published work, there is an underlying assumption that these democratic states are mostly victims, and not perpetrators, of terrorism (Jackson, 2008). The reason for his exclusion of Northern democracies when it comes to being actors of terrorism might be because of his connection to the RAND corporation. The RAND corporation is a non-profit making research foundation. It was formed after the second world war by the US Army Force as Project RAND and was contracted to the Douglas Aircraft Company (Burnett & Whyte, 2003). A few years later it separated from Douglas and thus became a non-profit 'independent' development and research organization. The organization had a budget in 2018 of \$345 million according to their own webpage (RAND corporation, 2019). Almost 75% of this is sponsored by organizations based in the US such as the U.S. Army and Airforce (ibid.). The RAND corporation worked together with the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at St. Andrew's University to create a database where incidents of international terrorism in the years between 1968 and 1997 were registered (Blakeley, 2007). This database is recognized as one of the most dependable sources of international terrorism data (Burnett & Whyte, 2003).

However, the way this database collects its data can be viewed as flawed or lacking due to two main observations (Burnett & Whyte, 2003). The first is that it only collects data on international terrorism. That means that terrorism conducted within the terrorist's own country and against its own people are not included. Most of the terrorist attacks that are included in the database are attacks carried out in 'lesser' states regarding the global economy (ibid.). The term international terrorism also implies that the attacks that are registered are on military occupiers or foreign visitors to these 'lesser' countries. This further implies that the victims are people from economically solid, Western nations (usually). The other observation is that this collection of data does not include terrorism acts perpetrated by states towards its own citizens, and violence that can occur in combat situations (war) (ibid.). The only time

incidents including Western armies are in the database is when these armies are victims of violence and not the perpetrators.

The third and final argument are concerning the selective ways the field of terrorism is studied and conceived. By looking at the people within RAND and CSTPV, and cross-reference these with some of the leading English written terrorism- and political violence journals, there would be some overlaps. Among these are Paul Wilkinson whose definition of terrorism, explained and criticized above, is widely used. He is one of the two founders of CSTPV and was appointed Chairman in the early 2000's, he is also co-editor of the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Burnett & Whyte, 2003). The other founder, Bruce Hoffman, started his career at RAND, but after over a decade he temporarily left to establish the CSTPV and work on the database, before he returned to the corporation again (ibid.). He is also a member of the editorial board of *Terrorism and Political Violence* as well as editor-in-chief of the journal *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (this journal was originally managed by RAND) (ibid.). Together with RAND's close ties to the US administration, and these examples on people with important roles in both journals and RAND-St. Andrews nexus, it is not difficult to understand that it would be easier to push, or hide, certain views on terrorism with their influence on this field of study. However, as both Blakeley and Burnett and Whyte note, this does not mean that the peer review system is corrupt or meticulous compared to other journals, just a mere observation of how this system could be used, if wanted. This could also explain why there are very few publications in these journals that discuss the Northern democracies use of state terrorism.

The lack of inclusion of western states when using the term state terrorism creates an unbalance in our world view. The definition needs to include the notion that all states, rouge and western, are completely able to perpetrate terrorism. There might also be a need for broadening the definition of state terrorism, which will be a point of discussion throughout this paper.

The Discourse

As explained above it is difficult to find one clear, objective definition on what terrorism is because of its complex nature. Different state leaders, amongst others, tend to define terrorism based on their own agendas and use their definition to try to frame what their listeners think about it so that they are more 'understanding' about actions taken (Bhatia, 2009). When framing these conceptions, Bhatia explains that they use "illusive and metaphorical representations" (p. 279) which consists of contrasts such as law vs.

lawlessness; good vs. evil; freedom vs. tyranny and so on (ibid.). These contrasts help create a feeling of unity in an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ environment. Also, using such a division makes the situation more black and white and thereby making it harder for people to question a state’s actions against terrorism. Either people are a part of ‘us’ or ‘them’, such rhetoric was used by former President Bush during his invasion of Iraq (will be discussed later on). He quite simply put it “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorist” (CNN, 2001, para. 54).

The term terrorism is heavily depoliticized when it is used dichotomies such as us against them. One of the most often used contrasts is good vs. evil. Lazar and Lazar (2004), form the term (e)vilification to illustrate this powerful dichotomy that effectively creates a side that is fundamentally good, but also create a moral obligation to get rid of that evil. Bush used this contrast (good vs. evil) when defending the Iraq invasion, he also incorporated Christianity (a religious discourse) to create a feeling of connectedness with God and the notion that Bush’s ‘side’ was the religiously correct side (ibid.). These interdiscursivities draw the focus away from the politics of it all and appeal more to the emotions and morals of the people.

In previous segments the conceptual background of terrorism and state terrorism has been elaborated. In the following section, the analytical tools presented will be used to explore cases within the context of the US and draw conclusions as to whether or not they can be labeled as state terrorism.

Analyzing Acts of Violence Perpetrated by the United States

The Guatemalan Civil War lasted 36 years, from 1960 to 1996 (Sieder & Wilson, 1997). The road to war started when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1954 decided to help overthrow the left-leaning, democratically elected government which was led by Jacobo Arbenz. He had caught the attention of the US by implementing a land reform policy to benefit farmers that had been displaced on the expense of the private sector’s interests. Amongst these where the US-based company United Fruit Company. Arbenz was overthrown in a military coup which was labeled an “anti-communist”-coup due to the fact that some people in the Guatemalan president’s coalition were members of the Communist Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT) (Sieder & Wilson, 1997). This thereby justified the CIA’s involvement. After this, several dictators were in power and they all tried to crush the guerrilla groups. From 1982-1983 the evangelical Christian General Efraim Rios Montt was in power. He was immensely supported by the president of the U.S. at that time, Ronald Reagan, who sent arms and expertise to Guatemala. The General implemented what would be known as a “scorched

earth” policy which consisted of heavily bombing of areas which could possibly be housing guerrillas. Arms on the ground was also used and this led to several horrific massacres of civilian population (ibid.). During the rule of General Rios Montt over 2,000 people were killed according to Amnesty International (through George, 1991). As a result of this civil war, current estimates suggest that around 180,000 people died, possibly 40,000 people ‘disappeared’, around 400 villages were destroyed, and over 100,000 people fled to Mexico (Costello, 1997).

The Guatemalan civil war is an example of state terrorism perpetrated by General Montt and his government. However, it is also an example of how the US took a part of this terrorism by first supporting by helping in the coup but also supporting with arms and expertise. President Reagan praised General Montt, illustrating a picture of a good man with good values with statements such as “[he’s] a man of great personal integrity and commitment” (Press, 2018), and “I’m inclined to believe that they’ve been getting bum rap” (Wills, 2013) when confronted about the human rights violations. This created a stand where the US and General Montt was in the right because a man with such great integrity could not be in the wrong. This shows that the framing of what is terrorism depends on who’s defining it and who has the most power to implement their definition.

The Iraq invasion

Whereas the Guatemalan civil war was a clear example of the US participated in state terrorism, other actions from the US are harder to clearly define. According to an article published in the Smithsonian Magazine (Savell, 2019) the US is currently engaged in countering terrorism in 80 countries across the globe. The question is if the action is justifiable, as counterterrorism, or just plain terrorism actions. The invasion of Iraq under former President Bush and President Obama’s extensive use of drones are examples where the framework of terrorism is shaped by the leading power and thereby labeled as counterterrorism.

The US, with George W. Bush as their president, launched a global war on terror after the attacks on September 11, 2001 (Clarke, 2008). During those days after the attack, Bush went from describing the threat from Al Qaeda as something as minor as “swatting flies” to proclaiming a global war on terror and the urgent need to fight back (ibid.). He further went on to extensively claiming that there were ‘ties’ between al Qaeda and Iraq and that this meant that Iraq was a possible threat to the U.S. However, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (Kean et al., 2004) published a report clearly stating

that they had not found any evidence that Iraq had cooperated with al Qaeda to develop or carry out attacks against the U.S. (ibid.).

What has in the years after the 9/11 attack come forward is that the Bush administration had been discussing invading Iraq long before the attack happened. The motives for this invasion have been widely discussed amongst scholars. Both Ahsan I Butt (2019) and Jeffrey Record (2010) explains that most American believed that the invasion was mostly due to the believed threat of a weapons of mass destruction program. This was a very disputed topic where the Bush administration kept insisting that this program was active and posed a great threat of war despite the lack of solid evidence to back it up. It later turned out, according to Record (2010), that Saddam Hussain (former president of Iraq) did indeed *not* have such an active WMD program and that the foundation of the Iraq-invasion was most likely false. Butt (2019) and Record (2010) both also consider the claims that the war was a way of spreading democracy or to get the control of the vast oil reserves, but they both concluded, though with some different phrasing, that the real reason for the invasion of Iraq was to show off Americas military power and (re)establish their position as the most powerful country in the world (Butt, 2019; Record, 2010).

While the invasion of Iraq, and the global war on terror might have been instigated by the terrorist attack on America 9/11, the invasion by US military could easily be labeled state terrorism perpetrated by the United States. However, the challenge lies in locating where the invasion of Iraq went from being a case of counterterrorism to state terrorism. It could quite possibly be at the very start where the people of the US went to war on false premises delivered by the president and his administration, because if what Butt and Record concludes with are true than the Iraq-war was not about protecting the American people from more attacks, but rather attacking others so that they might not be attacked in the future. Which could be seen as a good way to go, but quickly changes towards getting more enemies rather than allies and creating more tension and people with a vengeance.

To show how the Iraq war can be labeled as state terrorism instead of counter terrorism the four key elements previously outlined will be used. The first element is that ‘a ‘protected victim’ is either threatened or subjected, or both, to violence’. This protected victim is usually civilians who do not have any active part in ‘the terrorism’. In the period between 2003 and 2006 in the Iraq war an estimated number of around 50,000 deaths of civilian Iraqis occurred (Roberts, 2010). However, this number is believed to be higher due to underreporting and difficulties estimating a concrete number. Hicks and her coauthors for their article *The weapons that kill civilians – deaths of children and noncombatants in Iraq*

2003-2008 (2009) set the death toll to be around 60,000. They also note that of these deaths, almost 20,000 were executed after capture or abduction and of these again, 29% showed signs of torture such as burns and drill holes. However, it does not state that the U.S. forces were the active agent behind these incidents, but it is the most probable explanation. Also, with such an extensive number of deaths, abductions and torture-signs, the general public in Iraq lived with the knowledge that if they were to rally against the forces, they could be the victim of such acts.

Then the second key element elaborates that ‘the actor in this violence wants the violence to spread fear to people who witness it. This witness is generally not in relation to the victim’. In the case of the Iraqi war the second key element might either be towards the Iraqi people and state to not try “to mess with the United States”, however what is more likely is that the U.S wanted to use this invasion to show other regimes that had previously been uncooperative towards the U.S like Iran, Syria, Libya, or North Korea, that they could easily invade them. A decisive and quick victory would send a clear message to all countries that America was still the most powerful country. According to Stephen Glain’s book *State vs. Defense: The Battle to Define America’s Empire* (2011), Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, said after the 9/11-attack that “There just aren’t enough targets in Afghanistan. We need to bomb something else to prove that we’re, you know, big and strong and not going to be pushed around by these kinds of attacks” (p. 379). Again, the threat as described regarding the first key element also applies here because the threat of dying/abduction/torture can affect people whether or not they were in relation to the victims.

The next element is that ‘the violent actor wants or expects that the witness will change their behavior after this in some way’. The apparent reason for why the U.S invaded Iraq was to show other countries that they were the leading power and that after this invasion these countries might rethink their choices regarding possibly threatening the United States of America. The fourth key element is that it is a state or representatives of the state doing the acts of violence. In this case, the U.S military carried out the invasion on behalf of the elected representatives of the state, with the president in front.

The reason why this invasion of Iraq is not generally labeled state terrorism is due to several reasons. One of them is that it goes against the notion and definition established by scholars that the western states are usually the victim whilst the ‘rogue’ nations are the perpetrators of violence. Although the terrorism attack on America September 11th might be the triggering cause, it does not justify the acts against the Iraqi people, nor does it justify misleading the American people regarding the WMD threat. Another reason might be that

labeling the U.S. as perpetrators of state terrorism is not something the U.S. would particularly like. It would reduce their status amongst their allies and put them in a bad light.

President Bush heavily used the dichotomies such as good vs. evil. He stated that “Terror cells and outlaw regimes building weapons of mass destruction are different faces of the same evil” (Bush 2002 in Bhatia, 2009, p.282) to justify their invasion. This thereby created an us vs. them scenario which, considering the terrible 9/11, few dared to question in fear of being labeled as a “them” aka terrorist. He also claimed that whilst the US acted on their responsibilities, other instances did not, stating that he had “called on the United Nations to fulfill its charter and stand by its demand that Iraq disarm” (Bush, 2003 in Bhatia, 2009, p. 284). This could be interpreted as if the US had tried to reason with Iraq, but after exhausting all options, it seemed that the only option would be to use force. By framing the term terrorism to fit his plans of reestablishing the US as the greatest nation, he managed to go to war with limited resistance. This is a good example on how terrorism is relatively subjective and can be used as a means to justify great injustices.

Drone and airstrikes

The use of remote-control killing using lethal drones, or unmanned combat aerial vehicles, have been increasingly used against the threat of terrorism the last two decades. This practice has crept in through the back door of the GWOT (global war on terror), and now works as a favored alternative to regular armed combat. During former President Bush’s two terms he sanctioned 57 drone strikes outside of declared war zones (Purkiss & Searle, 2017). However, this number differs between different sources, but is generally estimated somewhere around 50 strikes (Bergen, 2012; Bachman & Holland, 2019; Calhoun, 2018), and is often presented as a comparison to the much higher number of strikes under Obamas terms. Obamas number of air strikes using drones during his eight years of Presidency has a total count of 563 (Purkiss & Searle, 2017). One of the differences that might have had an effect on the number of drone strikes between these two presidents is that Bush imprisoned a much higher number of terrorist suspects for the purpose of gathering intel when Obama rather killed possible threats. This gathering of intel usually implied, amongst others, the practice of rendition or the use of “enhanced interrogation techniques” (Calhoun, 2018). One of the sites for these interrogations and imprisonments was, and still is, Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Guantanamo Bay is a small territory of 117 square kilometers on the southeast coast of Cuba, leased to the US for an indefinitely period (Strauss, 2016). It has been used as a prison for several decades and has been renowned due to its practices of more ‘alternative

interrogation' and lack of general human rights. Some, such as the practice of indefinite detention of suspects of terrorism without charges were widely used during Bush's terms as president. One example of this is Shaker Aamer, a British resident, who was imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay without charges and was subjected to torture, only to be released 13 years later (Amnesty International UK, 2018). The Bush administration labeled Aamer, amongst others, as the worst of the worst, when he and many others actually had no ties to terrorism or terrorist groups. Obama has also openly confirmed that people have been tortured but refused to prosecute any of the torturers. He instead replaced the harsh methods of interrogation and detention at Guantanamo Bay prison with execution by drone strikes.

In the early years of the Obama administration, the general attitude towards drone strikes were positive. One of the probable reasons why air strikes by drone have been generally accepted and welcomed amongst the citizens of the US can be that they did not know the extent nor the number of casualties due to the high level of secrecy. For several years, the Obama administration refused to acknowledge that there even existed a drone killing program, much less give the public any information about the numbers of casualties or how the evaluation of targets came about (Calhoun, 2018).

The reason for drone strikes was not public knowledge. However, according to Calhoun (2018), Obama conceived "imminent threats posed by individual suspects as legally equivalent to acts of war by rogue states and hence appropriately countered by military force" (p.360). With a very vague definition of "imminent threats" Attorney General Eric Holder explained that the threat did not have to have any "immediacy" about it which again meant that individuals or small groups who might, in the impending future, be in any chance able to carry out a terrorist attack, could be targeted (ibid.). This means that had Shaker Aamer, who was wrongfully imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay for over 13 years, been labeled as a possible terrorist in Obama's terms instead of Bush's, he would most likely have been dead. It seems as if this administration followed a view where a person even with a tiny chance of being affiliated with terrorism is guilty until proven innocent, which is the opposite of what it actually should be. Another evidence of the Obama administration's vague definition of "imminent threat" is when the US government agreed openly that they had killed somewhere between 2,372 and 2,581 people that had not been in areas of active hostilities. This means that they have killed people who have not been an immediate threat to deployed US troops, but rather people who could, in the future, have been responsible for terrorist actions had they lived.

The extensive use of this "light footprint" approach, aka drone strikes, under Obama's presidency have resulted in many deaths over the years. In Yemen 2012, there was reported a

drone strike every six days and by August 2015 almost 500 people had been killed in Yemen alone (Scahill, 2017). In Pakistan, 346 drone strikes were conducted from 2004-2012, resulting in a causality range from 1,886 to 3,337 deaths depending on the source of information (ibid.). President Obama approved an astounding number of 288 drone strikes in a three-year period from 2009, which was the highest number of drone strikes yet (ibid.)

It can be dangerous when heads of state have the ability to order killings without any consultation with other representatives for the state, such as congress in the US. After having sanctioned drone killings on targets outside Iraq and Afghanistan for over two years, the congress voiced critiques about not being consulted about the ongoing air war in Libya in 2011 (Savage & Landler, 2011). The Obama administration did not ask for authorization under the War Powers Resolution (or War Powers Act) and did not terminate the mission after the legal 60 days (Emerson, 1975). When asking for answers, the Obama administration explained that the president did not have to ask for permission because it did not involve US ground troops, nor did it engage in active fire with enemy forces (Savage & Landler, 2011). They further went on to explain that this mission's limited nature did not fit with the 'hostilities' outlined in the War Powers Resolution (ibid.). Jack L. Goldsmith, former leader of the Office of Legal Counsel in the Department of Justice under President Bush, argues that this line of thinking from the Obama administration "implies that the president can wage war with drones and all manner of offshore missiles without having to bother with the War Powers Resolution's time limits" (p. 2). This did not only include airstrikes, but also the release of bombs.

During 2015, the Obama administration sanctioned the release of 23,000 bombs on Middle Eastern countries (Denton-Borhaug, 2016; Frum, 2015). He followed up the year later with an estimate of about 26,171 more bombs in seven countries in which Muslims are the majority (Thorpe, 2018). Many of these bombs in 2016 was dispatched outside of what was legally recognized by the US as battlefield (ibid.).

Drone attacks' measure for success is when they hit the right target with as few civilian casualties as possible. However, reports from drone attacks rarely mention the people who are injured physically and even more rarely the mental strain on the people living under threats of drone attacks. The US is currently using drone strikes in 7 countries in the Middle East. The people these countries face the threat of drone strikes every hour of every day. They can just be unlucky and be located near someone who is a target, or they can be a suspect of terrorism themselves on the basis of almost nothing. People living in areas under surveillance have to keep living with that constant awareness that they could be unlucky one day.

However, these people generally do not only worry about themselves, but also about their family and friends. With the US explaining little on the basis of why different drone attacks have been carried out, they do not know how to better shield themselves from such attacks. This is one form of psychological terrorism or what would be more appropriately called psychological drone terrorism, and should be included under state terrorism perpetrated by the U.S.

When exploring if the drone strikes are acts of state terrorism, Blakeley and Raphael's (2016) four key elements can be used as an analytical lens. With the high number of casualties, and probably an even larger number of wounded civilians, the general public is either consciously or subconsciously affected. However, the third element, where the aim is to change the behavior of witnesses, can be harder to give a conclusive answer to. Many of the witnesses do not generally participate in behavior that would make them terror suspects, but rather are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, the drone strikes might have an effect on smothering recruitment of terrorists due to the fear of being targeted, but it could also do the exact opposite. Mahmood and Jetter (2019) present the blowback hypothesis where they argue that drone strikes could generate grievances amongst general civilians which could lead to ideological or financial support for the terrorist groups.

Even though there have been many civilian casualties when it comes to drone strikes, it is still classified as one of the 'safest' ways of attack. A report written by the US Air Force explains that drones or "an unmanned aircraft is not limited by human performance or psychological characteristics. Therefore, extreme persistence and maneuverability are intrinsic benefits that can be realized by UAS" (US Air Force, 2009, p. 15). This means that UAS's (unmanned aircrafts) do not have the same faults as humans, such as the ability to get distracted, hungry, tired and so on (Dowd, 2013). It also means that, when using drone in warfare, the enemy does not have a human target to aim back on, which reduces the amount of deaths (at least on one side).

An example of the US targeting one of their own citizens by drone is the story of Anwar al-Awlaki. He was an American-born Muslim who, during his years at university became more political and religiously aware and after several run-ins with the FBI he became more politically radicalized.

Anwar al-Awlaki was an American-born Muslim, with an engineering education from a US university and a small family (Scahill, 2013). He decided after graduating that his path in this world was not as an engineer but rather an Imam. During his time as an Imam he had several would-be terrorist suspects going to his mosques which the FBI found very suspicious

and suspected a link between Awlaki and the 9/11 bombing, amongst others (ibid.). He was also very outspoken with his critiques towards the US foreign policies and their attacks on different predominantly Muslim countries. After the 9/11 attack, many Muslims were detained and questioned due to the fact that they might possibly had something to do with it or planning other attacks. Awlaki made secretly plans to leave the US because of this hostile environment which probably, in the FBI's eyes made him seem more suspicious. After that, the FBI made several claims, without solid evidence, that al-Awlaki was connected to the planning of attacks carried out by al-Qaeda. This led to al-Awlaki being labeled as so "dangerous" that he became the first US citizen targeted and killed by a drone strike in 2011 (ibid.).

Two weeks after the assassination of Anwar al-Awlaki, his son, Abdulrahman, was killed by another drone strike from the Obama-administration (al-Awlaki, 2013; Calhoun, 2018; Scahill, 2013). The administration, however, pretended to not know who was responsible for the drone strike (Scahill, 2013) only to confess almost two years later that it was indeed the US that had launched the drone (al-Awlaki, 2013). They did, however, not explain why they launched the attack, but rather portrayed a picture of a 'lethal terrorist' who had ties to al-Qaeda, just like his father was portrayed. The newspapers took it a step further, falsely claiming his age to be 21 (instead of 16) which sat better with the terrorist portray rather than a 16-year-old boy (Scahill, 2013). This led to his family inviting people to search him up on Facebook so that they instead could see the 'normal' teenager that he was. Abdulrahman was, according to his family, friends and the lack of evidence from the Obama administration (at least known to the public), wrongly killed either due to 'wrong place wrong time', wrong intel, fear of what he could possibly become, or, if he actually was a terrorist, lack of charges and prosecution.

In 2016, Donald Trump was elected president in the United States of America. In the first month of his presidency he sanctioned an operation in Yemen led by the Special Forces. The purpose of this operation was to gather intelligence on al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) by attacking a suspected safehouse of the organization (Radman, 2019). It was reported by various sources, that an estimate of 17 civilians were killed, and that 10 of these were children (ibid; Watson, 2018). Amongst these children where the 8-year-old daughter of Anwar al-Awlaki (Abdulrahman's stepsister) (Ackermann et al., 2017; Greenwald, 2017). It was speculated if this was a "deliberate causality", which a spokesman for the central command later denied and deemed it a coincidence (Ackermann et al., 2017).

However, the deaths of the al-Alwaki family members show the U.S is willing to kill their own citizens without proper evidence or a fair trial. What should always be done is to gather proper evidence so that the people suspected of terrorist activities can be held accountable. Although it may be “safer” to kill possible terrorists with drone strikes instead of risking another attack, there should be extensive discussing and justification for such assassinations. To simply justify it under the vague term of immediate threat and counterterrorism is not fulfilling enough. Killing without justification could easily be terrorism, and if it is a state behind the action than that is state terrorism.

The two cases of (state) terrorism discussed above show the subjectivity of the term terrorism. It is no longer a universal, political term but a term framed by who has the leading power, in these cases it is the US. The importance of discussing these cases within the discourse of terrorism is to show how world leaders can use their own definition to fit their (or their country’s) agendas. This can be very dangerous and lethal, as especially illustrated in the Invasion of Iraq case. Bush’s, and Obama’s, interpretation of terrorism and counterterrorism has helped them justify a large number of civilian deaths. They have thoroughly created an us vs. them scenario that can inhibit the discussion amongst scholars in fear of being labeled terrorism sympathizers.

The previous sections have given examples of cases where the US has engaged in activity that could be analyzed as state terrorism, but the shifting political context under the Trump administration provides a case that is also worth examining. The next section will therefore examine if Trump and his administration’s views on immigration and Islam creates an environment that enables right-wing extremism.

Trump and Right-Wing Terrorism

When Trump was running for president, he made several promises and announcements regarding immigration and Muslims. He promised to tackle the problem with illegal immigrants and return the millions of unauthorized immigrants in the US. It is, according to the Pew Research Center, estimated that around 10,7 million people are living in the US without legit residents permits, and that 5.4 million of these are from Mexico (Krogstad et al., 2019). Trump further claimed, during his presidential bid announcement, that Mexico is “sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (The Washington Post, 2015). He implies by this that even though few might be

‘good’, the majority if ‘bad’. He also stated during his bid that a wall between the US and Mexico to keep the immigrants out would be built and that Mexico would cover the costs.

After being inaugurated, Trump proposed three executive orders (EO) concerning immigration to keep his word from his campaign. The first was about border security and problems regarding the restriction of immigrant’s entry and the second was more about how to deal with immigrants already settled (Scribner, 2017). Two days later the third EO was proposed and this focused on Trump’s concern when it came to the refugee resettlement program and how it could potentially allow terrorists to be admitted to the US. The president therefore cut the amount of people accepted to 50,000 and implemented a 120-days long halt to revise the vetting processes and a ban on 90 days for the issuance of refugee resettlements or visas from seven countries that were Muslim dominated. The EO also suspended indefinitely Syrian’s admissions (ibid).

These three executive orders resulted in over 50 lawsuits from different state attorney generals, religious groups, and other organizations (Scribner, 2017). It also led to a temporary restraining order (TRO), issued by Judge James Robart, on several of the points in the EO regarding, amongst others, the 90-day ban, the 120-day admission halt and the seven-country suspension (ibid.) The EO’s were changed, but met the same resistance and a TRO.

Trump was asked in March 2016 about whether or not he believed that Islam was at war with the West. To this, Trump answered that he thinks “Islam hates us [the West/US]...there is a tremendous hatred there, and we have to get to the bottom of it. There is an unbelievable hatred for us” (Schleifer, 2019). After he was asked if he meant in Islam itself, he went on saying that “we have to be very careful and we can’t allow people coming into this country who have this hatred for the United States and of people who are not Muslim” (ibid.). He also elaborates that he finds it very difficult to separate and define if the war is between radical Islam or Islam itself, because he did not know who’s who.

Trump’s view on immigration and Muslim in general correlates with the views of right-wing populism in the US. This political ideology combines populism, anti-elitists and the common man, with right-wing politics, conservative and neoliberalist (Greven, 2016). This ideology opposes immigration and believes it is a threat to the traditional values and identity. It emphasizes the “us vs them” nexus by the construct of “othering”, they who are not within the socially accepted boundaries of these people. The “other” can differ from country to country, but in America these are often immigrants from Mexico or Muslims. However, Muslim immigrants are frowned upon generally throughout all the right-wing populist groups, but in US that is more due to the threat of terrorism than the influx of refugees (ibid.).

Right-wing terrorism is terrorist activity that is perpetrated by individuals or groups that have extreme right-wing beliefs (Piazza, 2017). Examples of such belief are white supremacy and racism, nationalism, radical Christian beliefs to mention some. During the last couple of years (notably after Trump's inauguration), the US have seen a rise in terrorism acts conducted by right-wing terrorists (Koehler, 2019). According to Seth G. Jones (2018) the number of attacks by such extreme 'righties' rose by more than four times in the period 2016 to 2017. Although Trump cannot be held accountable for the rise in domestic terrorist attacks, some have found some inspiration in his outspokenness about his view on immigrants, Muslims and Islam.

After the terrorist attack 9/11, most of the attention from law enforcement, policy makers and researchers have been on Islamic extremism (Koehler, 2019). Even though there is an impending threat from such extremists, there is a much larger threat of domestic right-wing terrorism in the US. This skewed view on extremism threat also comes from the labeling of violent acts perpetrated by right-wing extremists. In many cases, violence carried out by 'righties' are labeled hate crimes instead of terrorism (ibid.). Hate crimes are crimes perpetrated towards an individual or group due to their identity and can also include the aim to inflict terror on a larger group (ibid.). The act is perpetrated towards an innocent victim, or victims, and can be a means to inflict fear towards a larger group. This is fairly similar to the concept terrorism. However, some scholars claim that although it is similar, the terms are too distinct to merge because hate crimes are often spontaneous and lack planning whereas terrorism generally is a planned act (ibid.).

An analysis conducted by the Intercept uncovered that the Justice Department several times declined to charge right-wing extremists with terrorism even though their actions fit the terrorism definition (Aaronson, 2019). According to this analysis, 268 right-wing extremists that have been prosecuted since 9/11 fits the domestic terrorism definition. However, only 34 of them were applied with anti-terrorism laws, compared to over 500 international terrorist suspects (ibid.). This bias towards prosecuting right-wing extremists under terrorist-law have led the media to almost exclusively focus on international extremists, usually Islamic. There is as much as 357% more coverage in the news if the perpetrator of the terrorism is Muslim, rather than any other religious belief or ideology (Kearns et al., 2019). Between 2010 and 2017 263 domestic terrorism incidents was reported, whereas 92 of these was committed by 'righties', whilst only 38 was Islamic terrorism (Koehler, 2019).

There is still hesitation to call right-wing extremist groups domestic terrorist groups despite that the number of right-wing terrorism acts was almost three times as high as Islamic

acts. Brendan R. McGuire, a former prosecutor, explains that this is because the government is much more comfortable and experienced with labeling foreign groups terrorists, then they are with domestic groups (Aaronson, 2019). This makes terrorism seem like only a threat from the outside and not from within. The lack of media coverage and prosecution of right-wing extremist violence makes it also easier for Trump to export his views on Islam and immigration. When the general public rather fear terrorist acts from outsiders instead of terrorism perpetrated by people from within their own borders, Trump and his administration can draw on the dichotomy us vs. them. This again can create support for Trump's Muslim ban and wall building.

Even though Trump is not openly supporting extreme right-wing populism, he is drawing on much of their ideological beliefs. By not acknowledging that many of the violent acts carried out by 'righties' is indeed terrorism, he (and his administration) are to some degree enabling right-wing terrorism to prosper. This creates a larger threat towards the American people than the possible threat of Islamic terrorism. With Trump's rhetoric and outspokenness about Muslims and Islam he is also rallying an already dangerous group and giving them some legitimization for the attacks that they do towards this identity group. Because by claiming that Islam hates the American people and trying to ban them from even entering the country, he is giving the US citizens the impression that Muslims are dangerous and should be feared.

However, his rhetoric and policy implementation are not enough to label his actions as state terrorism. Yes, he is (indirectly) threatening a group of people that are supposed to be protected, such as portraying Muslims and immigrants as threats to the American people, and thereby causing fear. When people are subjected to extreme fear, basic human instinct take over and result in a 'fight or flight' response. Even though Trump is not exactly imposing extreme fear, he is creating tension over time which could transform to fear. Because when people are confronted with the threat of Islamic terrorism, or the 'terrible actions of Mexican immigrants' on a regular basis some transform this fear into hate. This again can transform to the need to act, because they no longer want to be afraid and thereby resolving to remove or harm the threat. This is where some of the right-wing extremism acts have their root. The second and third key element does not resonate with Trump because he himself is not perpetrating the acts of violence. However, he is to some degree giving others the ability to carry out acts towards Muslims, amongst others, due to the lack of a complete and actively used definition of terrorism, where domestic right-wing extremism acts are included.

Conclusion

In this paper, the four key elements outlined by Blakely and Raphael have been continuously used to analyze if specific acts carried out by the United State of America could be labeled state terrorism. In the cases of the Iraq invasion and drone strikes, all elements were present. The reason why they have not been subjected to the term state terrorism is mostly due to the discourse on terrorism. It has consistently been stated throughout that whilst the term terrorism should be objected, it is definitely not. It is framed by world leaders to fit into different agendas thereby making it subjective, but it is also framed so that the label cannot be used towards them. The question of where counterterrorism changes towards state terrorism should be more debated because it is important to hold a country accountable for their actions.

The discourse has also led state terrorism to become subjugated knowledge which further enables states to act as they wish without the fear of repercussions. They can label their actions as a means to battle terrorism without actually having enough justification. There needs to be more room for an open debate about state terrorism without the fear of being labeled as 'them' in the us vs. them nexus. Without a more open and broad discussion about the threat of right-wing terrorism and state terrorism, these actors can continue to frame the discourse to their agenda and thus make the world a more dangerous place to live in.

References

- Aaronson, T. (2019). Violent Far-Right Extremists Are Rarely Prosecuted as Terrorists. *The Intercept*. Retrieved from <https://theintercept.com/2019/03/23/domestic-terrorism-fbi-prosecutions/>
- Ackerman, S., Burke, J., & Borger, J. (2017, February 01). Eight-year-old American girl 'killed in Yemen raid approved by Trump'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/international>
- Al-Awlaki, N. (2013). The drone that killed my grandson. *New York Times*, 17. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- Amnesty International UK. (2018). Shaker Aamer: 13 years in Guantánamo Bay, never charged with any crime. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/shaker-aamer-13-years-guantanamo-bay-torture-uk>
- Beall, J., Goodfellow, T., & Putzel, J. (2006). Introductory article: on the discourse of terrorism, security and development. *Journal of International Development: The Journal of the Development Studies Association*, 18(1), 51-67.
- Bhatia, A. (2009). The discourses of terrorism. *Journal of pragmatics*, 41(2), 279-289.
- Burnett, J., & Whyte, D. (2003). Embedded expertise and the new terrorism. *The Guardian*.S
- Butt, A. I. (2019, March 20). Why did Bush go to war in Iraq? *Aljazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/>
- Calhoun, L. (2018). Totalitarian tendencies in drone strikes by states. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 11(2), 357-375.
- Clarke, R. A. (2008). *Against all enemies: Inside America's war on terror*. Simon and Schuster.
- CNN. (2001). Transcript of President Bush's address - September 21, 2001. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>
- Costello, P. (1997). Historical background. Negotiating rights: the Guatemalan Peace Process. *Accord: an International Review of Peace Initiatives*, ([http://www. c-r.org/accord/acc_guat/Contents.htm](http://www.c-r.org/accord/acc_guat/Contents.htm)).
- Cox, R. W. (1981). Social forces, states and world orders: beyond international relations theory. *Millennium*, 10(2), 126-155.
- Denton-Borhaug, K. (2016). US War Culture and the Star Wars Juggernaut. *Theology and Science*, 14(4), 393-397, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2016.1231975>
- Dowd, A. W. (2013). Drone wars: risks and warnings. *Parameters*, 42(4), 7-16.

- Emerson, J. T. (1975). War Powers Resolution Tested: The President's Independent Defense Power. *Notre Dame Law.*, 51, 187.
- Frum, D. (2015). Bombing Syria won't make Paris safer. *The Atlantic.-Wash*, 20.
- Ganor, B. (2002). Defining terrorism: Is one man's terrorist another man's freedom fighter?. *Police Practice and Research*, 3(4), 287-304.
- George, A. (Ed.). (1991). *Western state terrorism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Glain, S. (2011). *State vs. defense: The battle to define America's empire*. Crown.
- Greenwald, G. (2017). Yemen: Obama killed 16-year-old boy, Trump killed his eight-year-old sister. *Green Left Weekly*, (1124), 17.
- Greven, T. (2016). The rise of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States. A *Comparative Perspective [La emergencia del populismo de derechas en Europa y Estados Unidos. Una perspectiva comparada]*. Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Washington DC Office.
- Hicks, M. H. R., Dardagan, H., Serdán, G. G., Bagnall, P. M., Sloboda, J. A., & Spagat, M. (2009). The weapons that kill civilians—deaths of children and noncombatants in Iraq, 2003–2008. *New England journal of medicine*, 360(16), 1585-1588.
- Jones, S. G. (2018). The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States. *CSIS, November*, 7.
- Kean, T. H., Hamilton, L. H., Ben-Veniste, R., Kerrey, B., Fielding, F. F., Lehman, J. F., ... & Zelikow, P. (2004). *The 9/11 commission report*. e-artnow sro.
- Kearns, E. M., Betus, A. E., & Lemieux, A. F. (2019). Why do some terrorist attacks receive more media attention than others?. *Justice Quarterly*, 1-24. DOI: [10.1080/07418825.2018.1524507](https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1524507)
- Krogstad, J., Passel, J., & Cohn, D. (2019). 5 facts about illegal immigration in the U.S. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/28/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>
- Lazar, A., & Lazar, M. M. (2004). The discourse of the new world order: 'Out-casting' the double face of threat. *Discourse & Society*, 15(2-3), 223-242.
- Mahmood, R., & Jetter, M. (2019). *Military Intervention via Drone Strikes* (No. 12318). Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA).
- Press, A. (2018, April 01). Ex-Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt dies aged 91. *The Guardian* Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/international>
- Purkiss, J., & Serle, J. (2017, January 17). Obama's covert drone war in numbers: Ten times more strikes than Bush. *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*. Retrieved from

<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush>

- Radman, H. (2019). Al-Qaeda's Strategic Retreat in Yemen. *Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*. Retrieved from <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/7306>
- RAND Corporation. (2019). How We Are Funded: Major Clients and Grantors of RAND Research.
- Record, J. (2010). *Wanting war: why the Bush administration invaded Iraq*. Potomac Books, Inc..
- Rehman, J. (2005). *Islamic state practices, international law and the threat from terrorism: A critique of the 'clash of civilizations' in the new world order* (Vol. 7). Hart Publishing. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/about/clients_grantors.html#rev
- Roberts, A. (2010). Lives and statistics: Are 90% of war victims civilians?. *Survival*, 52(3), 115-136.
- Savage, C., & Landler, M. (2011). White House defends continuing US role in Libya operation. *New York Times*, 15.
- Savell, S. (2019, January). This Map Shows Where in the World the U.S. Military Is Combatting Terrorism. *Smithsonian Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/map-shows-places-world-where-us-military-operates-180970997/>
- Scahill, J. (2013). *Dirty wars: The world is a battlefield*. Hachette UK.
- Scahill, J. (2017). *The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program*. Simon and Schuster.
- Schleifer, T. (2019). Donald Trump: 'I think Islam hates us'. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/09/politics/donald-trump-islam-hates-us/index.html>
- Scribner, T. (2017). You are not welcome here anymore: restoring support for refugee resettlement in the age of Trump. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 5(2), 263-284.
- Sieder, R., & Wilson, R. (1997). Negotiating rights: the Guatemalan peace process. *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, 2, 100.
- Strauss, M. J. (2016). Returning Guantanamo Bay to Cuban Control. *Annual Proceedings*, 26. The Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy. Retrieved from <https://www.ascecuba.org/>
- The Washington Post, (2015, June 16). Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>

- Thorpe, R. (2018). US Empire in the Age of Trump. *Class, Race and Corporate Power*, 6(1), 3.
- United Nations (n.d.). UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. *United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>
- US Air Force. (2009). United states air force unmanned aircraft systems flight plan 2009-2047. *Washington DC: Department of Defense*.
- Watson, A. (2018). An Investigation of the Violation of Human Rights in Yemen. *Honors Research Projects*. 811 Retrieved from https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/811/
- Wilkinson, P. (1992). The European response to terrorism: Restrospect and prospect. *Defence and Peace Economics*, 3(4), 289-304.
- Wills, S. (2013, May 14). Did Reagan Finance Genocide in Guatemala? *ABC News*. Retrieved from <https://abcnews.go.com/>



Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Noregs miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003
NO-1432 Ås
Norway