

2022

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REPORT

**States and
terrorism**

Could states be considered to be enabling or supporting terrorism?



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A majority of focus on terrorism addresses non-state actors. This report looks at the complex question of whether states can be considered to be enabling, supporting, or perpetrating terrorist acts. It uses case studies as examples of states to illustrate and explore the issue.

It discusses how the international community can respond to states who have connections with terrorist actors.



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States and terrorism

From the world's only remaining superpower to small and impoverished states...and from military dictatorships such as Pakistan to liberal democracies such as Australia and Britain, terrorism has been, and continues to be, employed by almost every kind of state. (Jackson et al., 2009)

According to Jackson (2008), states have pursued terrorism far more extensively over the past few decades than non-state actors have done.

Terrorism has featured in the foreign policies of powerful states from the colonial era onwards. The British Empire was responsible for terrorist violence across Kenya and many other colonies; France committed acts of state terrorism during its war with Algeria; the United States deployed terrorism in various wars in Indochina. States that have never resorted to terrorism are few.

The US currently designates Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Syria as 'state sponsors of terrorism' - yet many more states could be considered to belong in this category, such as Israel (Nasr, 2010). At the time of writing, Ukraine has asked for Russia to be added to this list (Hussain, 2022).



Public perceptions of terrorism are shaped by government agendas and policy concerns which prioritise threats to their own security over scrutiny of their own policies

However, despite the widespread prevalence of state terrorism, the main focus of research has been on non-state actors. Silke (2020) points out that public perceptions of terrorism are shaped by government agendas and policy concerns which prioritise threats to their own security over scrutiny of their own policies.

Mason and Krane (1989) observe that more recently, a coherent body of thought on state terrorism has begun to coalesce. Scholars are paying renewed attention to this area and making efforts to describe and understand this strand of violence. However, this remains a relatively niche topic within the field, in which state terrorism remains predominantly ignored or dismissed as isolated incidents. For Blakely (2010), this represents the co-optation of security studies into state interests. As Jackson (2008) observes:

When state terrorism is discussed, it is usually limited to descriptions of 'state-sponsored terrorism' by so-called 'rogue states.' Further, the subsequent silence on the direct use of terrorism by state actors within the Terrorism Studies literature underpins a mostly unspoken belief that Western liberal democratic states in particular never engage in terrorism as a matter of policy, but only occasionally in error or misjudgement.'

Conceptualising state terrorism

'State terrorism' describes violence perpetrated against individuals that the state has a duty to protect by actors working on behalf of, or in conjunction with, the state

Blakeley (2010) notes that conceptualising state terrorism is complicated by the complex nature of states themselves: as 'complex webs of connection between numerous entities' that may have differing objectives, and which may act independently. She proposes that the term 'state terrorism' describes violence perpetrated against individuals that the state has a duty to protect by actors working on behalf of, or in conjunction with, the state. This can also include a threat of violence where the state has created a climate of fear that would make such a threat credible.

Blakeley (2009) also establishes that state terrorism is purposive: 'a threat or act of violence by agents of the state that is intended to induce extreme fear in a target audience, so that they are forced to consider changing their behaviour in some way.' It is a 'coercive tool,' used to achieve a desired goal.

State terrorism can be considered rational and goal-oriented, since it can be advantageous for the elites who put it in motion

The purpose of terrorism is not merely wanton destruction: it occurs in order to terrorise a population. For instance, if the assassination of a political figure was known to would impact upon other people who shared the victim's political positions, they would become less likely to express those views publicly. Witnesses are terrorised by the killers' impunity and the realisation that they are vulnerable themselves. As the Chinese proverb states: 'Kill one, frighten ten thousand.'

States may deploy terrorism for a variety of goals, both conservative and revolutionary. These include instantiating control over rebellious members of the public, enforcing colonial rule, military dictatorship, or upholding post-revolutionary regimes, gaining psychological advantages over their opponents, establishing control over material assets, population management, ethnic cleansing, and the intimidation of foreign opponents, amongst many others. State terrorism can be considered rational and goal-oriented, since it can be advantageous for the elites who put it in motion, at least in the short-medium timeframe.

As Jackson (2010) argues:

[S]tate terrorism is in part a reflexive strategy rooted in the accepted doctrines and practices of sovereignty, particularly the notion that the state should have a monopoly on the means of violence and the legitimate right to employ both punitive and defensive violence.

Stohl (1988) argues that state terror needs to be distinguished from oppression and repression – although naturally all three phenomena are likely to co-occur. Oppression involves the denial of social and economic privileges to whole sectors of the population, whether or not they oppose the state. Repression involves coercion against real or potential opponents but does not necessarily imply terrorism. If repression occurs under a complete veil of secrecy, then it lacks the capacity to terrorise a target audience; however, where the knowledge of state activities can be used to impact the behaviours of citizens then there is a potential for it to be considered state terrorism.

State power and violence

Most funding and attention in the counter-terrorism sphere goes towards threats against the state. There is also a conceptual issue around the definition of state terrorism which makes the issue difficult to grasp for the public (Duvall & Stohl, 1988). Since states normally bear, in Weber's terms, 'the legitimate monopoly of political violence' there is an intimate connection between states and the capacity for violence from the start.

There is an intimate connection between states and the capacity for violence

As such, the state's legitimated use of coercion in law enforcement and war, can include illegitimate violence, such as violations of the principles of human rights. Additionally, non-state actors may be considered to be able to use legitimate violence in overthrowing repressive and genocidal states when other methods have failed and other states have refused to intervene.

Some members of the public may consider state terrorism a necessary evil

States, in fact, frequently violate principles of the Geneva Convention and other international laws, in both peace and wartime. Sometimes these acts are described as temporary measures, introduced due to an emergency, but may continue long past the point of justification. The recognition of state terrorism is inhibited by an 'emotional problem' in Duval and Stohl's (1988) description – the fact that loyal citizens are resistant to acknowledge that the state in which they live, and which they identify with positive values, could be in violation of the principles of human rights or be complicit in terrorism. Similarly, nationalist loyalties may lead some members of the public to consider state terrorism as a necessary evil rather than a crime against humanity. The resort to aggressive militarised responses is not merely strategic in terms of deterring enemy forces but can be a means of strengthening patriotism and creating a macho image of the state in order to address anxieties and resentment brewing within the population.

The word terrorism itself is drawn from violence perpetrated by the state: the mass executions known as the 'Reign of Terror'

Although states – unlike non-state groups – hold claims towards legitimate use of violence in war, for instance for in policing, self-defence and self-protection purposes, this right is circumscribed by various human rights acts and international laws. No state has the right to commit genocide, ethnic cleansing, or war crimes, for instance. Human rights treaties provide a base level of conduct for states.

Yet states have very often violated the principles of human rights and have committed acts of violence that amount to terrorism, up to and including genocide. In fact, the word terrorism itself is drawn from violence perpetrated by the state: the mass executions known as the 'Reign of Terror' led by Maximilien Robespierre in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

Some of the worst atrocities in human history can be considered state terrorism, such as the atrocities of Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia, and Mao's China. Rummel (1994) estimates that between 170 and 200 million people have been killed in 'exemplary violence' during the 20th century.

Another reason why state-perpetrated terrorism is often overlooked is the framing of terrorism as 'weapons of the weak'; i.e., as violence used by underdog actors unable to command conventional military power or coercive state policies to achieve their political aims.

Yet military power can be used to terrorise, for instance through bombing civilian populations rather than military targets. This ‘shock and awe’ tactic has been used in Iraq; in Israel’s attack on South Lebanon in 2006; in NATO’s bombing in Kosovo in 1999 - amongst many others.

These are all violent attacks with the goal of achieving political change through targeting non-combatants, and as such, they may be considered as terrorism. Many states deploy tactics such as extensive state torture, extra-judicial killings, disappearances, collective punishments and intimidation – as regularly recorded by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Such state-sanctioned terror acts vastly outnumber crimes perpetrated by militant non-state groups, even at a very conservative estimate.

Through inaction, the state effectively condones groups that support its interests

States and state agents

On a case-by-case basis, it may be difficult to distinguish between the acts of individual officers or members of the armed forces acting in a deviant way on their own initiative, and the state mobilising its coercive power. The key definitional indicator in this case must be how the state responds to violence perpetrated by those working in its name. Through inaction, the state effectively condones groups that support its interests – with the potential that acts which should be considered deviant or criminal become accepted, and even normalised due to the state's failure to respond appropriately.

A state's flagrant refusal to intervene in acts of violence – for instance the day-light abductions of regime opponents in Argentina and Chile – itself contributes to the climate of fear, impacting both the state's rivals, and dissidents within its own numbers. States can be considered complicit if they fail to act to prevent violence by their agents and employees.

During the cold war in particular, states frequently accused each other of terrorism or of collaboration with terrorist actors (Bale, 2018). Since the 1990s, however, the focus of terrorism by scholars, policymakers and journalists shifted towards an almost complete focus upon terrorism perpetrated by non-state actors.

Bale (2018) identifies that many of these actors have particular political orientations which predispose them to focus on non-state terrorism; moreover, as Blakeley (2009) notes, much counter-terrorism research is funded by states, which means that there is potential for them to set the agenda of scholarship according to their own perspectives, which are shaped by their sense of exterior threat. In the post-9/11 era particularly, academic analysis has focussed almost exclusively on sub-state activities, and particularly on Islamist paramilitaries (Jackson, 2009).

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States frequently make opportunistic alliances in order to pursue realpolitik goals (Silke, 2020), including alliances with terrorists. Many states also indirectly support political violence through providing resources and selling arms to extremist groups (Zuesse, 2018). Bale (2009) observes that while it is overly simplistic to suggest that states set out to form extremist groups as proxies to serve their own aims, they do collaborate opportunistically, such as the funding of Hezbollah by the Syrian and Iranian governments.

States may collaborate with violent groups that do not share their ideologies

States may collaborate with violent groups that do not share their ideologies. For instance, in 2012, the Ugandan army claimed that Joseph Kony's infamous Lord's Resistance Army was being funded by Sudan (BBC, 2012). If this were true, it would be notable that Sudan was an Islamic state enforcing sharia law up until 2020 - whereas Kony's organisation was an erratic personality cult which combined Christianity and animism. Despite the huge ideological differences, Sudan still found the LRA's manic violence useful to destabilise rival states.

Similarly, during the 1980s, Libya supplied the Irish Republican Army with arms to sabotage Britain, for instance. Stohl (1988) observes that the United States trained, equipped, and provided tactical support to groups attempting to overthrow the governments of Guatemala, Indonesia, Iran, and Cuba in the 50s and 60s. Arming and training terrorist groups to serve national interests is not limited to the global North. For instance, Murphy and Tamana (2010) state that ‘many Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officers have had – and still have – sympathy with, and give support to, religious extremists.’ Bale (2009) states that there is no doubt that ISI has played a role in ‘arming, training, supplying and even providing operational direction to numerous radical anti-Western groups’ – the most notable being the Taliban.

States may be particularly able to spread dehumanising language and imagery through using official media channels and their own authority, such as Vladimir Putin’s portrayal of Ukraine’s leadership as Nazis and drug addicts (Illing, 2022).

Counterterrorism can also be a powerful means to justify actions which amount to state-sanctioned terror. Nasr (2010) notes that in Israel, the term ‘collateral damage’ describes the supposedly unintended injuries occasioned during a targeted military action. She points out that Israel could reasonably predict collateral damage from its actions but fails to take all necessary steps to prevent ‘wanton injury.’ She draws attention to attacks on Palestinian citizens from Israel Defence Forces (IDF) soldiers, particularly at checkpoints, noting that even when brutal acts of violence committed by members of the IDF are challenged, the IDF ‘seem unwilling to accept either the scope or prevalence of the problem.’ Hence Israel is able to exert pressure to delimit collateral damage but may choose not to do so when it serves the state’s political interests.

Another means by which a state can be implicated in terrorism is through neglect of their responsibilities to ensure the security of the citizens.

Byman (2005) argues that:

At times, the greatest contribution a state can make to a terrorist’s cause is by not policing a border, turning a blind eye to fundraising, or even tolerating terrorist efforts to build their organizations, conduct operations, and survive.

This can particularly be the case if the state shares goals with non-state terrorists, or if there are overlaps between the state and violent groups which inhibit them from taking action against terrorist groups. Powerful states in particular are able to compensate for the external costs of the terrorism they enact or enable. As such, state terrorism remains one of the single greatest threats to human well-being and societal security today.

Case studies

This section will draw out three case studies to explore the impacts of state-sponsored extremism on intergroup relations, political power, and human rights principles.

Sudan

Leveraging post-colonial cleavages

The Sudanese state has been using violence against its own people since 2003, if not earlier. From 2003 onwards, civilians have been targeted with violence, including murder, rape and severe injuries; their livelihoods were sabotaged through the slaughter of livestock and the destruction of crops and dwellings.

Sudan's destruction of the Darfur region, which lies to the west of the country, is estimated to have killed 300,000 people

Despite this, the international community were slow to react and struggled to categorise the mass violence that occurred. In 1994, the United States declared it a genocide, but this position was not agreed upon by the entire international community.

Sudan's destruction of the Darfur region, which lies to the west of the country, is estimated to have killed 300,000 people, either through direct violence, or through starvation, disease, and malnutrition due to the destruction wreaked by national military and state-sponsored militias.

Of Darfur's six million population, four million were 'seriously affected' by the conflict and the resultant humanitarian disaster. Some 2.7 million fled the country. Ostensibly positioned as a response to a local armed rebellion, the destruction of Darfur was intended to reduce recruitment to rebel groups opposing the Sudanese state. Darfur was populated by a non-Arab minority, and after the 1989 military coup in which Omar al-Bashir took power, the regime was rooted in extremist Islamism and concomitant tendencies towards Arab supremacy. Arab/Muslim identity clashed with Darfurians of African origin. Moreover, post-colonial redistributions of land left some nomadic tribes with limited access to land and water.

Omar al-Bashir's regime was rooted in extremist Islamism and concomitant tendencies towards Arab supremacy

The Sudanese state deployed, armed, and financed nomadic Arab militias from across west Sudan, specifically from the areas which were most likely to harbour resistance movements. Known as the Janjaweed (i.e., devil's horsemen (Flint, 2009)), these fighters had their own interests in expelling populations from land they wanted to seize. The atrocities committed by the Janjaweed became notorious and were vitiated by dehumanising attitudes towards their victims. Brosché & Rothbart provide an example of their rhetoric.

The blood of the Blacks runs like water, we take their goods, and we chase them from our area and our cattle will be in their land. The power of al-Bashir belongs to the Arabs and we will kill you until the end, you Blacks, we have killed your God... You are baboons, you are Black. (in Brosché & Rothbart, 2013)

China and Russia opposed sanctions that could have challenged their own trade interests in the region's natural resources. Mickler notes that Sudan's trade interests provided political support for Sudanese collaboration with the Janjaweed and enabled the country to evade political censure. Mickler (2010) writes:

...China has been Sudan's largest foreign investor, buying increasing quantities of oil from an emerging local petroleum industry which China has itself largely developed. Sudan, awash with petrodollars, has then purchased Chinese- and Russian-made military equipment to use against dissenting Sudanese in the outlying regions of the country.

riminal Court and warrants for his arrest were issued but ignored by the state.

In 2010, the Hague established that Sudan's actions against Darfur constituted a genocide – the first of the 21st century. Al-Bashir was deposed in 2019 after a year of protests against his rule. At the time of writing, he is on trial for his crimes against humanity.

India

Populism and communalolence in Gujerat

In 2002, between February and June, Hindu rioters embarked on what Murphy (2010) describes as a 'well-planned, coordinated campaign of state terrorism' in the Indian state of Gujerat (Narula, Murphy, 2010).

Gujarat is one of India's most prosperous states, benefiting from modernisation and economic liberalism.

Narendra Modi was described as initiating, encouraging, and condoning the violence

This was attributed to the Hindutva movement, an ultra-nationalist, Hindu supremacist ideology. Over two thousand Muslims were massacred in a campaign of rape and mutilation of Muslim women and girls. Much of this rioting was conducted under the ruling party of the Gujerati state, the Bharitya Janata Party (BJP), and its Chief Minister Narendra Modi. Modi – who would become Prime Minister of India in 2014 – was described as initiating, encouraging, and condoning the violence (Murphy, 2010).

The trigger for the rioting was a train fire. A train packed with Hindus returning from a pilgrimage, who were berating Muslims selling tea and snacks to the passengers. This spiralled into inter-group violence. At a stop further down the line, a Muslim mob attacked the train. In the chaos, a fire broke out in two carriages. Fifty-eight passengers were killed. Modi immediately claimed that the fire had been deliberately started by Muslims working in collaboration with Pakistani security forces (Sud, 2008).

Radical Hindus positioned themselves as victims of Muslim communal power, despite the fact that they represent 79% of the population

From the next day, Hindu mobs, with the support of state agencies and politicians, started a rampage against the Muslim population. Radical Hindus positioned themselves as victims of Muslim communal power, despite the fact that they represent 79% of the population while Muslims represent a mere 15%.

Besides the thousands of deaths, historic Islamic buildings were destroyed. The tomb of a poet respected by Muslims and Hindus alike was destroyed, and a small Hindu temple erected in its place. This act chimed with the symbolic importance of Hindu sites of worship to the Hindutva movement.

There were accounts of Hindus committing heinous crimes against the Muslim population with near impunity; a man who cut open a pregnant woman's belly, extracted the foetus and then immolated the mother and child together was released on bail after eight months (Murphy, 2010). Muslim buildings were sacked and razed; mobs turned out to have been issued with computer printouts of the homes and businesses of Muslims obtained from official sources (Smita, 2002). Two senior cabinet ministers even met with members of Hindu nationalist organisations to coordinate the attacks (Sud, 2008).

Murphy (2010) argues that the BJP leveraged violence against Gujarat's Muslims in order to win support amongst the lower castes, Dalits and Adivasi tribespeople. These disadvantaged groups had previously tended to support secular governance, with a commitment to social justice and reducing inequality. This threatened the dominance of Gujarat by high-caste Hindus – a threat that became particularly salient with the introduction of reserved jobs for Dalits and other members of the lower castes.



Demonising Muslims disrupted class-based solidarities between the less prosperous members of Gujarati society and created new social alliances based on Islamophobia

In the riots, Dalits were at the forefront of the attacks on Muslims, drawn into what Murphy (2010) described as ‘a new inclusive form of Hinduism’ – which shattered class-based solidarity between the lower castes and Muslims, and reconfigured this into faith-based identities. Hindutva activists had carried out social and development work in deprived areas to promote their ideology. Some lower caste and Dalits were included at the lower levels of the organisation to dispel the impression that the movement was centred upon the interests of the Brahmin caste. Hence, demonising Muslims disrupted class-based solidarities between the less prosperous members of Gujarati society and created new social alliances based on Islamophobia.

The Gujarat riots set a pattern for the India that Modi would go on to lead, where communal violence outbreaks receive no response from the government, and in some cases are actively inflamed by the state. After a small riot in Delhi, for instance, a local BJP member destroyed Muslim properties in supposed violations of building codes (The Economist, 2022). India, formerly notable in Asia for successfully forging a nation from a diverse collection of religions, ethnicities, and languages is now establishing religious identity as a measure of citizenship.

This trend dates back to 1992, when Hindu extremists demolished a historic mosque, erecting a temple in its place. The following wave of Islamist terror from 2000 only deepened the crisis. Portraying Muslims as an existential threat managed to consolidate Hindus into a reliable voting bloc, for which the Gujarat riots were arguably the template.

Ten years after the Gujarat riots that the state's leveraging of communal identities into political power became clear

The rise of Hindutva in India and the intense pressure on the Muslim population may have started in symbolic violence in 1992, but it was ten years after the Gujarat riots that the state's leveraging of communal identities into political power became clear – along with the parlous situation of India's vulnerable religious minorities exacerbated.

USA

Neoliberalism and counterterrorism in the 'war on terror'

After 9/11, the USA led other countries in the global North in the resurgence of the use of state terrorism

From the end of the Cold War, the United States' security was framed in connection with economic strength. After 9/11, the USA led other countries in the global North in the resurgence of the use of state terrorism as well as the entrenchment of neoliberal policies via its own aid programmes and its relationship with international finance. This consolidated a trend which had already been a strong part of the US' foreign policy.

Neoliberalism rests upon the principle that the market can, and should, solve all economic problems. America is home to the world's wealthiest citizens (Chang, 2022); hence, American foreign policy is likely to reflect the interests of this class, aiming towards solidifying America's monetary advantage and the dominance of the dollar. As George W Bush said in 2002:

We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.

The US was not only involved in deposing a dictator, but also in establishing a new social order

As such, America's ambitions in their participation in the Iraq War went far beyond the goal of deposing Saddam Hussein and were more focused on putting a neoliberal social order in place (Zabci, 2013). Yet this only served to further destabilise a fragile state.

Blakeley (2009) writes:

Neoliberalism involves dismantling the apparatus of mercantilist production operated at state level, the opening of previously close economies to the forces of economic competition, macroeconomic discipline, globalised rather than national economics, and foreign direct investment.



Terrorising Iraqi citizens
was not an unexpected
outcome of America's
bombing

This involved a drastic and disruptive attempt to reconstruct post-Saddam Iraq along these lines. The US was not only involved in deposing a dictator, but also in establishing a new social order. This increased dissent and dissatisfaction in a population, which was already divided. Many were suspicious of the US intervention, dragging the US into a longer counter-insurgency campaign.

Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, headed a working group that recommended the use of torture in Guantanamo Bay, on the basis that 'valuable intelligence' could be gathered by these means (Rumsfeld, 2003); without any discussion of the fact that such methods are unreliable at best. Numerous European states were complicit in America's policy of extraordinary rendition (Grey, 2006). The extrajudicial treatment of these prisoners amounted to torture (Winkler, 2008).

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (in Westra, 2014) declared that 'extraordinary rendition saves lives' - despite the lack of evidence for the efficacy of torture. The Office of Legal Counsel provided opinions that legitimised extreme forms of physical and psychological torture (Westra, 2014).

US fighter planes carried out 2500 sorties a day over Iraq, and over 1000 bombing missions, terrorising Iraqi citizens. This was not an unexpected outcome. Some of the air planners predicted that destroying Iraq's power grid would lead to regime change (Keaney & Cohen). Baghdad and Basra's power supplies were both crippled – which was not an unintended effect, and therefore constitutes deliberate terrorism against the populace (Blakeley, 2010).

Westra (2014) notes that many of the techniques used in Iraq were developed in the infamous 'School of the Americas' (Gill, 2004). Graduates of this military training institute have been implicated in serious human rights abuses, and the school's manuals advocate for torture, execution, and blackmail (Latin America Working Group, 1997).



Implications

A key element of state terrorism is that it involves acts that are illegal under international law, as Cassese (2001) notes:

...transnational state-sponsored or state-condoned terrorism amounts to an international crime and is already contemplated and prohibited by international customary law as a distinct category of such crimes. (Cassese, 2001)

States' violations of human rights are unacceptable. As the ICRC argues: 'some rights are never derogable. Among them are the right to life, freedom from torture, or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, prohibition of slavery and servitude and prohibition of retroactive criminal laws.' (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2003). These rights are all threatened by state terrorism. Westra (2014) suggests that state terrorism might best be considered as a crime against humanity.

Yet states, particularly powerful ones, may be difficult to bring to international justice and effectively operate with impunity (Andersson, 2008).

Powerful states may
effectively operate with
impunity

The international community can be slow to react and is divided by internal dissent, where some states may be reluctant to move against those states with which they share ideological perspectives and cultural identities.

External pressure from civil society and the media are essential to raising issues, documenting crimes and calling for states to be held accountable

Here, external pressure from civil society and the media are essential to raising issues, documenting crimes and calling for states to be held accountable. Within academia and policy circles, it is also important that the issue of state terrorism is studied to grasp its heterogeneous nature more fully, and to fill in the huge gaps in knowledge. This study needs to cover state terrorism at all levels, looking at the causes, the motivations, and the consequences of state terrorism – as well as the best methods for harm reduction and accountability for those states involved in crimes.

It is also essential to deal with the historical record of crimes which have not yet been studied, from targeted assassinations to the equipping of death squads. This needs to be done not only for the sake of gathering data, into this understudied area of research but also in the interest of achieving justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators.



Next, the complex web of interactions between the state and violent groups needs to be mapped, and the extent of involvement between individuals and groups who are acting in their capacity as representatives of the state needs to be measured. This includes military, security and policing personnel, intelligence services and other state employees.

The state can also work with third party groups, such as sub-contracted private security firms and private military companies – as well as death squads, assassins, paramilitary organisations, terrorist organisations and criminal gangs. These networks need to be studied, along with their impacts on citizens, as part of the understanding of terrorism.

A mechanism and resource to record this data would help develop understandings of the topic and provide a normative framework which would highlight terrorism perpetrated by states and perhaps inhibit human rights violations.

State terrorism must be documented. States are in better positioned than extremist groups to erase evidence of their violence due to control of the media and government. For instance, the CIA admitted in 2009 that they had been responsible for the destruction of interview tapes that likely held evidence of torture. Without accurate record-keeping, there is no accountability for states.

This means that there must be efforts to ensure the historical record is kept in ways that will not be subject to interference, alteration, or erasure. It is important to establish that terrorist acts committed with the justification of counterterrorism are should not be excluded from consideration.

Lastly, it must be remembered that besides perpetrating or sanctioning terrorism, states might also be indirectly culpable in the development of extremism due to their own priorities. One of the drivers of extremism has been increasing divisions between the trans-national elite class and billions of citizens of the world who are comparatively marginalised. Such socio-economic inequalities are not conducive to harmonious coexistence and can generate resentment – which may be channelled into violence, for instance along communal lines. This is not, in itself, terrorism, but the continuation and increase of inequalities between communities, and the failure to provide vulnerable people with social support creates the conditions in which extremist ideologies fester.

Inequalities between communities, and the failure to provide vulnerable people with social support creates the conditions in which extremist ideologies fester

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