

AN ANALYSIS OF THE IDEAS OF ‘TERRORIST’ AND ‘FREEDOM FIGHTER’ IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SECURITY PRACTICE

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Abstract

In the context of contemporary international relations, the interpretation of the concepts “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” acquires particular political, historical, and scientific significance, as variations in their interpretation directly influence the shaping of global security and the regulation of international legal frameworks. The historico-political evolution and legal boundaries of these concepts are formed under the influence of geopolitical interests, ideological frameworks, and the practice of international relations, which frequently leads to dual assessments of the same political actors. In this regard, this article explores the theoretical and methodological foundations of the essence of the concepts “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” in modern political science and international security practice. It identifies the reasons for their conceptual convergence or opposition in the context of contemporary conflicts, addresses the issue of violence against civilians as a key criterion for differentiating these categories, and substantiates the need for scientifically precise terminological clarity to enhance the effectiveness of international counter-terrorism policy.

Keywords: Terrorism, Freedom Fighter, International Security, Political Violence, Asymmetric Conflict, Non-state Actors, Political Legitimacy, Counter-terrorism Policy.

Introduction

Amidst the complexities of international relations, the concepts of terrorist and freedom fighter are closely linked to changes in political regimes, forms of state power, the nature of armed conflicts, and the structure of global politics. Throughout different stages of historical development, these categories have been imbued with varying political and legal content, reflecting the dominant ideological paradigms of the era, the level of institutional state development, and the evolution of international legal norms. In the course of historical civilisation, concepts associated with anti-colonial and national liberation movements have, under the conditions of globalisation and asymmetric conflicts, been transformed and have acquired increasingly complex and contradictory interpretations.

Political practice demonstrates that across different historical periods, depending on the balance of power, the international conjuncture, and the

strategic interests of leading global actors, the same forms of violent political action have been assessed in divergent ways. For instance, depending on the international environment, the same actor may be viewed as a terrorist in certain politico-legal contexts and as a freedom fighter in others. Such assessments create a normative dualism that exacerbates legal uncertainty and hinders the development of unified international approaches to countering terrorism and resolving conflicts. Thus, a comparison of national and international interpretations of these concepts reveals not only terminological discrepancies but also deep-seated differences in the political, ideological, and value-based foundations of these evaluations. Indeed, the political, economic, and social conditions under which terrorist and liberation movements emerge exert a significant influence on the mechanisms of their legitimisation or delegitimisation on the international stage. Consequently, amidst the transformation of the international security system and the proliferation of threats, political actors become multidimensional, fluid, and context-dependent, taking on a dynamic character. A special role in this process is played by the policies of global and regional power centres, as well as the experience of states oriented toward the principles of tolerance, multiculturalism, and social harmony. The practice of countries such as Azerbaijan demonstrates that stable models of intercultural interaction and institutionalised dialogue are capable of mitigating radicalisation risks and fostering a more stable security environment. Conversely, examples from other regions suggest that ignoring historical, socio-political, and cultural factors sometimes leads to the intensification of extremist manifestations and the reproduction of conflict potential.

In this regard, this article seeks to substantiate the theoretical, methodological, and political essence of the concepts of terrorist and freedom fighter by examining their historical formation and the discrepancies in their political interpretation, while providing a scholarly systematisation of these terms within the context of contemporary political science and international security practice.

Literature Review

The problem of the relationship between the concepts of “terrorist” and freedom fighter holds a prominent place in contemporary political, historical, philosophical, legal, and interdisciplinary literature; however, there are substantial divergences in researchers’ opinions regarding their interpretation. It should be noted that a significant body of scholarly work is dedicated to identifying the criteria by which political actors are classified as either terrorists or legitimate participants in liberation struggles, as well as analysing the causes of the normative ambiguity surrounding such assessments in international relations. One of the most renowned researchers in this field is Boaz Ganor, who emphasises that the deliberate application of violence against civilians must serve as the key criterion for distinguishing terrorism

from other forms of political violence.¹ In contrast to approaches that justify violence by referencing political goals, Ganor insists on a normative-universal understanding of terrorism that excludes ideological and geopolitical justifications. In our view, his position is characterised by strict legal certainty and is oriented toward the establishment of unified international standards. A different perspective is held by Immanuel Wallerstein, who examines terrorist activity through the lens of systems analysis and global inequality.² He argues that many movements labelled as terrorist emerge under conditions of structural oppression and an unequal standing within the world-system, which allows them to be viewed as forms of resistance against dominant centres of power. From our perspective, unlike Ganor, Wallerstein focuses less on the methods of violence and more on the historical and social drivers of its emergence, rendering his approach more contextual but less normatively rigorous.

A relatively similar, though more politico-psychological position, was propounded by Samuel Smith, who addressed the role of stereotypes and political discourse in shaping the image of the terrorist.³ He argues that the classification of actors as terrorists often reflects not an objective assessment of their actions, but rather the dominant ideological narratives reproduced by the mass media and state institutions. However, unlike Wallerstein, Smith places less emphasis on structural factors, focusing instead on the mechanisms of the social construction of threat. A more original perspective is offered by the Turkish researcher Nurullah Aydın, who provides a politico-legal analysis of the problem. He contends that the lack of a universal definition of terrorism is primarily driven by the political selectivity of states.⁴ He maintains that the same actors may be recognised as either terrorists or freedom fighters depending on the state of international relations and strategic interests. Thus, in contrast to Ganor, Aydın does not propose a rigid normative criterion, but rather demonstrates how political expediency supplants legal logic.

In the works of Sam Vaknin, special emphasis is placed on the psychological dimension of terrorism; he argues that terrorist groups operate as closed social systems characterised by a high degree of ideological mobilisation and de-individuation.⁵ His approach complements political science interpretations by suggesting that terrorist motives are formed not only through political

¹ Boaz Ganor, "Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?" *Police Practice and Research* 3(4), 2002: 289.

² Immanuel Wallerstein, "Terrorism and the World-System," *The Modern World-System*, New York: Academic Press, 2014: 134.

³ Steve Smith, "Terrorism, Identity and Political Stereotypes," *Journal of Political Psychology*, London: Routledge, 1994: 67.

⁴ Nihat Aydın, "Terrorism, Political Crime and International Law," *Security Studies Quarterly*, Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık, 2006: 112.

⁵ Sam Vaknin, "The Psychology of Terrorism," *Malignant Self-Love*, Prague: Narcissus Publications, 2004: 201.

ideologies but also within the dynamics of group psychology. Unlike Aydın, who focuses on international legal aspects, Vaknin highlights the internal mechanisms of radicalisation. The perspective of Alexander Lee is equally distinctive; he investigates network structures, social ties, and recruitment mechanisms within terrorist organisations, thereby analysing the social nature of terrorism.⁶ He contends that terrorists are politically informed and socially engaged actors rather than marginal figures, a finding that significantly differentiates his stance from biologically deterministic and culturally stigmatising interpretations of terrorism.

Thus, a comparative analysis of existing scholarly approaches demonstrates that the discrepancies in interpreting the concepts of “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” are driven not only by the methodological orientations of researchers but also by differences across politico-structural, discursive, psychological, and normative-legal levels of inquiry. Consequently, these ideas illustrate the impossibility of a one-sided explanation of terrorism and confirm the necessity of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and comparative approach. Such an approach allows for the identification of both the objective criteria of political violence and the contextual factors of its legitimisation in international practice.

Research Methodologies

Within the framework of this article, the concepts of “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” are analysed through the prism of understanding them as complex, multi-layered categories formed at the intersection of political, legal, social, and ideological processes. Their substantive content and functional boundaries are viewed not as isolated from one another, but as a product of the interaction between various scholarly approaches; this allows for an examination of how these concepts are interpreted and redefined in contemporary political science and international security practice. Particular attention is paid to the meanings assigned to these categories by states and international organisations based on their own political interests, normative frameworks, and strategic priorities.

It should be noted that this study relies on the analysis of specific historical and contemporary political events, in which the relativity and contextual dependency of the concepts under consideration are clearly manifested. Empirical examples are utilised not merely as illustrations but as analytical material that allows for the identification of consistent patterns in the assessment of political actors and forms of violence. Particular emphasis is placed on the motivations of actors, the dynamics of radicalisation, and the socio-psychological and political conditions under which terrorist and liberation movements emerge. The analysis of these concepts is structured according to the historical sequence of their transformation, regional

⁶ Alexander Lee, “Who Becomes a Terrorist? Poverty, Education, and the Origins of Political Violence,” *World Politics* 63, 2011: 89.

specificities, and shifting security dynamics in a globalised world. A comparative analysis of various national and international approaches reveals both convergences and divergences in normative and political interpretations, demonstrating how the same actors can acquire opposing statuses depending on institutional and geopolitical processes. Such a comparative analysis makes it possible to move beyond a purely historico-legal framework and examine the problem within a broader political science dimension.

Thus, the political essence of this study is directed toward forming a comprehensive and systemic understanding of the phenomenon, in which theoretical conclusions are correlated with the practice of international security. The analysis of the semantic boundaries and practical application of the concepts of terrorist and freedom fighter highlights the necessity for scholarly classification and conceptual consistency. This allows the findings to be viewed not merely as theoretical generalisations, but as a foundation for more balanced political decisions in the sphere of international cooperation and counter-terrorism.

Discussion and Results

In contemporary international relations, the observed discrepancies in the interpretation of the concepts of terrorist and freedom fighter constitute one of the most acute normative and practical challenges in global security politics. Specifically, the same non-state actor may simultaneously be viewed by different states and international organisations as either a terrorist threat or a legitimate subject of resistance. Such legal ambiguity undermines the political cohesion of the international system, reduces the effectiveness of anti-terrorism mechanisms, and facilitates the escalation of violence. From a political perspective, this problem is directed toward identifying the essence of a deeper conflict between the normative universalism of international law and the contextual political assessment of violence. Research conducted in the field of political violence theory indicates that terrorism cannot be reduced to a purely legal phenomenon, as it represents complex socio-political processes encompassing ideological, symbolic, and communicative dimensions.⁷ Consequently, based on this approach, one can conclude that the author views terrorism not only as a form of criminal violence but also as a strategy of political communication aimed at transforming perceptions of power, fear, and legitimacy within society.

The results of interdisciplinary research confirm that individual terrorist behaviour is formed through the process of societal radicalisation and the advancement of technological capabilities; meanwhile, terrorist organisations function as complex collective actors structured by ideology, disciplinary codes, and symbolic narratives. From this perspective, the concept of a freedom fighter is also not neutral; it is shaped by the influence of historical

⁷ Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13(4), 1981: 379.

narratives, colonial experiences, asymmetric conflicts, and perceptions regarding the justice of resistance.

Historico-political analysis demonstrates that throughout the 20th century, the status of armed movements was repeatedly transformed depending on geopolitical processes. Actors initially classified as terrorists were, as a result of reassessment, recognised as subjects of national liberation struggles. This attests to the nature of the political legitimisation of violence and confirms the thesis that the distinction between a “terrorist” and a “freedom fighter” is often determined not so much by legal criteria as by the balance of power and interests.⁸ The significance of this proposition lies in identifying the fundamental difference between power and violence: violence may temporarily substitute for power, but it is incapable of sustainably legitimising it, which is critically important for assessing political actors in the long-term perspective.

In the context of the multi-vector activities of political actors and the increasing complexity of the global security environment, such discrepancies give rise to normative dualisms and legal uncertainty. When different states classify the same actor in divergent ways, it leads to the selective application of international law, the weakening of collective security mechanisms, and an increased risk of radicalisation. This is particularly dangerous during the development of asymmetric conflicts, where the boundaries between essential and non-essential distinctions become blurred.

From a methodological standpoint, the problem necessitates a revision of the fundamental categories of political science and international relations theory. Concepts such as “political violence,” “legitimate resistance,” and “non-state actor” require conceptual unification based on clear epistemological criteria. As Carl Schmitt emphasised, “the political” is inherently linked to the “friend-enemy” distinction; however, the absolutisation of this distinction entails radicalisation and the destruction of the legal order.⁹ This demonstrates the danger of transforming political assessment into an exclusive category that justifies violence outside of legal frameworks.

In this instance, the systemic clarification of the necessary boundaries between the concepts of “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” acquires strategic significance for the stability of the global security architecture. Terminological precision fulfils several key functions: it enhances the objectivity of legal assessments by reducing political arbitrariness; it bolsters the effectiveness of counter-terrorism policy through the standardisation of international cooperation; it facilitates more accurate security risk forecasting; it strengthens

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970: 52.

⁹ Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1932: 26.

mechanisms for the protection of civilian populations; and it limits the political manipulation of humanitarian norms.

Ultimately, the conceptual unification of these terms represents not merely a terminological task but a fundamental condition for the stability of the international security system. A comprehensive definition of “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” viewed through the prism of international law, political philosophy, and security studies is critically necessary for the development of a consistent, just, and effective global counter-terrorism policy within the context of contemporary international reality.

When addressing the question of who constitutes a “terrorist,” it is necessary to provide an answer from the perspective of pluralism; in various disciplinary traditions and politico-legal regimes, terrorism is described not as a single “object,” but as a multi-level phenomenon where law, politics, ideology, morality, and technology intersect. Consequently, the “terrorist” often emerges not merely as a legal subject, but as a subject in the struggle for legitimacy, a struggle in which some are recognised as legitimate political actors, while others are excluded as an “enemy of humanity”.

From the perspective of political science, terrorism is understood as a form of political violence organised in such a way as to affect not only the immediate victim but also society, the state, and international structures. Consequently, terrorism is often interpreted as “communicative violence,” which transmits a political message through fear, symbolic destruction, and demonstrativeness. This approach is particularly productive for the philosophy of politics, as it allows for the analysis of terrorism as a radical strategy for the destruction of the political order rather than merely a criminal episode. Of particular interest is the view of Martha Crenshaw, who proposes viewing terrorism as the deliberate use or threat of symbolic, “low-intensity” violence by conspiratorial organisations for the sake of a political effect directed at a broad audience, rather than just the immediate target of the attack.¹⁰ This implies that terrorism is not just any form of violence or protest, but violence embedded within a mechanism of political signalling and the management of public perception.

Consequently, a multidisciplinary approach is required as a methodological necessity for a more rigorous and critical analysis of terrorism. Through a legal lens, terrorism is primarily identified as a criminal act within the boundaries of national and international law. However, political science demonstrates that a purely legal perspective is insufficient because terrorism emerges and functions within the context of conflicts, crises of legitimacy, asymmetric warfare, radicalisation, and transnational networks.

¹⁰ Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 379.

In applied security studies and strategic works, a definition is frequently employed that links terrorism to violence by non-state actors against civilian targets for political or ideological purposes. For instance, in an analytical review based on the definition provided by Boaz Ganor, terrorism is defined as the intentional use of violence by non-state actors against civilian targets to achieve political, ideological, social, or religious goals [Ganor 2003, p. 3].¹¹ The significance of this definition lies in its “operationality”: it helps to empirically distinguish terrorism from other forms of armed struggle based on the criteria of objective-setting and the selection of targets (specifically, civilians).

From the perspective of social and political philosophy, it is fundamentally important to consider that the figure of the “terrorist” is formed neither biologically nor “religiously,” but structurally and contextually: through the social environment, ideological production, network communications, experiences of exclusion or humiliation, as well as technological capabilities for violence and propaganda. Therefore, it is more accurate to speak of the terrorist as a socio-political actor whose actions are embedded within a specific system of meanings and practices.

In a study on the socio-economic foundations of involvement in terrorism, A. Lee demonstrates that participation in violence is often linked to barriers to political participation and a “cost-benefit” calculation of various forms of political activity; in this context, terrorism emerges as a specific form of political participation under conditions of limited channels of influence.¹² The significance of this approach lies in its shift of the analysis from a moralising plane (“irrational evil”) to the explanatory plane of political sociology and rational choice theory.

The Historical Argument: Terrorism in “Atypical” Conditions.

Historical experience demonstrates that terrorism is not the “monopoly” of unstable societies. The precedent of July 22, 2011, in Norway, where 77 people were killed in two attacks, shows that politico-ideological radicalisation and terrorist violence can emerge even within stable democracies.¹³ The significance of this example lies in the dismantling of the simplified terrorism = poverty/chaos hypothesis; rather, the causes also reside in ideological ecosystems, identity conflicts, and networked radicalising environments. Similarly, the Columbine case (April 20, 1999) is illustrative for the analysis of mass violence in educational settings; according to FBI data, 12 students and one teacher were killed (the attackers subsequently

¹¹ Ganor, “Defining Terrorism: Is One Man’s Terrorist Another Man’s Freedom Fighter?,” 3.

¹² Alexander Lee, “Social Networks and Political Violence.” *Journal of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011:75–102.

¹³ Ingrid Melle, “The Breivik Case and What Psychiatrists Can Learn from It.” *BJPsych Bulletin*. 2013. Accessed via PubMed Central.

committed suicide).¹⁴ The significance of this fact lies in a methodological distinction: not every act of mass violence is automatically identical to terrorism, yet such cases reveal similar mechanisms of radicalisation, symbolic violence, and media impact, which is useful for the comparative analysis of political violence.

Legal Codification and Political Interpretation: The Case of Uzbekistan

In the legal system of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the concepts of “terrorism”, “terrorist”, “terrorist activity”, and “terrorist act” are established through a list of specific actions and characteristics, as well as through their connection to the goal of coercing the state or organisations and intimidating the population. In the Law “On Combating Terrorism” (the article on basic concepts), terrorism is described as violence, the threat thereof, or other criminal acts that pose a danger to life and are aimed, among other things, at intimidating the population and achieving political, religious, ideological, or other goals; the definitions of a “terrorist” and a “terrorist act” are separately codified.¹⁵ The significance of this norm lies in the fact that it demonstrates the state’s endeavour to legally stabilise the concept of terrorism, while simultaneously highlighting that, in the international dimension, the problem of inconsistent definitions and the politicisation of classifications persists.

‘Terrorist’ and ‘Freedom Fighter’: Criteria of Distinction in Political Theory.

The concept of a “freedom fighter” in political discourse is typically associated with the idea of legitimate resistance, such as the right to self-determination, anti-colonial struggle, and resistance against oppression. However, the philosophical-political difficulty lies in the fact that the legitimacy of resistance in international relations is frequently evaluated not only by law but also by political recognition, that is, by power relations, alliances, and geopolitical interests. This gives rise to a “normative duality,” in which the same actor may be interpreted as a “liberator” or a “terrorist” depending on who is performing the evaluation, in what situation, and what goals they are pursuing.

Methodologically, it is advisable to distinguish between several levels of analysis:

Goals: both declared and actual political objectives (e.g., self-determination, regime change, etc.).

Means: whether the methods employed are permissible under the norms of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights.

Target Selection: a key marker of the deliberate use of violence against civilians and non-combatants.

¹⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Columbine High School,” *FBI Records: The Vault*, 1999, para. 1.

¹⁵ Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Fight against Terrorism, art. 2, December 15, 2000.

Context of Recognition: the presence or absence of political representation, negotiation channels, and external support. Communicative Effect: the endeavour to manage mass fear as a political resource. From this follows a principle useful for both academia and security policy: even if a political goal is declared as “liberational,” the intentional use of violence against civilians undermines any claim to legitimacy. It facilitates the classification of the act as terrorism within the framework of relevant definitions and practices.

It is essential to emphasise the importance of forecasting the future scale of terrorism. Predicting the dynamics of terrorism in the XXIst century requires a departure from the simplified linear logic of “where there is poverty, there is terrorism and a transition toward multi-level models that combine structural causes, political processes, ideological frameworks, and technological capabilities. In security policy, terrorism should be understood not merely as a collection of criminal episodes, but as a form of political violence embedded in asymmetric conflicts and crises of legitimacy. It is precisely for this reason that terrorism manifests as an “asymmetric threat”: it is not symmetrical to the state in terms of resources, organisational form, or the logic of symbolic intimidation.

From a historical perspective, terrorism “flows” between regions and forms, reacting to changes in world politics, the collapse of empires, wars, the redrawing of borders, state weakness, protracted conflicts, migration waves, and identity crises. Therefore, it is necessary to speak not of predicting a specific terrorist attack, but of mapping probabilistic zones and “escalation mechanisms” where a confluence of factors increases the likelihood of the emergence of radicalisation networks, logistical corridors, ideological “incubators,” and arms markets.

It is also necessary to note the geographic expansion of terrorism as a consequence of asymmetry and the “reconfiguration” of global politics. From a practical standpoint, the expanding geography of terrorism is typically linked not to a single cause, but to a combination of war and conflict, institutional weakness and corruption, trans-border networks, and the accessibility of technologies that “entrepreneurs of violence” translate into ideological language. This approach stems directly from literature reviews on the causes of terrorism, which emphasise the necessity of using research “toolkits” for long-term forecasting and scenario analysis rather than seeking a single universal determinant. As noted by Lia, forecasting is built through a “set of hypotheses” and verifiable mechanisms rather than through moral labels and one-dimensional explanations.¹⁶

¹⁶ Brynjulf Lia, *Causes of Terrorism: An Expanded and Updated Review of the Literature*, FFI/RAPPORT-2004/04307. Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2004: 1.

From this perspective, forecasting cannot be purely policing or purely economic in nature; it must be politico-historical, as terrorism often “flares up” at points where regimes change, agreements collapse, and statuses or identities are redistributed within and between societies. The paradox of modernity lies in the fact that while almost everyone condemns terrorism, terminological consensus remains limited. The absence of a single, universally recognised legal definition in the international environment creates a field for divergent interpretations, selectivity, and instrumentalisation.¹⁷ This reinforces the argument for conceptual unification: without it, the risk of political manipulation of concepts directly impacts the accuracy of forecasting. In this regard, it can be argued that effective forecasting requires an institutional “stitching” of four levels: the elimination of conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; prevention and suppression measures; building the capacity of states and the international system; and the observance of human rights and the rule of law as an anti-radicalisation barrier.¹⁸ Here, prevention is inseparable from human rights; this is crucial because repressive imbalances can themselves become “accelerators” of radicalisation.

The politico-historical profiles of societies and the “non-linearity” of radicalisation are of paramount importance. In constructing security strategies, states and international organisations are obliged to account for historical memory, the type of political culture, the traumatic experience of wars and repressions, socio-religious configurations, and the psychological “threshold” reactions of the population to threats and humiliation. This is crucial because terrorism is not an automatic product of poverty or religion; rather, it is the result of the politicisation of social conflicts, where violence becomes a means of asserting agency. Furthermore, classic terrorism studies emphasise that the causes of terrorism are manifold and cannot be reduced to a single explanation. Moreover, the same “conditions” in different situations generate diverse trajectories ranging, for example, from peaceful mobilisation to a violent underground.¹⁹ This necessitates a rigorous scientific framework to counter “deterministic” simplifications and requires political analysis for accurate forecasting.

Consequently, in the process of forecasting, it is necessary to distinguish between structural tensions manifested in discrimination, conflicts, inequality, and political closure, and catalysts such as online propaganda, transnational resources, diasporas, and criminal markets. Therefore, effective forecasting requires a classification of groups based not on their slogans, but on

¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *Toolkit for the Prevention of Extremism, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees from Armed Conflict Zones in the Republic of Tajikistan*. New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2023: 8.

¹⁸ Jacob Street and Louise Attree, *The Rise of Counter-Terrorism at the United Nations: Two Decades Later* (Briefing, September 2021). New York: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Saferworld, 2021: 3.

¹⁹ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 379.

observable parameters: organisational structure and the discipline of violence; the type of targets (symbolic objects, Infrastructure); financing channels and logistics; media strategy and the “threshold” of brutality; the dynamics of radicalisation; and the degree of transnationality. Based on these principles, state strategy must prevent the legitimization of violence through “freedom fighter” rhetoric if the practices are directed against the civilian population and non-combatants; in political philosophy, this is the key marker of the transition from resistance to terrorism as a technology of intimidation. However, sustainable preventive measures must be designed to avoid producing “reverse radicalisation” through group stigmatisation or collective responsibility. Ultimately, effective forecasting and counter-terrorism are possible only within an integrated model that unites historical analysis, the political theory of legitimacy, the political economy of risk, the sociology of radicalisation, and technological analytics. Such an approach allows for more than just a reaction; it enables the ranking of threats, the construction of scenarios, and the prevention of the transformation of radical groups into sustainable terrorist actors.

In political economy, focus is shifted away from a simple empirical link between terrorism and poverty toward processes where income levels alone poorly explain terrorism; instead, state capacity, environmental conflict, access to weapons, and organisational capabilities become more significant.²⁰ This “cools” simplified theses and moves the discussion to the level of verifiable variables, specifically, where and under what conditions economic factors become meaningful. Consequently, in sections regarding resources, Infrastructure, and financial flows, it is advisable to strengthen the phrasing: a threat is heightened not merely by “resource inequality,” but by the politicisation of distribution when resources are perceived as tools of injustice, humiliation, or “extraction” without the participation of local communities. In such situations, the economic factor is transformed into an ideological one, becoming a convenient platform for recruiting diverse categories of people, from students to scientists. Economic growth is vital primarily as a driver of employment, horizontal mobility, and trust in institutions. Where the state provides basic social conditions and fair rules, the “recruitment market” for radical networks shrinks. However, it is critically important to avoid reductionism: it is not that “poverty breeds terrorism,” but rather the combination of frustration, political closure, and networked mobilisation. In the modern world, Infrastructure protection is not only a technical task but a matter of political legitimization; if the population perceives that resources are guarded “for outsiders” or distributed opaquely, Infrastructure becomes a symbol of injustice. Therefore, protection must be supplemented by transparency, social contracts, and the inclusion of local communities. Financial flows are significant not in themselves, but as instruments for

²⁰ Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, “Terrorism,” *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008: 2.

enhancing governance capacity in education, municipal services, violence prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration. At the same time, it is vital that financial support does not undermine sovereign trust; otherwise, it may be reinterpreted by radicals as “external governance”.

Conclusion

As a result of the historical-philosophical and political analysis conducted, it can be concluded that the concepts of “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” within the framework of contemporary political science and international security practice allow for the following conceptual findings, which hold both scientific and applied significance: Terrorism cannot be adequately comprehended within the bounds of a single discipline or through a narrow normative-legal prism. It represents a complex, multidimensional, and dynamic phenomenon of political violence, formed at the intersection of historical, socio-economic, ideological, psychological, and technological factors. Attempts to reduce terrorism to a religious, cultural, or ethnic nature are not only methodologically incorrect but also dangerous, as they contribute to the stigmatisation of entire groups and, paradoxically, intensify radicalisation processes.

The distinction between a “terrorist” and a “freedom fighter” is neither absolute nor universal; rather, these categories are constructed within the space of political interpretation and the struggle for legitimacy, where legal criteria often give way to geopolitical interests, ideological preferences, and historical narratives. Consequently, the same actor may be qualified as a terrorist by one state and as a freedom fighter by another, thereby engendering a normative duality and legal uncertainty that diminishes the effectiveness of international counter-terrorism policy.

Terrorism is not a product exclusive to “weak,” “poor,” or “unstable” societies. Precedents occurring within developed and democratic states demonstrate that the decisive role is played not only by material conditions but also by ideological ecosystems, identity crises, the asymmetry of political participation, and transnational channels of radicalisation. This circumstance necessitates a departure from simplified deterministic models in favour of contextually sensitive analytical frameworks.

Forecasting the future scale of terrorism is possible only in a probabilistic, scenario-based format. As an asymmetric threat, terrorism fundamentally eludes precise prediction; however, a systematic analysis of the politico-historical profiles of societies, the economic structure of risk, geopolitical transformations, and the dynamics of radicalisation allows for the identification of zones of high vulnerability and potential trajectories of escalation. In this process, forecasting should be viewed not as a search for exact dates and locations of attacks, but as an instrument of strategic warning.

Economic development, Infrastructure protection, the equitable distribution of resources, institutional resilience, social integration, and intercultural dialogue must be regarded not as secondary measures but as structural elements of security policy. Conversely, securitisation and repressive practices that undermine human rights and the rule of law are capable of acting as factors of secondary radicalisation.

The problem of conceptual unification is of particular importance, as the absence of a universally accepted and depoliticised definition of terrorism in international relations creates a vacuum prone to manipulation, the selective application of law, and double standards. The unification of concepts does not imply the levelling of contexts; rather, it presupposes the development of minimal yet stringent criteria, primarily regarding the impermissibility of violence against the civilian population. Such unification is a necessary condition for trust between states and for the overall effectiveness of collective security mechanisms.

The relationship between the concepts of “terrorist” and “freedom fighter” extends far beyond a mere terminological dispute; it touches upon the fundamental questions of political philosophy: the legitimacy of violence, the boundaries of resistance, the nature of political action, and the responsibility of the state in a globalised world.

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