

Can the Concept of State Terror be Theoretically Justified?

Written by Melayna Lamb

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MELAYNA LAMB, OCT 13 2012

The study of contemporary 'state terror' has been very much neglected by the academic community, who have tended to reserve the term for 'the reign of terror' during the French Revolution, or Stalin's Russia. It is a concept that is theoretically confused and seems more applicable to bygone eras of mass uprisings and total war.

The state, from its inception as a theoretical concept, has been bound up with the use of violence and force. In Weber's famous definition a state is: 'a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (quoted in O'Kane 1996, p.5). The state has been conceptualised as being the *only* grouping which can legitimately use violence. Thus to combine the words 'state' and 'terror' may seem counter-intuitive, as terror is generally used to describe a type of violence which is inherently *illegitimate*. For the purposes of this dissertation the working definition of terror will be used which is: 'fear deliberately produced by threats to innocent non-combatants to modify the behaviour of others' (Sproat 1991, p.23). The notion that the state is not only a legitimate user of force, but that the use of force in fact defines the state is still with us today. For policy-makers, a 'failing' state is one in which 'the government does not have effective control of its territory, is not perceived as legitimate by a significant proportion of its population, does not provide domestic security or basic public services to its citizens and lacks a monopoly on the use of force' (Failed States Index 2006, p.2). Thus to label a state's use of violence as illegitimate is a difficult task, that seems imbued with normative claims and value judgments.

By looking at classical and contemporary theories of the state, it will be shown that the concept of state terror is theoretically incoherent, and leads only to descriptive explorations of where and when state terror has been used. These theories show that terror and the state are not opposing concepts, but when adjoined cannot lead one to any theoretical or analytical conclusions – just that it is a weapon that most states at some point in their history have wielded. Hence it is extremely difficult to construct an argument in which there is a distinction between what violence states may legitimately use in order to sustain themselves, and that which is illegitimate. In times of crisis and challenge a state may claim that the only way to preserve itself is through the use of terror in order to subdue an enemy. Thus the concept of state terror is theoretically confused as one must see the state as an autonomous actor which once instituted, will necessarily attempt to preserve itself regardless of the costs. Thus when faced with a revolt from below, the state may deem it necessary to use terrorist tactics in order to sustain itself.

The first section will look at the concept of terror, and its change in usage and meaning over time. Secondly by looking at classical theories of the state it will be shown that the state and violence are inherently bound. The third section will deal with contemporary analyses of state terror, followed by contemporary theories of the state. The contemporary state theories will then be used to show that state terror has been used historically as a method of creating or re-ordering a sovereign entity. Finally, it will be shown that the West has been attempting to de-legitimise states that use terror through the medium of universal human rights, and that this is in essence contradictory.

The Concept of Terror

Terrorism is necessarily symbolic, with its victims, not the audience, which the perpetrator wishes to convey a

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message to. Rather it is meant to change or circumscribe the actions of people other than the victims themselves.

The concept of terror first emerged to describe the activities of the French Revolutionaries during the revolution. The use of terror by the revolutionary leaders for them, 'functioned as a principle, system and instrument of government designed to punish, avenge and educate as part of a quest to re-establish a single political and legal sovereignty' (Mayer 2000, p.101). Terror as originally conceived thus referred explicitly to what would now be referred to as 'state terror'. Over time, however, the concept has been re-defined and the discourse surrounding terrorism usually refers to groups that are not part of a state structure. It now refers to a method of violence which is illegitimate in the eyes of the 'international community'. In the legal definition, terrorist acts are 'peacetime equivalents of war crimes' (Schmid 1992, p.12). Schmid defends this definition by claiming that 'terrorists consider themselves as being at war with Western democracies' (1992, p.12). This argument is extremely problematic. Not only does it exclude all acts of terror committed during times of war, it also exclusively refers to actors outside of the West. Thus terrorism is ultimately a 'pejorative term – terrorism is committed against us, we don't commit it against them' (Duyvesteyn 2004, p.440). The appropriation of the term terrorism to de-legitimise sub-state groups outside of the West in their use of violence, is not only historically inaccurate but does not inquire into the systematic use of terror by states, sub-state groups, Western and non-Western across space and time. The US state department has defined terrorism as 'pre-meditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by *sub-national* groups' (emphasis added, Blakely 2007, p.230). Policy-makers and Western leaders have frequently invoked the word to describe what they perceive to be illegitimate groups who pose a threat. Since September the 11th there has been a slight shift in Western political rhetoric surrounding terrorism and states. However frequent reference is made to state sponsors of terrorism, rather than states as direct perpetrators of terrorism themselves. Indeed, the 'key narratives still focus on non-state groups and actions as primary and states as secondary sponsors or supporters' (Jackson 2008, p.301).

There is a feeling that 'in order to gain official entry into the terrorist debate, one must check critical weapons at the door and join in the chorus of condemnation, or risk suspicion of having sympathy for the terrorist devil' (Der Derian 2009, p.69). This sense has in effect distorted any meaningful debate around terrorism, its historical use and the question of why (states) would use such abhorrent methods of violence. It is accounted for by barbarism, irrationality and afflictions of pre-modernism. States who engage in acts of terror are de-cried as uncivilised, failing or 'rogue' and not having the legitimacy to lay claim to any formal notion of sovereignty.

The State and Violence

In Thomas Hobbes's seminal work *Leviathan* he conceives of the sovereign as being absolutely necessary for without one there is 'no industry... no culture of the earth...and the life of man is solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short' (Hobbes 1991, p.89). This state of nature is the natural condition of men, and in order to overcome it they must institute a sovereign who has the ability to 'keep them all in awe' (1991, p.88). Indeed the sovereign must cultivate fear among his subjects so that the state will not descend into chaos and the state of nature. Of course, it must be remembered that Hobbes was a counterrevolutionary and was writing at a time of manifest political unrest: the English Civil War. This led him to believe that in a state of absolute liberty people would descend into a condition of war and must be overawed by an all-powerful leviathan for their long-term self preservation. In Hobbes's conception, the leviathan is created once all of the people in a given community come together and renounce their absolute liberty in a 'covenant'. Once the sovereign has been instituted, the people must subject to his will:

because every subject is by this institution author of all actions and judgments of the sovereign instituted, it follows that whatsoever he doth, it can be no injury to any of his subjects, nor ought he to be accused any of them injustice (Hobbes 1991, p.124).

The sovereign is to have absolute power over his subjects, and any action he deems necessary to take is 'unpunishable by the subject' (1991, p.124). For Hobbes, terror is a state which will allow men to realise their self-fulfillment, for no longer will they be in a state of war with one another, they will live in a state in which there is order and justice. Hobbes was explicit that 'the aim of punishment is not a revenge but of terror' (1991, p.89). Indeed without the use of governmental violence, the state will collapse back into the state of nature as it would have no

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means by which to cultivate the fear and terror so necessary for order. Laws could not be enforced 'without a sword' (Hobbes 1991, p.147). Of course, a state which has ultimate authority and cannot be taken to account for its actions, is not one we would associate with the modern state. However the implications of Hobbes's theory do still resonate with what is seen as the defining characteristics of the state today. Social theorists from Marx to Giddens (O'Kane 1996, p.5) have all identified violence and force as the very essence of the state. Indeed 'non' states are perceived as being the ones that do not have a monopoly on the means of coercion. If a state does not have an effective army or police force it is assumed that this accounts for the breakdown of society and a return to a barbarous existence. The assumption being, like Hobbes', that people are not naturally orderly and the artificial state is the only social construction that can make them so. This is explicit in the 'failed states' literature as they are seen to play host to 'a plethora of internal wars, ethnic conflicts and a collapse of legitimate authority' (Garvogui 2001, p.29). It was Montesquieu who, rather than using this as a justification for the absolute authority of the sovereign, attempted to overcome Hobbes's vision of despotic authoritarianism and offered an alternative.

For Montesquieu, terror was not a thing to be cultivated by the sovereign to maintain order and security. On the contrary, terror 'decimated institutions and elites and dispensed with education' (Robin 2004, p.29). In contrast to Hobbes, Montesquieu did not believe that the government should have absolute authority to use violence and punishment as it wished. Indeed, 'mankind must not be governed with too much severity' (Montesquieu 1995, p.515). Montesquieu deplores despotism and advocates a government form that is restrained. The despot initially secures a domestic peace through the use of killing as punishment (despite the severity of the crime), however this soon becomes ineffective as 'men become so used to it that it ceases to have the desired effect of obedience' (McClelland 1996, p.327). He ardently believes that despotism is the least cultivated form of government, and one which men are compelled to 'behave like beasts in instinct, compliance and punishment' (Montesquieu 1995, p.410). People are subject to the despots whim and the despots state is completely devoid of justice or law. This is in stark contrast to Hobbes for whom law, reason and justice can only come into being once a sovereign has defined them.

Montesquieu believed that government should be limited with checks and balances, and 'mediating institutions' (Robin, 2004, p.53). Moderation would ensure the freedom of the people, whilst despotism would enslave them to fear. Arbitrary punishments would not be possible under a republic as 'criminal laws derive each punishment from the particular nature of the crime' (Montesquieu 1995, p.517). Hence the state which Montesquieu was advocating resonates much more clearly with the modern liberal democratic states of the West today. The liberal state was conceived as being in opposition to terror, however still based on fear. While for Hobbes it was the fear of the state of nature that would lead men to institute an all-powerful leviathan, for Montesquieu it would be the fear of a despotic leader that would lead men into creating a liberal state. For under despotism the individual would be 'reduced to the raw apprehension of physical destruction' (Robin 2004, p.53), and thus men would be inspired to create for themselves a more liberal, moderate state. Terror is perceived as being apolitical, serving no function except the despots own desires. A liberal democratic state therefore, would by Montesquieu's definition, not be capable of engaging in acts of terror. Indeed terror is antithetical to it, as no despot exists whose desires need to be fulfilled.

This has interesting implications for the current debates surrounding state terror. Through Hobbes and Montesquieu one is able to derive some of the widespread assumptions surrounding state terror. Firstly, if one takes Hobbes's definition then the state must do all it can for the maintenance of order internally, and security externally, including the use of violence against any who would dissent against it. Also foreign states are to be treated as enemies as sovereigns who 'endeavour as much as they can to subdue or weaken their neighbours' by force if necessary, are remembered with 'honour' (Hobbes 1991, p.118). The notion that the *raison d'etre* of the state is order via command of coercive apparatuses leads one into a way of thinking about the state in which its use of (or threat of the use of) violence has *de facto* legitimacy. Violence and fear of violence by the state is seen as a necessary remedy to the violence and disorder which occurs between men in the state of nature. The use of fear is used to circumscribe actions of the subjects within the state through the use of violence. For Hobbes, then terror is integral to the state itself. Thus one may come to the conclusion that the 'state cannot be terrorist by definition' (Sproat 1991, p. 19). For the state may have recourse to the justification that its use of violence, however severe and however arbitrary, is for either internal order or external defence. Indeed, without the threat or use of violence there would be no state to speak of, as men would be in a state of absolute liberty. The perceived 'legitimacy of the state is itself normally conceived as providing legitimacy to actions that would be condemned as terrorism if such behaviours were

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executed by non-state actors' (Stohl 1984, p.43).

Montesquieu however introduces a new distinction. While violence by the state in some cases may still be legitimate: 'the life of governments is like that of man, the latter has a right to kill in case of natural defence: the former have a right to wage war for their own preservation' (Montesquieu 1949, p.133). Here we have a distinction in which violence used for self-defence is legitimate, however state violence is not legitimate when it is not constrained by mediating institutions. For Montesquieu 'offensive force is regulated by the law of nations, which is the political law of each country considered in relation to every other' (1949, p.133). The defining characteristic of legitimate violence for Montesquieu is *constraint*. This can be seen as a highly pertinent observation. During the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America where widespread state terror occurred, the use of states of emergency and executive decrees were used to demolish any constraints on them. In the case of Chile 'political parties were banned, congress dissolved, national Trade Unions dissolved and severe restrictions were imposed in professional associations' (Latin American Bureau 1983, p.54). In order for the state to begin its campaign of terror, it first had to ensure that it was completely unrestricted domestically. Thus liberal republics with a separation of powers, independent judiciary and an accountable executive is necessarily constrained, and domestically will not have the freedom to use arbitrary and terroristic violence against its own population. Montesquieu has thus laid the foundations for the belief that liberal democratic states are not terroristic in themselves. He 'depicted terror as lying primarily outside of Europe' (Robin 2004, p.70), and states which engaged in acts of terror reflected an uncivilised barbarous form of government that could be overcome by instituting a state committed to liberalism. These feelings within the West have not disappeared today. The US departments annual list of states that are 'sponsors of international terrorism – Iran, Syria, Cuba, North Korea, Sudan, Libya, Iraq' (Jackson 2008, p.381) to name a few lays testament to this. This is to reinforce the feeling that terror is something that exists 'elsewhere' and that we must combat it to secure ourselves 'here'. The states engaged in, or supportive of terror are presented as being backward, failed states that are 'zones of chaos' in which 'barbarism, anarchy and arbitrary violence' are free to thrive (Abrahamsen 2005, p.66). The use of this type of language parallels with that of the Hobbesian state of nature, and the barbarous states of Montesquieu. This has contributed to the reasoning that it is absolute liberty, whether of the people or of the state, that allows terror to flourish, and that in the West we have successfully overcome this with a state which is able to maintain order through coercion, with constraints and checks on government officials in carrying out these functions.

Internationally however, states are relatively unconstrained. The 'law of nations' which Montesquieu speaks of seems an empty concept for his time of writing. Now of course, we have established international law and the UN which could be seen as placing constraints on the foreign policy of states. This is not to equate war and terrorism of course, but merely to highlight that while domestically liberal democracies are necessarily constrained, internationally this is not so much the case.¹ States have historically circumvented international rules for their foreign policy aims. In situations of war, the actions of states which are guilty of 'exceeding limits of conduct are not often labelled as 'terroristic'' (Stohl 1984, p.45). This lack of international constraint, means that the liberal democratic states of the West, while being unable to carry out acts of terror domestically, are able to, and indeed have, used terroristic methods in their relations with non-Western states.

State Terror

While there has been little academic literature or study on contemporary state terror, there have been some attempts to theorise and conceptualise its meaning. We must accept that state terror is a real phenomenon that not only exists in the periphery of the world, but in the Western core as well. The concept of state terror has frequently been invoked to de-legitimise certain actions undertaken by the state. While in the West this has been used most frequently to describe the most extreme forms – Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, more recent literature has expanded the concept to not only historical state forms, but more contemporary ones and the uses of terror by the West itself. While not necessarily labeled as terrorism, there are numerous examples of the use of terrorism internationally by states. For example, in 1972 US President Richard Nixon resorted to 'around the clock air raids in Hanoi' to 'bomb Hanoi back to the negotiating table' (Stohl 1984, p.44). Stohl also analyses the nuclear deterrence strategies used by both the United States and the Soviet Union as forms of state terror, as its 'primary use is to deter or intimidate, and thereby to influence behaviour through the threat of enormous civilian damage' (1984, p.49). For James Der Derian the use of terrorist methods during times of war such as Dresden, Hiroshima and Afghanistan 'all testify to the ability

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of states...to sanction the killing and maiming of large numbers of civilians'(2009, p.72). Bearing these examples in mind, it is not surprising that state terrorism is 'noticeable mainly for its absence as a subject of systematic academic study' (Jackson 2008, p.377). Once one state is accused of using methods of terror, then historically, most states at some point would have to be noted as being guilty of state terror. This makes the concept of state terror theoretically devoid of any substantive content. For if most states have used terror/do use it, then we must ask ourselves, what is it that this concept identifies?

For the advocates of the concept, terrorism as a field of study has been criticised for confining the use of the word to non-state actors. However, by proposing the use and study of 'state terrorism' these proponents are systematically undermining their own aims to re-appropriate the word. While criticism of the exclusion of state actors from the definition of terrorism is justified, the concept of state terror obscures the distinction between terrorism committed by non-state and state actors. It serves to equate the violence used by states with that of sub-state groups by using the same terminology. Sub-state groups simply do not have access to the same means of violence that states do. While sub-state groups may be attempting to re-define the boundaries of violence (and in some cases aspiring to statehood themselves), state terror is usually an attempt to maintain and re-assert the boundaries of violence already in place. By confining the debate to discourse surrounding terrorism, one may miss the significance of the *meanings* behind the violence, and the re-constitution of the boundaries of violence which are taking place. It simply serves a purpose of de-legitimising the methods of violence that are used. Thus Stohl's study of state terror is constrained to merely providing numerous examples of where and when state terror as a method has been used, and not an adequate theorisation of state terror itself. This reflects the confused and theoretical incoherence of the concept, and the analysis that evades the proponents of the concept. By immediately de-legitimising the use of violence used in certain situations, the rationale behind it tends to be missed. The prevalence of state terror in Africa, where its 'new wars function as an important means of social re-ordering and transformation in which new local, regional and global power relations are being formed' (Willett 2005, p.574), is not surprising. Africa's conflicts may be seen as constant shifting in the boundaries of violence and different groupings vying for control. To immediately cast the groups vying for power as state terrorists misses the point completely. It is the lack of state that has led to the use of terror as groups seek control over the means of violence.

Contemporary State Theories

If we accept the general definition of terrorism as producing fear by threatening/targeting civilians in order to change the behaviour of others, then in order to overcome the theoretical problems associated with state terror, we must focus our attention on definitions of the state. It is widely perceived that state action is somewhat legitimised as it is presented as 'upholding the laws necessary for public protection and as conforming to legal processes' (Gilbert 1994, p.126). This serves not only to legitimise the states actions, but also in a sense makes the state seem more of a neutral arbiter rather than an autonomous actor. Theda Skocpol criticises not only orthodox theories of the state, but also Marxist ones for viewing the state as 'nothing but an arena in which the conflicts over basic social and economic interests are fought out' (1979, p.25). Instead she proposes a view of the state which is able to account for its *autonomy* in certain situations. Sproat calls for a distinction to be made between 'those terrorist acts and non-terrorist threats (of punishments) or acts of violence that the state needs to deter law breaking' (1991, p.23). We may be able to partly resolve this by looking through the lens that Skocpol has provided. By viewing the state as an organisation with its own interests and own aims – apart from those of the 'national' interest, we can begin to unravel the ways in which states may use terroristic methods for its own purposes. The state must be able to maintain itself, and the organisations which it controls. Hence Theda Skocpol maintains that 'even after great loss of legitimacy has occurred a state can remain quite stable and certainly invulnerable to internal mass based revolts, especially if its coercive organisations remain coherent and effective' (1979, p.32). The state seen as an autonomous actor in its own right, must frequently re-assert itself. Sovereignty is never absolute and legitimacy 'constantly needs to be reproduced' (Shaw 2000, p.212). In this way Sproat's distinction cannot be theoretically justified. For in times of state crisis, when the state is being challenged by other groups, terrorist acts and non-terrorist threats that the state needs to undertake in order to sustain itself become one and the same thing. The concept of state terror from this perspective becomes void.

Martin Shaw has also provided a re-conceptualisation of the nation state in contemporary times. He argues the need

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to 'conceptualise the major categories of bordered centres of state power within which the authoritative control of violence is coordinated' (2000, p.199). Drawing on orthodox theories of the state which see it as having a monopoly on the means of violence, Shaw has shown that the dynamics and form of the 'nation state' of the Westphalian era have been radically transformed. His claim that we now have a 'Western state which functions as a single centre of military state power' (2000, p.200) may also serve to unravel the (neo) Kantian premise that liberal democracies are inherently peaceful. For, if we see the West as functioning as a state, in which violence is coordinated at a level above the traditionally observed sovereign entities, then any violence within would be an attack on itself, as the post world war two era has ended 'war between the major nation-states of the West....reduced the role of the nation state as a military centre within society' (Shaw 2000, p.222).

State Terror as Societal Re-ordering

As noted before, there is a tendency in the West to cast states engaged in terror as somehow 'pre-modern' or 'backward'. They are frequently presented as being un-state like and in need of some sort of intervention by the West to develop their community into what is commonly perceived as a fully sovereign state. They are perceived as not being able to claim juridical sovereignty that the Western state has, by virtue of engaging in activities perceived as illegitimate. This is a theme prevalent in the 'failed states' literature, in which states which have resorted to extremely repressive means of coercion and terroristic activities have somehow retreated into a Hobbesian state of nature. According to Robert Jackson, 'establishing and maintaining conditions under which a populace can be safe... is the raison d'être of the sovereign state' (Jackson 2006, p.160). Thus any political community that fails to provide security for its citizens is failing to reach sovereign statehood, as it is not providing the single most important function of the state as universally conceived. However, Martin Shaw has shown that if we see statehood as the 'authoritative control of the means of violence' (2000, p.225) then this perception of what it is to become a fully fledged state begins to break down. Using the former Yugoslavia as an example Shaw highlights that communities aspiring to statehood, have used extremely violent methods in an attempt to consolidate themselves as states, leading him to the conclusion that 'warlordism and genocidal power cannot be opposed categorically to the state' (2000, p.212).

By viewing aspirations to statehood as necessarily rooted in the control and organisation of violence, then the concept of 'state terror' seems misplaced. The claim that it is 'states rather than insurgent groups that have been the most persistent and successful users of the strategy of terrorism' (Sproat 1991, p.22) becomes a mere truism. The consolidation of sovereignty necessarily entails the use and control of violence. Indeed as 'state power fractures and is reconstituted, the line between constitutional authority and arbitrary violence blurs' (Shaw 2000, p.212). Since the end of the cold war, the West has frequently de-legitimised this form of state creation. Whether by labeling them as failed states, or re-defining what it is to be a state, we are frequently told that the use of arbitrary violence and terror negates these states' claims to sovereignty. State terror is very often linked with 'the weakness of the state' which 'precludes less violent alternatives to death squads and terror' (Campbell 2000, p.10). When looking at examples of state terror carried out by the West however, attributing state terror to 'weak states' cannot be maintained. By adopting Shaw's definition of the Western state, we can see that internationally, the West has attempted to maintain itself and defeat challenges to it through uses of terror. This is not necessarily a sign of weakness, rather terrorism is seen by states as a rational method for coping with major challenges that are launched against it, just as in smaller states around the globe.

Boron in his analysis of state terror in Latin America, goes further and claims that state terror was an inevitability in these peripheral states. He argues that the periphery would not experience the same developmental processes and social conditions and formations which in the Western core led to the bourgeois democratic revolutions. The lack of presence of despotic governments and state use of terror in peripheral Latin America is attributed to their status as 'late-comers' to capitalism. He points to Germany and Italy which had to go through the 'horrors of fascism before they established a more or less resistant bourgeois democratic state' (Boron 1981). Due to the radical re-structuring of society that the transition to a capitalist mode of production needed in the periphery, democracy was seen as dangerous and state terror and repression as the most effective tools to implement such fundamental and far-reaching reforms. In Latin America, it was the 're-establishment of a liberal economic order, untying the hands of the most dynamic and concentrated fractions of capital, requires an ever more authoritarian political order' (Boron, 1981).

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This is not a uniform pattern of course, but describes a phenomenon in which underdeveloped countries seeking to re-structure their society in a radical way, towards neo-liberal economics, may have to resort to state terror to do so, and in the case of Latin America were actually supported in this venture by the West. For example, in Chile the government received a massive inflow of capital after the military coup, with (Western) capital inflows rising from \$30 million to \$304 million by 1976 (Veltmeyer et al 1997, p.62). Thus state terror, for the Chilean military government was used in order to re-structure the country in line with Western ideology concerning neo-liberal economics. The huge influx of money after such methods were used, show that this was (contrary to Montesquieu) not an apolitical choice, serving to merely fulfill a lone despots desires. It was a conscious *political* choice to secure much needed capital and loans in a country facing economic crisis. This can be supported by the fact that the military coup and subsequent state terror ensued after a socialist leader was elected in Chile, and the United States and the international financial establishment precipitated an informal blockade. All loans were severed, and credit facilities withdrawn to Chile as a result of American pressure on the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (O'Brien 1976, p.231). The Chilean military were aspiring to become part of the global economy, even at the expense of the citizens within their jurisdiction. Due to the nature of the reforms, (highly exploitative and unpopular), and the nature of the government (military), the government in Chile needed quick solutions to gain obedience from the people, thus state terror was seen as a way to immediately crush any opposition which may have de-stabilised and overthrown them in turn. This was state terror not only on the part of the Chilean military, but arguably the American government as well. By actively funding and supporting the coup, in which there was a bombing of the Presidential Palace in Chile, the American government was sending a message to not only Chile, but all of the Latin American countries. The CIA spent \$8million 'in clandestine activities to defeat the Chilean left' between 1969 and 1973 (O'Brien 1976, p.230). It was a strong message from the American government to all of the South American governments that should they choose the path of socialism, there will be strong and violent repercussions.

This served American geopolitical purposes in the context of the Cold War but also economic purposes as well. This highlights the ways in which state terror whether domestically or internationally, is seen by some governments as a 'quick fix' solution to overarching and fundamental problems or challenges they may be experiencing. This of course does not legitimise its use, but breaks down the notion that governments that use state terror are in some way apolitical or backward.

The Western 'International Society'

Bill Clinton, shortly after becoming President announced that democracy promotion was 'one of the three pillars of its national security strategy' for the reason that 'democratic states are less likely to threaten our interests and more likely to co-operate with the US to meet security threats and promote free trade and development' (Rose 2000, p.189). The linkage of democracy and security is not a new one. However in the post-cold war era the Western state has increasingly attempted to circumscribe what functions and what form a 'legitimate' state may take. The United States alone spends over \$700 million annually on 'democracy promotion' (Alford 2000, p.1680) around the globe. The rise of an international human rights establishment headed by the West, also serves to reinforce the notion that states who do not adhere to internationally accepted norms and uphold human rights cannot be seen to have a right to sovereignty as the West conceives of it. In a DFID paper Hilary Benn claims that 'State capability underpins political stability and national security, and helps ensure that human rights, personal safety and security of property are respected' (2007, p.15). States which do not adhere to and perform these functions are cast as 'rogue states' which pose a danger not only to its own people but to the West itself. This is highly contradictory. For if an aspiring state wishes to achieve legally recognised sovereignty it must respect human rights and adhere to notions of 'good governance'. However this may preclude a states ability to take control and organise the violence which is so central to statehood. Thus groups are in a position to constantly struggle for control of the state's coercive means, with no one group ever being able to take effective control. State terror seems to be an inherent part of most states itself whether domestically or internationally. This is not to legitimise its use, rather to highlight the contradictions in what these states are being compelled to do by the West. Indeed 'established states, even the Western state despite all their paraphernalia of legitimacy can be even more violent and just as arbitrary in relation to many claims of human rights' (Shaw 2000, p.212). What is interesting to note here, is that outside of the Western state, where there are challenges to its legitimacy and hegemonic status, methods of state terror are used, for example 'shock and awe' in Iraq, and nuclear deterrence with the Soviet Union. Whereas smaller, less established states which attempt to do the

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same are lambasted as illegitimate.

It would seem that terrorism perceived by the West as 'a threat to the right of the individual to exist in a setting that is free from the arbitrary coercion and violence of others' (Chalk 1998, p.91) only applies if you are within and accept the basis of the Western 'international community'. Drawing on Kantian philosophy it is claimed that 'those whom liberals respect and with whom they identify, are those who exercise the self-discipline of adherence to the moral law' which they 'recognize themselves as having achieved' (Williams 2001, p.535). It is widely perceived that in the West, we have overcome the 'state of nature' of barbarous violence that afflicts countries outside of the West so frequently. We have successfully suppressed our most debased instincts and institutionalised liberalism, and those that have not are treated with hostility and suspicion. However these states should not be seen as somehow pre-modern or barbarous. Instead they are in a transitory state, in which some state leaders have found state terror as an effective means to take control and install order. Mayer describes the 'reign of terror' as 'inseparable from the tangled consequences of civil war, foreign hostility, economic disorganisation and social dislocation which called for quick, centralising and coercive action' (2000, p.119). Many of these problems afflict transitory states today, which may be looking for their place in an international arena of states. Violence against civilians is of course abhorrent, however 'by unequivocally condemning the violence of the Soviet regime, the liberal humanism of the Western countries at least implicitly denies the founding violence of their own beginnings' (Mayer 2000, p.110). The same applies to the condemnation of states outside the Western state as well.

Concluding Remarks

The idea of fear and terror as political tools has long pervaded Western political thought. While some have seen its use as a debasement of politics (Montesquieu), others have perceived it to be a necessary tactic to secure order from a disorderly population (Hobbes). For both however, terror serves 'as the catalyst of political and moral awakening' (Robin 2004, p.29). In Hobbes, it is the awakening that without the leviathan only a state of nature could ensue, whereas for Montesquieu it is the awakening that a liberal constrained government is necessary to stave off a despotic one. In both cases terror serves a purpose. This is most forcefully argued by the French Revolution's most ardent advocate of terror:

☐ It has been said that terror is the mainspring of despotic government. Does your government, then, resemble a despotism? Yes, as the sword which glitters in the hands of liberty's heroes resembles the one with which tyranny's lackeys are armed. Let the despot govern his brutalized subjects by terror; he is right to do this as a despot. Subdue liberty's enemies by terror, and you will be right, as founders of the Republic. The government of the revolution is the despotism of liberty against tyranny' (Robespierre 1794).

Terror has been widely used, throughout history in order to secure a political domain, a legally recognised sovereignty which other states will recognise. Are we right then, to call it terrorism? The word terrorism has been appropriated by Western political elites and policy-makers to de-legitimise violent actions by certain groups or states. As has been shown, however, the West is not exempt from the use of terror. It has not been systematically used as an analytical concept, rather it has been used as a labeling device, which when used, precipitates a media and public outcry and hysteria. This leads to fear-driven politics which only seeks to combat the people using the strategy of terrorism. It is assumed (much like Montesquieu's assumption that terror would disappear with the onset of a liberal republic) that there is a solution to terrorism. By removing the perpetrators we may successfully eradicate its use. However, by continuing to ignore the rational political choices which may lie behind the use of terrorism any comprehensive understanding will be obscured. Indeed as the Western state continues to use terrorism internationally, it is likely that other states will use it as a method of response. It has long been a method of state-making and state defence. It is argued here that a response to the use of terrorism should not be driven by irrational fear, but by a measured informed response. This is why I believe the concept of state terror concerning contemporary state violence should be abandoned in favour of a term which can more adequately capture the essence of the reasoning behind the violence and appropriate responses to it. The 'media transformation of violence into a news event has magnified and distorted the terrorist threat, further reducing the possibility of any meta-critical and ethico-political response to it' (Der Derian 2009, p.33). Thus to label a state as terrorist will only serve to create fear-driven policies, and may give rise to intervention on the part of the Western state. In doing so, a state which may be

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attempting to consolidate its sovereignty and assert itself as a state form will only be further undermined, which may lead to the fuelling of more conflict.

The concept of state terror itself seems somewhat analytically unhelpful. When looking at classical and contemporary theories of the state, it has been shown time and time again that the way in which a state becomes a state and maintains itself as a state is through the use and control of violence. While this will not necessarily lead to the use of terrorism, empirically speaking, most states at some point have engaged in some kind of terroristic activity. Thus to accuse one state of terrorism seems misplaced and based on Western criteria of whether a state can be perceived as using terror for the right *ends*. Western support and engagement with terrorism was widespread during the Cold War, as it was seen to serve a political purpose. The over-riding fear of the spread of communism was seen to legitimise the use of terrorism in pursuit of capitalism, democracy and freedom. Of course the Western policy-makers would never describe their tactics as constituting a form of terrorism. However, in the face of an ideological enemy, a fear that pervaded the Western political establishment and the public it would seem that there was some belief that the ends did justify the means. Was this not the same feeling that occupied Robespierre's mind? It is the professed imagining of a greater good, that has driven both the West and French revolutionaries to terror. While this may have been the original intention it was not long before extreme paranoia and fear, and thus irrationality led to more atrocities being committed. This brings to mind Roosevelt's important observation that 'the only thing we have to fear is fear itself' (quoted in Robin 2004, p.28). This is especially true for governments, policy-makers and academics alike. To go back to Montesquieu, constraints on governments not just domestically but internationally may help to lessen its use. What is not useful is an arbitrary use of the concept selectively applied to states which the West wishes to condemn as illegitimate. Thus in academia, it may help to employ a different concept to avoid the pitfalls that necessarily come with the use of the words 'terror' and 'state', as the two have been historically intertwined we are left only with numerous examples, devoid of any substantive analysis.

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