The Terrorist-tactic Contradiction: Academic Disjuncture Between Terrorism and Terrorist Tactics

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Abstract:

The pejorative connotation of the term terrorism and the never-ending debate on its definition has prompted many commentators in the field of terrorism studies and political violence to use the term 'terrorist tactics' in place of terrorism. This practice has resulted in a semantic severing of terrorism and terrorist tactics, with the latter acquiring a relatively milder tone. Thus, where most scholars were hesitant to use the word terrorism because of its emotive overtone and pejorative connotation, they have instead started using the word terrorist tactics to describe the activities of a range of actors like guerillas, insurgents, militants and even criminals. In the midst of all this it has become exceedingly difficult to point out who the terrorist is, as using terrorist tactics alone does not necessarily make one terrorist. Such a practice creates confusion as it contradicts the semantic and epistemological basis of the term. This paper will examine this academic disjuncture between terrorism and terrorist tactics- the reasons for it and how it is unhealthily contributing towards theoretical and conceptual ambiguity in the field of terrorism studies. Addressing this problem will immensely contribute to greater conceptual clarity in the terrorism discourse.

Key Words: Terrorist, Tactic, Definition, Emotive overtone, Pejorative, semantics, epistemology, Academic disjuncture, Theoretical, Conceptual, Terrorism discourse.

Introduction

The moral dilemma of terrorism largely overshadows all conceptual and theoretical discussions in the field of terrorism studies. It is generally believed that the existing theoretical stalemate will never be resolved as long as the moral problem persists. There have, therefore, been attempts from both within and outside the field of terrorism discourse to address this problem.

At its most fundamental level the debate is at a crossroad between two opposing viewpoints. At one end there are academics that accept the term's pejorative undertone and argue that terrorism is inherently immoral and it should therefore be studied as such. On the other hand, there are those who believe that the moral underpinnings of the term prevent academics from studying terrorism objectively. They therefore hold that terrorism must be disconnected from its pejorative underpinnings so that it can be studied impartially.

The word terrorism, as a result of this disagreement, tends to invite a plethora of questions, which often compel the academics to spell out their use of the term as a simple usage could be inferred completely differently. Using the term terrorism has therefore become a source of nuisance for scholars in the field of terrorism studies.

In order to avoid the questions and criticism the word terrorism invites, most academics at both ends of the moral spectrum, have become wary of using the term altogether. Instead, there is now a growing trend in terrorism scholarship to use the term 'terrorist tactics' in place of 'terrorism'and 'terrorist'- under the assumption that such a practice will permit evasion of terrorism's pejorative connotation.

This paper will analyze this recent academic tendency to shy away from the word terrorism. It will point out the contradiction that accompanies all such practices, the academic silence over it and the semantic and logical dilemma it creates. But first it is important to discuss academic apprehensions regarding terrorism's moral underpinnings.

The academic apprehension of the pejorative connotation

Despite widespread disagreements on the definition and meaning of the term terrorism, there is an overwhelming general consensus among scholars that terrorism is a pejorative term. As Bruce Hoffman points out, 'on one point, at least everyone agrees: terrorism is a pejorative term'.[1] Many other influential scholars in the field also emphasize and endorse this position.[2] This academic agreement on the pejorative connotation of the term has had a detrimental impact on the study of terrorism. It is imperative, therefore, to first briefly discuss this negative undertone of terrorism, what it means and how it has proven to be consequential for terrorism studies.

The word ' pejorative' on its own means contempt and disapproval. Its application to terrorism implies negativity and foul play. The pejorative connotation of the term terrorism has its roots in its moral underpinnings, where terrorism is largely seen as illegitimate and an illicit unsanctioned activity. Almost the entire academic discourse agrees that the moral problem of terrorism is mainly responsible for the existing theoretical and conceptual deadlock. Grant Wardlaw, for instance, believes that the main

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[1] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 23.
[2] See e.g., Thornton (1964), Wilkinson (1977), Jenkins (1980), Wardlaw (1989), Crenshaw (2011).

hurdle in understanding it is that, at base, terrorism is a moral problem'. [3] Brian Jenkins also points out that the Use of the term implies a moral judgment'.[4] This moral judgment brings forth the fact that terrorism is a value-laden term with a strong disapproving undertone, which whenever used, automatically gives a moral verdict over the act under question.

The academic community largely recognizes and acknowledges this moral problem, although it remains fundamentally divided on the issue. Some (mostly in orthodox scholarship) view it as an essential attribute and argue that terrorism must be studied in the light of this pejorative backdrop. Mark Rigstad, for instance, deems it unwise to uproot the ordinary core appraised meaning of the term.[5] Tamar Meisels, likewise, points out that any understanding of the term must point out the 'prima facie wrong' with it and what it is that makes terrorism morally repugnant to most of us.[6]

Recent emancipatory and postmodernist approaches to the study of terrorism, such as the critical studies on terrorism' have criticized and challenged the longstanding pejorative status of the term terrorism. They protest against this derogatory backdrop and strongly urge the academic community to shed this attitude and study terrorism objectively. However, in their attempts to observe value neutrality, they do in the process acknowledge the existing predicament of the term's negative undertone in

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[3] Grant Wardlaw, *Political Terrorism: Theory, Tactics, and Counter -Measures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4.

[4] Brian Jenkins. "The Study of Terrorism: Definitional Problems," No. RAND/P-6563. (RAND CORP SANTA MONICA CA, 1980): 63.

[5] Mark Rigstad. "The Senses of Terrorism," *Review Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no.1 (2008): 76.

[6] Tamar Meisels. "The Trouble with Terror: Liberty, Security and the Response to Terrorism," (2008): 19.

the academic discourse.[7] In fact it will not be an exaggeration to say that the very reason why critical studies have emerged is to address this pejorative connotation of terrorism. Thus, even its most vocal critics will not contest the popular usage and implications of the term.

Whether there are attempts to acknowledge the pejorative connotation of terrorism or to redress it, there is a prevailing general sense that the moral problem exists. This moral problem, being the only attribute, most academics agree upon, has had a deep and profound impact on the way scholars study terrorism. The use of the term terrorism because of its implied pejorative connotation (and the conflicting academic positions it raises) always invites a plethora of questions. Therefore, the scholars that use the term have to make their position clear, otherwise they run the risk of speculation on the part of readers. Thus, the negative connotation of terrorism forces theoreticians and academics (that use the term) into stating their respective moral inclinations.

To escape this overarching moral dilemma many academics, suggest that terrorism should instead be treated as a tactic that can be employed by a variety of actors. It is believed that if the academics agree to see terrorism as a tactic, then all the concerns with morality will eventually fade away. Ariel Merari, for instance, sees terrorism as a strategy and as a 'mode of struggle rather than a social aberration[8]. Robert Goodin insists that terrorism is best understood not as a psychology or ideology but instead as a ' distinct political tactic'.[9] Martha Crenshaw also points out that ' the

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[7] See e.g. Burke (2008), Dexter (2012), Jackson (2012).
[8] Ariel Merari. "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence*5, no. 4 (1993): 213.
[9] Robert Goodin, *What's Wrong with Terrorism* (Polity Press, 2006), 31.

method, not the identity or ideology of the user, determines whether or not an action can be defined as terrorism'.[10]

This tendency to see terrorism as a strategy or tactic has prompted many commentators in the field to suggest that terrorism should be seen as a form of warfare. Richard Clutterbuck draws comparison between 'urban guerilla warfare' and terrorism and often uses the terms interchangeably. [11] Andrew Silke is perhaps one of the strongest advocates of treating terrorism as a form of warfare. He considers the distinction between terrorism and warfare as merely illusionary. Silke believes that the academics that consider terrorism as a form of warfare possess a more comprehensive view of the problem and that those who fail to do so are still caught up with its smaller aspects.[12] Alex Schmid also follows this line of argument and suggests that one of the ways to tackle the definitional problem of terrorism would be treat it as 'peace time equivalent of war crimes'where the'terrorist offences could be considered federal crimes against humanity.[13]

Everett Wheeler likewise criticizes approaches that distinguish terrorism from guerilla warfare. Terrorism, she argues, can be better understood if it is placed within the broader 'military theory framework of stratagem' rooted in the Greco-Roman tradition, which she regards as the 'conceptual

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[10] Martha Crenshaw, *Explaining Terrorism, Causes, Processes and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2011), 206.
[11] Richard Clutterbuck, *Terrorism and Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Routledge, 1990).
[12] Andrew Silke. "Terrorism and the Blind Men"s Elephant,*Terrorism and Political Violence* 8, no. 3 (1996): 12-13.
[13] Alex P. Schmid. "The Response Problem as a Definition Problem," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4, no. 4 (1992): 12.

ancestor of modern terrorism'.[14]Merari treats terrorism as one of the strategies that the insurgents can adopt given their circumstances.[15] Richard English, following Clutterbuck's line of argument, believes that' it is perhaps as a subspecies of war that terrorism is best understood'. He also points out that much of what is attributed to terrorism today, its psychological and political dimension in particular, 'is also present in much formal warfare'.[16]

The moral problem has further prompted a parallel debate, particularly in critical circles, to place terrorism within the broader context of violence. Michael Boyle, for instance, points out that the study of terrorism is increasingly getting detached from the study of political violence. This attitude, he argues, has resulted in the treatment of terrorism as an exceptional form of violence and treating terrorism as exceptional is dangerous and not productive.[17] Helen Dexter argues along similar lines and points out that categorization of terrorism produces a 'moral hierarchy of violence'. So, one of the reasons why terrorism is categorized is because it prevents moral critique of violence itself by isolating the bad (terrorism), from the good (legitimate violence).[18]

The academic tendency to see terrorism as a form of warfare or even placing it in a broader context demonstrates the academic ambitions to

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[14]   Everett L. Wheeler. "Terrorism and Military Theory: An Historical Perspective." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1 (1991): 6-33.
[15]   Ariel Merari. "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence*
[16]   Richard English, *Terrorism, How to Respond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23.
[17]   Michael Boyle. "Progress and Pitfalls in the Study of Political Violence," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 4 (2012).
[18]   Helen Dexter. "Terrorism and Violence: Another Violence Is Possible?" *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5, no. 1 (2012): 123.

solve the moral dilemma. And although all such attempts are mainly intended for theoretical convenience and to do away, once and for all, with the pejorative undertone of the term, they have conversely led to even further conceptual confusion. Reasons for this will be discussed in the next section.

The terrorism-tactic contradiction

Does placing terrorism in a broader context or treating it as a form of warfare solve the moral problem? The existing academic stalemate confirms that it does not. Placing terrorism in a broader context of warfare and violence is mainly intended to reduce the term to a method or a tactic to trim down its derogatory connotation. Such a practice is intended to lend flexibility to academics in applying the term to a variety of actors. However, the academic disagreement over what constitutes terrorist tactics in the first place, and the fact that any and all actors could practice it, stretches the term to the verge of redundancy. Furthermore, even with terrorism treated as a method, its moral subtext still looms large, which renders the whole enterprise superfluous.

Warfare and violence in comparison with terrorism have somewhat neutral connotations, as they do not carry its derogatory undertone.[19] It would make sense, therefore, to see terrorism in a broader context to load off its emotional baggage. However, seeing terrorism in such broader context has raised concerns over the legitimacy of war and violence itself- such is the pejorative power of the term terrorism.

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[19] See e.g. Hoffman (2006), Guelke (2006).

This inescapable pejorative power of the term terrorism and the setback of inclusive positions have led to a new and different approach. This new approach rooted in the aforementioned inclusive tradition, however, is neither desirable nor ever promoted as a viable academic alternative. Instead, it is practiced without any formal acknowledgement or credence. Despite lacking any scholarly patronage, this new practice is becoming not only exceedingly common but also deeply entrenched in the contemporary academic practices.

As already pointed out, the efforts to place terrorism in a broader context in an attempt to address the moral problem have largely been unproductive, as the term not only retains its pejorative connotation but also contaminates its affiliates. Consequently, most academics, in order to avoid terrorism's emotional baggage and the questions and criticism it invites, have grown wary of using the term. There is now a growing trend in the academic community to avoid the words 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' and use the word 'terrorist tactics' instead. It is somehow assumed that such a practice will allow evasion of the pejorative undertone. Thus, where most scholars were hesitant to use the word terrorism, they have now found it convenient to use the term terrorist tactics to avoid the gratuitous moral debate.

Under this tactic-centric approach' the phrase terrorist tactics is treated somewhat independent of 'terrorism' and 'terrorist'. It mainly entails that using terrorist tactics alone does not make one terrorist and that a range of actors can commit terroristic violence without being labeled as such. This means that various political actors such as insurgents, guerillas and conventional armies (and even non-political actors) can use terrorist tactics

and at the same time avoid being called terrorists. This of course is done in the hope of extending legitimacy to all such actors and studying them objectively. However, the practice leads to an inherent contradiction (the terrorist-tactic contradiction), which can be illustrated by the following hypothetical situation.

If, for instance, some guerrilla insurgents utilize terrorist tactics to achieve their goals then what should they be called? Will they cease to be guerrillas or will their status change to terrorists? If their status changes to terrorists then this means that guerrillas in principle cannot use terrorist tactics, because if they do, then they will cease to be guerrillas and will instead transform into terrorists. The assertion then that guerrilla can utilize terrorist tactics becomes invalid. If their status stays guerrilla insurgent then this will imply that guerrillas may use terrorist tactics without being labeled terrorist- hence the contradiction.

Therefore, the academics that insist that insurgents, guerillas and conventional armies may utilize terrorist tactics are essentially arguing that such utilization does not necessarily make the practitioners terrorists. So, it appears that for most academics terrorism (and in extension terrorists) are qualitatively different from terrorist tactics. This principally is the essence of the tactic-centric approach. English, for instance, charges the IRA (Irish Republican Army) of using various terrorist tactics but does not see them as a terrorist organization.[20] Likewise, Louise Richardson believes that states can 'use terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy' but at the same time fails to see state actors as terrorists.[21] Hence, for English and

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[20] English, *Terrorism, How to Respond*.
[21] Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understand ing the Enemy, Containing the Threat* (New York: Random House, 2006).

Richardson terrorism is a tactic and the actors that practice them are not necessarily terrorists. Organizations such as Hamas, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) are frequently accused of adopting terrorist tactics. However, they are hardly ever labeled as terrorist organizations in the academic discourse. It is important to note, however, that the academics that practice this tactic-centric approach make no formal acknowledgement of it.

An important reason for this contradiction (other than the moral problem) is the absence of any sound theoretical and conceptual foundation in the terrorism discourse. As a result of this most terrorism scholars more than often start their academic careers through investigating a certain case study, insurgency or civil war typically. This mode of study has a profound impact on their conceptual understanding and later research undertakings. The definition of terrorism developed by Crenshaw, for instance, grew out of her study of the Algerian war and the National

Liberation Front (FLN) in particular,[22] which is largely regarded as an insurgency by the academic community. English, a historian of Northern, Ireland, developed his understanding of terrorism through the subsequent study of the IRA,[23] which was never popularly seen as a terrorist organization in the academic discourse. Both Crenshaw and English charge FLN and IRA of adopting terrorist tactics but do not go so far as to label them as terrorist organizations so as to not undermine their insurgent/guerilla status.

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[22] Martha Crenshaw, *Explaining Terrorism, Causes, Processes and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2011), 2.
[23] English, *Terrorism, How to Respond*.

In the absence of a general overarching theory of terrorism such a bottom-up approach can hardly be criticized. The academic study of terrorism, thus, generally often starts through a close examination of a specific insurgency, guerilla warfare or civil war and the scholars in the process become conscious of using the word terrorism (so as to not undermine or challenge the premise of the movement as a whole).

It is also imperative to discuss the 'strategic approach', which is an important variant of the tactic-centric position. The strategic approach is fairly similar to the tactic-centric approach with the only difference that it formally acknowledges its undertaking. This approach treats terrorism, guerilla warfare and insurgency as strategies that are independent of the actor. It posits that an actor may choose any of these strategies to pursue its goals, and it is this choice that will ultimately determine its status. For instance, an actor will only be called a terrorist if it opts for the terrorist strategy as its mode of struggle.

This strategic position is strongly endorsed by various academics. Merari, for instance, sees terrorism and guerilla warfare as strategies of insurgency and believes that the insurgents may adopt any of the two strategies, depending upon their circumstances.[24] Charles Tilly argues that 'terror is a strategy, not a creed' and that 'a remarkable array of actors sometimes adopt terror as a strategy'.[25] David Jones and M.L.R Smith advocate the utilization of 'strategic theory' for studying terrorism and argue that 'it is merely a tactic… that can be employed by any social actor'.[26] Unlike the

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[24] Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of…,".

[25] Charles Tilly. "Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists," *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 1 (2004): 11.

[26] David Jones and M. L. R. Smith. "We"re All Terrorists Now: Critical or Hypocritical Studies "on" Terrorism?", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 4 (2009): 300.

tactic centric approach, this position clearly lays out that terrorism is nothing more than a strategy that is operationalized under appropriate circumstances and is independent of the actor.

Despite being more reflective, the 'strategic approach' still suffers from similar inherent problems and contradictions. Firstly, most of the actors do not face any clear strategic choices as is often imagined in the discourse. Secondly, the terrorist strategy (composed of various terrorist methods and tactics) is highly contentious as there is hardly any academic consensus as to what methods constitute terrorist tactics.[27] Thirdly, an actor may simply adopt different strategies simultaneously or choose to oscillate between them. As English points out, ..…terrorism often overlaps with guerilla violence or with campaigns that might be termed insurgent'.[28]

This feeds into the argument that terrorist organizations perform multiple functions and each of its roles tend to pull the organization in a different direction. A focus on a certain aspect of the organization may establish it as terrorist, while an emphasis on another may reveal it to be guerilla or insurgent. The question that arises here is that when an actor utilizes more than one strategy or engages in both terroristic and non-terroristic activity then what should it be called? Should the wider movement be defined by its strategic tactics or its other undertakings?

Christopher Finlay also points out this dilemma when he says that 'The stakes in the rhetorical game centrally concern whether one part of a greater organization (or some actions by some of its parts) can be used to

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[27] Methods such as indiscriminate targeting, coercive intimidation, generation of fear, psychological impact, and political motivation are often advanced as terrorist tactics. However, each of these methods as a defining attribute of terrorism is highly contested and there is hardly any general agreement.

[28] English, *Terrorism, How to Respond*, 12.

characterize the organization as a whole'.[29] Boaz Ganor suggests that this problem can be addressed through conducting a quantitative analysis to measure the frequency of different functions the organization performs. If it chiefly engages with terrorist activities then it should be labeled as a terrorist actor. Ganor also believes that a situation may arise in which an actor may be described as both guerilla and terrorist.[30]

In the absence of any consensus on what terrorist tactics are, it will be naïve to assume that such a quantitative analysis could be done to determine the status of an actor. Furthermore, calling an actor both terrorist and guerilla pulls the organization into opposite directions with one undermining and the other upholding its legitimacy. The moral subtext of terrorism more than often proves to be far too powerful to permit the actor from being pulled into any other direction (irrespective of what other functions it performs).

However, the most serious problem with the strategic approach is that it mostly ends up being a tactic-centric approach itself. This happens with the eventual realization that it is not possible to escape the pejorative power of terrorism and if an actor is labeled as a terrorist, then there will be no objective way to study its actions. Thus, despite its normative agenda to emancipate terrorism from the clutches of the moral dilemma, the strategic approach too eventually finds it convenient to not use the word altogether (preferring instead to terrorist tactics only) and so consequently also falls prey to the classic terrorist-tactic contradiction.

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[29] Christopher Finlay. "How to Do Things with the Word Terrorist," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 757.
[30] Boaz Ganor. "Defining Terrorism: Is One Man"s Terrorist Another Man"s Freedom Fighter?," *Police Practice and Research* 3, no.4 (2002): 297.

The unconscious academic disjuncture

The word terrorism is a vicious moral circle that keeps pulling all defying attempts to its center. All the inclusive approaches with their normative agenda to emancipate terrorism from its pejorative undertone have failed to escape its power. The tactic-centric approach (and all its variants) can be seen as one such defying attempt.

From the discussion above it becomes obvious that the tactical and strategic positions have resolved little if at all any of the conceptual problems. Most importantly, these approaches have failed to extricate the term from its pejorative undertone, and have also created a contradictory incongruity that is dangerously getting ingrained in the popular discourse. The implications of all tactical positions are far too many and far too grave to dispense with.

All tactical positions essentially create the paradox of an insurgent/guerilla using terrorist tactics and somehow escaping the label terrorist. This terrorist tactic contradiction' has led to an 'unconscious' severance of the word terrorism (and terrorist) from terrorist tactics. It is important to use the word unconscious here because there is neither academic acknowledgement nor any formal recognition of this practice. This severance of the words raises serious semantic and normative challenges. The logical assumption that accompanies the usage of the term terrorist tactics is that its perpetrators must be terrorists. Stating or implying otherwise, contradicts the semantic and in extension the epistemological basis of terrorism.

This contradiction particularly has major implications for any definitional pursuit of terrorism. If terrorist tactics indeed are different from terrorism

itself then the all-encompassing definitions of terrorism that exist right now are not only inadequate but also largely misleading. As semantics and logic would then dictate that a definition of terrorism should formally acknowledge the difference between terrorism and terrorist tactics and if not, then terrorism and terrorist tactics should be defined separately. No existing definitions of terrorism either make or permit a distinction between terrorism and terrorist tactics. The efforts of all academics that define terrorism are then all but in vain since their premise was not right to begin with.

Arguably if terrorism were to be universally seen as just a tactic or a strategy (and nothing more) then perhaps it could solve the moral problem. However, there are several philosophical reasons why such an undertaking would be too daunting and problematic. In order to see terrorism as a strategy we will first have to acknowledge that terrorism as a phenomenon or ideology does not exist. The primary reason for the terrorist-tactic contradiction is that terrorism, despite contrary claims, is commonly understood as a social phenomenon.

The critical scholars and proponents of the strategic approach will contest this, arguing instead that terrorism is a method, which has erroneously been given the guise of an ideology.[31] However, their inability to address the semantic and logical implications of such a proposition and an intrinsic tendency to fall prey to the terrorist-tactic contradiction has hardly posed any serious challenge to the ideological status of terrorism.

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[31] Anthony Burke. "The End of Terrorism Studies," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (2008).

Furthermore, even if the academic community somehow manages to establish that terrorism is not a social phenomenon and is merely a strategy or a tactic, there will still be further philosophical considerations. On the off chance this ever happens, the underlying ideology and status of all other forms of violence will become highly questionable. For if terrorism is not a social phenomenon (or an ideology) then how can other forms of violence like guerilla warfare and insurgency still be? The inclusive approaches that insist on seeing terrorism in the broader context of violence and warfare will be particularly faced with this dilemma.

The philosophical implications of seeing terrorism as a strategy or tactic at the moment are somewhat secondary in importance, as they will only arise when academics engage directly with the moral problem. On the other hand, the contradictory implications of the widespread tactic-centric positions demand an immediate attention as they take a damaging indirect approach to the problem.

The disjuncture between the term terrorism and terrorist tactics as a result of the terrorist-tactic contradiction is a testament of academic inability to solve the moral problem. It shows that academics have chosen to go around the moral problem rather than taking it at face value. Implying that utilization of terrorist tactics does not necessarily make one terrorist clearly exposes academic hesitation to engage with the problem directly. Shying away from the word altogether to escape its pejorative connotation or treating terrorist tactics as a lesser evil only creates more confusion. The tactical positions will never be able to address the moral dilemma as long as they keep approaching the problem indirectly. They must, therefore, first address the problem of terrorist-tactic contradiction, which has led to

the severance of the word terrorism from terrorist tactics. This will, among other things, pave way for direct engagement with the problem. Without this realization, the semantic, logical and normative challenges will be far too many to allow any theoretical advancement. Recognition and confrontation of this widespread misconstruction will be the first step in the right direction to solve the moral problem.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to highlight a problem of considerable gravity. It has assessed the efforts of the academic community to address the pejorative connotation of the term terrorism. The philosophical and theoretical implications of resolving the moral problem of terrorism are undeniably tremendous. The tactical and strategic approaches have by and large been the foremost academic attempts to take on this colossal undertaking. Sadly, however, because of their inability to engage directly with the problem, they have resolved very little if at all any of the existing conceptual predicaments.

The tactic-centric approach essentially encourages academics to escape rather than address the pejorative undertone of the term terrorism. This practice, which is becoming exceedingly common in the popular discourse, has conversely led to the terrorist-tactic contradiction, where different actors can employ terrorist tactics and still manage to evade the label terrorist. What is most puzzling and alarming, however, is the academic silence over this widespread practice. This inherent contradiction has also led to an unconscious academic disjuncture between the word terrorism and terrorist tactics.

In order to effectively deal with the predicament, it must be addressed directly as all existing indirect approaches in essence merely go around the moral problem. For any serious attempt at normative theory building, definitional development and direct engagement, there must first be a formal acknowledgement of the widespread terrorist-tactic contradiction and the disjuncture between the word terrorism and terrorist tactics that it leads to. As without any formal acknowledgement such usage will get further entrenched and the disjuncture between terrorism and terrorist tactics will be further cemented- resulting in a theoretical stalemate, which will raise serious normative challenges for any future understanding of terrorism.

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