

Compare and contrast the phenomena of guerrilla warfare and urban terrorism.

Guerrilla warfare and urban terrorism can be distinguished as forms of action by the intended target; the methods and tactics used by each group are often strikingly similar. *The Webster's Dictionary* (1983) defines guerrilla as "one who engages in irregular warfare, especially as a member of an independent unit carrying out harassment and sabotage". Terrorism, as Paul Wilkinson defines it, is "the systematic use of coercive intimidation, usually to service political ends. It is used to create and exploit a climate of fear among a wider group than the immediate victims of the violence, and to publicise a cause, as well as to coerce a target to acceding to the terrorists' aims" (2000, pp. 12-13). Terrorist and guerrilla groups can fall into both of these categories.

"Guerrilla" means "little war" in Spanish and, typically, those engaged in guerrilla warfare are fighting for liberation of a native land from an oppressive regime; the right to fight against a foreign oppressor (and in some cases, a native one) is recognized by the United Nations. There are rules for waging an irregular war. In addition to military tactics, outlines include guidance on dealing with the local population in a respectful manner (Mao Tse Tung 1937, ch.6). In any case, uninvolved non-combatants are not to be engaged within the context of a "pure" guerrilla conflict. On the contrary: the populace is to be wooed to the side of the guerrilla force. Many terrorists also shelter with or blend into sympathetic populations.

The United States State Department defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents" (USDS Statute 22 USC 2656f/d, 2005). This is consistent with Wilkinson's definition and both make a point of noting that non-combatants are usually the targeted individuals in a terrorist action. The USDS includes non-deployed military

personnel as non combatants but most guerrilla fighting forces would regard these people as fair game.

The Irgun and the Irish Republican Army are examples of guerrilla fighting groups that have also committed terrorist acts; civilians were targeted, injured and killed indiscriminately.

The Irgun was formed in Palestine in 1931, originally to defend the Jewish population from Arab attacks. Mere defence was ineffective and retaliation was introduced. When Jewish civilians were killed, the Irgun retaliated by killing Arab civilians. The British occupying force was targeted after it began restricting Jewish immigration. British officers were assassinated, their headquarters, the King David Hotel, bombed. The Irgun were condemned as terrorists by the British and other Jewish Agencies. (Lapidot 1999)

The original Irish Republican Army was created as a guerrilla fighting force in the 1860s to establish an independent Ireland; the modern Provisional IRA developed as the “self-proclaimed defender of the Catholic minority against sectarian attack, due to the failure of the police and the army to control the situation” (*MS Encarta Encyclopaedia* 2005). Later, the Provisional IRA used terrorist tactics, targeting civilians as well as military personnel.

Both the Irgun and the IRA existed in order to further the liberation (or establishment) of a state or homeland and rid said homeland of an oppressive government. This struggle has repeated itself thousands, if not millions, of times throughout world history. Again, the United Nations does recognize this as a legitimate objective through the action of guerrilla warfare, which follows conventional rules of war.

The United States, currently one of the key players in their declared war against terrorism, conducted covert actions in Central America that could--according to its own government's definition of terrorism--be considered acts of terrorism but have been classified (by the US government) as guerrilla tactics. Civilian non-combatants were

indeed the objects of premeditated violence by clandestine agents and these tactics were used to service political ends, as described by Wilkinson. The USA was certainly not engaged in a struggle for a homeland in the context of its actions in Central America. In this view, the USA could be seen as collaborating with the oppressors.

A Brazilian revolutionary, Carlos Marighella, wrote that “Today, to be ‘violent’ or a ‘terrorist’ is a quality that ennobles any honourable person, because it is an act worthy of a revolutionary engaged in armed struggle against the shameful military dictatorship and its atrocities“ (1969,p.1). But he also writes that “the ...guerrilla follows a political goal, and only attacks the government, the big businesses and the foreign imperialists” (1969, p.2).

As long as oppressive regimes have generated disgruntled revolutionaries, terrorism, too, has existed. The United Nations does not recognize terrorism as a legitimate tool in a struggle for liberation; but unlike the guerrilla/freedom-fighter groups who committed acts of terrorism in the past, many of today’s terrorist groups have clearly defined themselves, whatever their motives. Fred Halliday has noted that the militant leaders in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine portray the cause of resistance to the West and its regional allies in the Muslim world as one” and he notes that the connections between these countries have strengthened over the years. (2002, p.40)

“Resistance to the west” in the broader sense is a vague objective, but under this banner these groups have aggressively targeted civilian as well as military or government installations. Of the four planes dispatched on 11 September, only two were aimed at clearly military/government establishments. Additionally, further bombings in Bali, in Kusadasi (Turkey), London and Madrid were directed at non-combatants in urban or semi-urban settings.

While the Palestinians, for instance, have a clear mission, the actions they have taken to achieve their goals can be categorized as terrorism: civilians as well as military personnel are primary targets in Israel. The genocide in Rwanda to further a governmental coup was

a terrorist action, as were the massacres of Croatian and Bosnian Muslims.

Bombings of public facilities used predominantly by civilians (i.e. public transport systems, nightclubs, religious buildings) are tactics used by guerrillas but, usually, citizens and authorities are warned, to minimize casualties. In terrorist actions, civilian casualties are the goal.

For both guerrillas and terrorists, the motives are the same—to draw attention to the cause, strike fear into government and populace, and provide leverage for a demand.

Urban terrorism is not a recent phenomenon. The nature of the terrorist engagement demands that as many people are injured or killed as possible; logically, this is facilitated by carrying out actions in crowded areas like cities. Additionally, an action that harms more rather than fewer is more likely to get widespread media attention, particularly in the last two decades. Sensational acts are both easier to cover and more likely to get a response. Compare this to the humble guerrilla leader somewhere in a jungle or forest or desert, making sporadic forays to attack a larger force.

It would also seem that, in the context of guerrilla warfare, there is a resolution. The oppressor is toppled and a new regime takes over (and the process begins anew). With objectives like “resistance to the west”, resolution is murkier. Will groups like Al-Quaeda be satisfied with one homeland governed by Sharia law? Probably not. It is almost as if these terrorist acts become an end to themselves, with perpetrators who are propelled by extreme views and, perhaps, the adrenalin rush. There is no end resolution in sight. Even if all foreign troops were withdrawn from these Arab nations, there is no guarantee that the civilian populations of these countries will support the Al-Quaeda objective; even in Afghanistan the revolt was against the Soviet occupiers.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, an Irgun leader, opposed “on moral grounds” the reprisal policies; later he wrote an article in which he claimed, “There is no war which is not conducted against the innocent, just as there is no war which is not fraternal strife. Therefore every war and the tribulations it brings is accursed, whether offensive or defensive, and if you do not

wish to harm the innocent - you will die. And if you do not wish to die - then shoot and stop prattling” (1938)

On some level the reasons for conflict are irrelevant; there will always be one person or people who can manufacture a reasonable justification for action. The story depends on who is telling it and what seems preposterous to one person is completely logical to another. Land will almost always be a point of conflict and nationalism a reason to take up arms. Corrupt leaders will continue to surface in various governments, providing citizens with a reason to revolt.

Given that global conflict is unlikely to cease in the near future, one can only strive towards a more peaceful resolution. If that peaceful resolution is not forthcoming, the next best thing (or least worst) is to confine casualties and combat to those who have actively chosen to become a part of the conflict (i.e. military personnel). Many terrorists could argue that, simply by living in a certain place, civilians become collaborators, but this is just not the case. Most people do not or cannot choose where they are born and exist and to judge and condemn them remotely is unacceptable.

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