Terrorism

Peer Discussion

- What is terrorism?

Defining terrorism

- Audrey Kurth Cronin provides a reasonable definition: terrorism is political in nature (i.e. seeks to induce political change by inducing fear, overreaction, etc.), perpetrated by non-state actors, and the deliberate but seeming random targeting of non-combatants. Terrorism is an asymmetric tactic of weak non-state actors against (usually) overwhelmingly stronger states.

Terrorism

- Four types of terrorist groups
  - Left Wing
  - Right wing
  - Ethnonationalist/separatist
  - Religious/sacred

Terrorism

- Originally: state violence in French Revolution

- Now: violence used by groups to generate political change

- Realists: Terrorist violence illegitimate

- Weakest form of irregular warfare

- (globalization) factors enable transnational terrorism
  - Air travel
  - Media
  - Common causes
- Modern democratization of force also facilitates terrorism

Terrorism

- Why does terrorism maintain its vitality?
  - Culture
  - Economics
  - Religion

- Kronin
  - Terrorism intimately linked with religion
  - Reaction with military force insufficient

Peer Discussion

- Is terrorism a useful concept?

Challenging the concept of terrorism

- The term terrorism creates the false impression that there is a special or unique terrorism phenomenon perpetrated by a special or unique terrorist actor, impeding the ability to understand politically motivated violence as part of broader social and political systems

- In calling something a 'terrorist' attack, what intellectual and political agenda is at work?

- Political Effect: By using the term 'terrorism', policymakers invoke a system of meaning that generates conditions of fear and insecurity.

  - Militarized response, but is that best course of action?

Challenging the concept of terrorism

- Analyzing 298 incidents from 1945 to 2004, Jordan found that killing the leader of a group resulted in its collapse only 30 percent of the time. With religious organizations, less than 5 percent collapsed after the leader was killed. Overall, organizations were actually more prone to decline if their leaders survived

Challenging the concept of terrorism

- Problem for the scholarly study of terrorism: classification of political violence based on intent.

- The old, overused adage that one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter gets at this issue.

- This suggests that the concept of terrorism (and thus the field of terrorism studies) depends on whether one is on the receiving end of politically oriented violence rather than on something intrinsically unique to terrorist violence

Challenging the concept of terrorism

- The asymmetric nature of the violence and the targeting of non-combatants might be held to rescue the uniqueness of terrorism as an organizing concept. However, neither concept is particular to phenomena labeled as terrorism. Asymmetric tactics pervade actual and possible situations of politically oriented violence

Challenging the concept of terrorism

- Neither is the targeting of non-combatants particularly unique. The United States targeted non-combatants at very large scales when it fire bombed Tokyo and Dresden during World War Two.

Challenging the concept of terrorism

- Finally, one might argue that the indirect, psychological aspect of terrorism is what sets it apart as phenomenon.

  - Arguably the US, in dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, sought to generate fear in the populations not directly targeted.

  - Clausewitz noted in On War, central to any military strategy is breaking the will to fight of the opposing side, which in turn means draining support for the war from the sentiment of the opposing society.

17.41 Introduction to International Relations
Spring 2018