1. Defining ‘terrorism’

I will address the question whether the rhetoric of "terror" help or hinder efforts to understand contemporary political violence?

Let me begin with definition. Many observers have pointed out that despite the fact that for over three decades, “terrorism” has been deemed a threat to the civilized world, to democratic values, or to “our way of life,” and despite the fact that our country is now engaged in a “war on terror,” there is no universally agreed upon definition of terrorism—not even the various agencies within the U.S. Government are agreed—and, hence, there is no clarity about what we are warring against.

There are rhetorical reasons for being vague about the term for, as Plato taught us, once you try to become precise about the terms you employ, then your own commitment opens the doors to critical scrutiny of the sort that can generates uncomfortable conclusions and exposes inconsistencies.

Yet, if we are to talk intelligently about terrorism, if we are to draft and pass legislation concerning terrorism, debate policies about how to deal with terrorism, and inquiring into the causes and cures of terrorism—which, as rational citizens of a democracy, we should be doing—then we cannot avoid characterizing and clarifying what it is we are talking about.

To cut to the chase, most definitions agree that terrorism (i) involves the deliberate use or the threat of violence, (ii) is politically-motivated, and (iii) is directed against non-military personnel, that is, against civilians. Taking these as the essential features of terrorism, perhaps the simplest and more accurate reportive definition is this:

**Terrorism** is deliberate, politically-motivated violence, or the threat of such, directed against civilians.

So defined, terrorism is nothing new. It is as ancient as organized warfare, emerging as soon as one society, pitted against another in the quest for land, resources, or domination, was moved by a desire for vengeance, or, found advantages in military operations against civilians or other “soft” targets. It is sanctioned and glorified within holy scriptures, and has been part of the genesis of states and the expansion of empires from the inception of recorded history. The United States itself emerged through the systematic ethnic cleansing of native Americans, a nearly 300 year campaign that featured the destruction of homes and crops, the theft of land, forced expulsions, massacres, and tears.
2. Effects of the Rhetoric of ‘Terror’

Attempts to understand, evaluate, and craft a proper response to terrorism must come to grips with the fact that labeling someone a ‘terrorist’ is itself, more often than not, a political act in its own right. To appreciate this, one must recognize two salient features of the contemporary usage of ‘terrorist’ and ‘terrorism’.

The first feature is that both words have acquired an intensely negative connotation in contemporary discourse. Terrorism is perceived as breaking the rules of legitimate political violence by refusing to respect the distinction between belligerents and civilians, and by using methods that should not be employed, for example, hijacking commercial airliners or killing hostages. As such, terrorism and its agents have come to be viewed as morally reprehensible.

The second feature is that the terms are used as though they have an indexical, egocentric, or perspectival character, essentially dependent upon a speaker’s point of view, much like the words ‘stranger’, ‘foreigner’, or ‘enemy’. Obviously, no one is an enemy as such, but only an enemy to someone or other. When I use ‘enemy’ and ‘the enemy’ I am talking about my enemy or our enemy, implicitly evoking my own perspective in using the label. Similarly, when we hear people speaking of ‘terrorism,’ in actual practice they are talking about violence directed against “themselves,” or, in first-person terms, against “us.”

Now mind you, there is nothing in the semantics of the term ‘terrorism’ that warrants the perspectival or egocentric usage. The standard English-language dictionaries and encyclopedias indicate that the term depicts a mode of political violence involving civilians or noncombatants, and suggest nothing to the effect that violence is classified as ‘terrorist’ because of the perspective of its users.

But even if we acknowledge that the term has evolved semantically to encompass perspectivalism, that alone would afford no basis for moral claims about terrorism, for instance, that it is an unjust or immoral use of violence. Just as there is no automatic moral taint to being an enemy—many good people have been enemies to someone or other—so too, if a terrorist act is wrongful, it is not because it is politically motivated violence directed at us. If an action is morally wrong, it is because it possesses some universalizable morally relevant characteristic, say, that it is violence directed at civilians, or against innocent people, or that it uses improper means, or that it is politically motivated violence, or—from a pacifist perspective—that it is violence. For the purposes of making a moral claim, the perspectival character of the term ‘terrorism’ is irrelevant.

Finally, it goes almost without saying that the mere negative connotation of a term is no grounds for moral opprobrium towards whatever or whomever it applies to. The terms ‘enemy’, ‘stranger’, ‘foreigner’ all harbor a degree of negativity, but they apply to everyone, saint and sinner alike.

These subtleties of indexical usage and moral relevance are lost upon the general public, even the educated public. As a consequence of the two features of the contemporary rhetoric of ‘terror’—
the pejorative overtones of the words ‘terror’, ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorist’, and the perspectival employment of these terms—the rhetoric of ‘terror’ has become an important political weapon for molding thought and stimulating consent, a weapon whose reach extends from the propaganda arsenals of government agencies and associated “think tanks” through the popular media into political discussion, scholarly publications, classrooms, and, thereby, into the private thoughts of the general public.

The basic strategy is to depict one’s enemies as terrorists, and those who oppose one’s policies for dealing with these enemies, as supporters of terrorism. The effects of so doing are fairly dramatic, and let me list some of the more prominent results here.

1. **Permit inconsistencies in ascriptions of “terrorism.”**

Because of the negative connotation, no one wants to be accused of terrorism, and because of the indexical character it is nearly incoherent to describe one’s own actions, or those of your allies, as ‘terrorist’. Thus, people who are labeled ‘terrorist’ are not all and only those who commit politically-motivated violence against civilians as the standard definition might suggest; instead, the label is ascribed selectively to fit the perspective of the speaker and audience.

To illustrate, it is unquestioned in the mainstream Western media that those who flew hijacked planes into the World Trade Center towers, or those who have turned themselves into suicide bombers in Iraq, Israel, or Sri Lanka, are engaged in terrorist activity. But many actions that would qualify as terrorist under most definitions—certainly under the standard definition—are not described as such, nor are their perpetrators referred to as ‘terrorists.’

Some of these were committed by sub-national groups, for example,
- the massacre of Bosnian civilians in the mid-1990s;
- the attacks upon civilians in Nicaragua by the U.S. financed “contra” rebels of the 1980s that claimed several thousand civilian lives;
- the massacre of approximately 3000 Palestinian civilians by the Israeli-supported members of various Lebanese militias in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Beirut in 1982.

If we broaden our scope and examine some of the overt actions committed by states, then there are numerous examples that are not usually labeled as “terrorist” though they qualify as such under those definitions that allow for state terrorism. These include,
- Bombing of Fallujah (and other Iraqi cities) by American in 2004 featuring the use of cluster bombs and phosphorus bombs;
- the destruction of Grozny by Russian forces during the Chechnya war in 1999;
- the US invasion of Panama in 1990; (Over 2,000 Panamanians were killed in the invasion to capture one leader.)
- the US bombing of Tripoli, Libya in April 1986; (over 100 dead)
- the Israeli aerial and land bombardment of Beirut in the summer of 1982; (over 5500 dead)
- the Syrian army’s attack on the city of Hama in the spring of 1982; (over 10,000 dead)
- the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor, 1975-1998. (over 100,000 civilians killed)
These terrorist actions pale in comparison to more large-scale campaigns such as occurred during WWII by all sides to the conflict.

At the opposite extreme, some actions are routinely labeled ‘terrorist’ that do not qualify as terrorist under the standard definition nor under the definitions championed by U.S. governmental agencies. For example, the U.S. media was replete with references to “terrorist” actions by the Lebanese group, Hezbollah, against the Israeli military in southern Lebanon during its occupation of southern Lebanon, or, again, by Palestinians against Israeli soldiers in the occupied territories, targets that do not qualify as civilians or noncombatants under any acceptable definition. The same can be said for actions directed against the U.S. military, say, the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen in October 2000, or the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983—acts usually labeled as "terrorism" even though they target military personnel in foreign territory.

2. **Dehumanize any individuals or groups described as “terrorist.”**
   Because of its negative connotation and perspectival character, the effects of this the ‘terrorist’ label automatically discredits any individuals or groups to whom it is affixed, placing them outside the norms of acceptable social and political behavior, and portraying them as “evil” people that cannot be reasoned with.

   The abuse of prisoners at the American-operated prisons, e.g., in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, should also be seen in this light. The Navy's top legal officer, John Hutson, recently said "The taint of association with terrorists can influence the way soldiers treat these prisoners... It's pretty clear what the intention is, what the atmosphere is. It goes from the administration to the generals to the colonels to the majors to the captains and lieutenants. And pretty soon, that's the message all around: These are terrorists and different rules apply."

3. **Erase any incentive an audience might have to understand the point of view of the “terrorists” so that questions about the nature and origins of their grievances and the possible legitimacy of their demands will not even be raised;**

   This devastating strategy of discouraging inquiry into causes is typified in the following quotation by a well-known figure in American academic and legal circles:
   
   *We must commit ourselves never to try to understand or eliminate its alleged root causes, but rather to place it beyond the pale of dialogue and negotiation.*
   

   But it's critical to understand the root causes of particular instances of political violence. And what are these root causes? It’s no real mystery to those who have actually studied the systematic use of terrorism by various groups over the years. For example, take this conclusion drawn by Robert Pape in his important book on the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism. Look what Pape says:
What nearly all suicide terrorist attacks actually have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland. . . . Three general patterns in the data support these conclusions. First, nearly all suicide terrorist attacks - 301 of the 315 in the period I studied - took place as part of organized political or military campaigns. Second, democracies are uniquely vulnerable to suicide terrorists; America, France, India, Israel, Russia, Sri Lanka and Turkey have been the targets of almost every suicide attack of the past two decades. Third, suicide terrorist campaigns are directed toward a strategic objective: from Lebanon to Israel to Sri Lanka to Kashmir to Chechnya, the sponsors of every campaign - 18 organizations in all - are seeking to establish or maintain political self-determination.


4. Deflect attention away from one’s own policies that might have contributed to the grievances of the “terrorists”—in short, to silence policy critics;

   Thus, if individuals and groups are portrayed as evil, irrational, barbaric, and beyond the pale of negotiation and compromise, then asking why they resort to terrorism is viewed as pointless, needlessly accommodating, or, at best, mere pathological curiosity.

5. Repudiate any calls to negotiate with “terrorists”;

   You see this in the quotation from Dershowitz (above).

6. Prepare the way for the use of force and violence in dealing with “terrorists,” specifically, by making it easier for a government to exploit the fears of its citizens and stifle any objections to the manner in which it responds to terrorist violence;

7. Obliterate the distinction between national liberation movements and fringe fanatics (whose recourse to violence is either unrelated to a legitimate grievance and whose tactics constitute a disproportional response to an alleged offense).

The general strategy is nothing new; it is part and parcel of the war of ideas and language that accompanies overt hostilities, and it is now employed by governments around the world. The term ‘terrorism’ is simply the current vogue for discrediting one’s opponents and paving the way for violent action against them, before the risky business of inquiry into their complaints and grievances can get off the ground.

All of these effects can be seen in the current “war on terror” waged by the American government and some of its allies. The rhetoric has thereby camouflaged the reality of this war, which is, in effect, an American attempt to

- eliminate any opposition to its aggressive policies in the Middle East;
- establish a permanent military presence in the Middle East;
- reinforce pro-American regimes in the Islamic World;
- control resources in the Middle East;
- protect Israeli expansionism in the occupied territories;
• pacify the Islamic world so that it accepts American hegemony throughout the region.

3. The Rhetoric of 'Terror' Increases Terrorism

Now I want to make a more radical charge. Rhetoric of this magnitude is bound to produce results in a context of political turmoil, especially among agitated people looking for solutions. The language of ‘terror’ fosters shortsighted belligerence among those oblivious to its propagandistic employment, while increasing the resentment of those who are so labeled. Moreover, by so effectively erasing any incentive to understand the motives behind terrorist violence or to critically examine governmental policies that might have caused grievances, the rhetoric serves to silence meaningful political debate. Those normally inclined to ask “why?” are fearful being labeled “soft” on terrorism, or "unpatriotic," while the more militant use the ‘terrorist’ label to deface the distinction between critical examination and appeasement.

Thus, far from contributing to a peaceful resolution of conflict, it prepares both types of person for more violence. Far from making the world a safer place, it has made the world more terrifying. Quite directly, the rhetoric of “terror” actually increases terrorism in at least four distinct ways.

First, it magnifies the effect of terrorist actions by heightening fear among civilian populations.

If we demonize the terrorists, if we portray them as arbitrary irrational beings devoid of a moral sense and beyond all norms, we are amplifying the fear and alarm among civilians that is generated by terrorist incidents, regardless if this forms part of the political objectives of the perpetrators. If people don't know the circumstances from which the violence emerges, and if they come to believe that the perpetrators operate with no moral principles, with no rational restraints, and that their sole ambition is sow death and destruction, or, to destroy their type of civilization, then they are plunged into a state of alarm because they fear similar thing might happen to them.

George Lakoff (Univ. of California Linguist): "The word terror activates your fear, . . . The "war on terror" is not about stopping you from being afraid, it's about making you afraid."

Second, those who succumb to the rhetoric of “terror” will support a violent elimination of what they perceive to be a terrorist threat—under the guise of “retaliation,” “counter-terrorism,” or “deterrence”—that is likely to result in harm to civilians.

That is, people will endorse violent actions of their own government, not only against those who commit terrorist actions, but also against those populations from whose ranks the terrorists emerge. Why so? This kind of terrorist warfare is actually a form of guerilla warfare waged not by state militia, but by groups whose members live within populations they claim to represent and which may or may not support their actions. Thus, going after them where they are, with a powerful military like ours that attempts to minimize risks to its own soldiers, is likely to expose
civilians to significant harm. And this is what has happened in Afghanistan. The Guardian reported in December 2001 that in the first two months of the US invasion over 3700 Afghan civilians had been killed by American bombs. (www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,622000,00.html, citing Professor Marc W. Herold of University of New Hampshire)

On the evening of September 11, 2001, President Bush vowed to retaliate against those responsible for today's attacks on New York and Washington, declaring that he would "make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."

A CBS/New York Times poll of 1216 Americans conducted a week after September 11, 2001, asked the following questions about the 9/11 attacks.
Do you think that the U.S. should take military action against whoever is responsible for the attacks? 92% said Yes.
These people were then asked:
What if that meant that many thousands of innocent civilians may be killed, then do you think the U. S. should take military action against whoever is responsible for the attacks? 68% said Yes.

In his novel, 1984, George Orwell described doublethink as “the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them,” and he portrayed it as a device for destroying the capacity for independent critical or rational thinking, for all critical thinking is founded on the assumptions that if a proposition is true then its opposite is not true. Hence, since affirming a proposition is a commitment to its truth, then to also affirm its opposite is irrationality. If we renounce rationality, only rhetorically-induced emotion and force are left to guide us. There will be no ability to protest a policy or action by saying, hey, that's false, that's wrong—for what is false is true, and what is wrong is right. Doublethink is thereby a device for bringing about a general mental condition of "controlled insanity."

Something like doublethink is occurring as the result of the rhetoric of "terror." In hearing some individuals or groups identified as "terrorists," the ordinary person is caused to forget that these are fellow human beings with their own concerns and hopes, their own families and communities. Swept away from all consideration is their history, the reasons for their discontent, and the details of our past involvement with them. The power of language confines consciousness to one powerful image; these are terrorists and must be eliminated at all costs.

In the course of such thinking, well-meaning people think of terrorism as something profoundly evil to be eliminated at all costs, yet they become are insouciant [indifferent] about the massive destruction this might entail. The very fact that 68% of Americans who supported the use of military force in combating terrorists would do so even if it were to cause the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians (that's almost 62% of the total polled) should give us some cause for Orwellian reflection. In sanctioning the use of force against civilian populations, people
advocate the very thing they condemn—and this is closer to doublethink that we should ever wish to be.

Third, short of genocide, a violent response that harms civilians within an already disaffected community is likely to further embitter and stiffen the resolve of those from whose ranks terrorists have emerged, and thereby cause them to resort to more violence of their own.

Violence will lead members of that community to view their foes—whom they have already identified as their oppressors—as people who cannot be reasoned with, as people who, because they avail themselves so readily of the rhetoric of ‘terror,’ know only the language of force. As long as they perceive themselves to be victims of intolerable injustices and view their oppressors as unwilling to arrive at an acceptable compromise, they are likely to answer violence with more violence.

Consider the following statement by a high profile figure, Osama bin Laden in October 2004:
The events that affected my soul in a direct way started in 1982 when America permitted the Israelis to invade Lebanon and the American Sixth Fleet helped them in that. This bombardment began and many were killed and injured and others were terrorized and displaced. I couldn't forget those moving scenes, blood and severed limbs, women and children sprawled everywhere. Houses destroyed along with their occupants and high rises demolished over their residents, rockets raining down on our home without mercy. . . . In those difficult moments many hard-to-describe ideas bubbled in my soul, but in the end they produced an intense feeling of rejection of tyranny, and gave birth to a strong resolve to punish the oppressors. And as I looked at those demolished towers in Lebanon, it entered my mind that we should punish the oppressor in kind and that we should destroy towers in America in order that they taste some of what we tasted and so that they be deterred from killing our women and children. And that day, it was confirmed to me that oppression and the intentional killing of innocent women and children is a deliberate American policy. Destruction is freedom and democracy, while resistance is terrorism and intolerance. Is defending oneself and punishing the aggressor in kind, terrorism? If it is such, then it is unavoidable for us.

Fourth, and most insidiously, those who employ the rhetoric of ‘terror’ for their own political ends, may well be encouraging actions that they understand will generate or sustain further violence directed against civilians.

How might that happen? Well, suppose you want to provoke a population into behaving in a violent desperate manner so you can use that as an excuse to intensify measures against them (whether this be an imposition of greater restrictions, confiscating their land, ethnic cleansing, genocide)? Then, you ratchet up the demonization process so to pave the way for violence against that population. When that happens, your verbal behavior is a means for securing consent that in turn makes it easier to employ violence against civilians and thereby secure your political objectives.
In such a case, the rhetoric of "terror" is an *instance* of terrorism just as much as any direct order to carry out a bombing of civilian targets. In both cases, there is purposeful verbal action aimed at bringing about a particular result through violence against civilians. In this way, as the rhetoric of 'terror' prepares public opinion to accept actions against civilians through a steady process of demonization, it has itself become a deadly weapon, with powerful psychological effects, designed to make it easier for governments to carry out their own terrorism. As such, it is itself part of the problem of terrorism.
4. Example: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

All of these uses and effects of the rhetoric of ‘terror’ are manifested by the ongoing use of this rhetoric in depicting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For more than three decades, this rhetoric has fostered the popular perception that Arab terrorism is the central problem in the Middle East crisis, and that once solved, progress can be made on other issues. Nothing could be more illusory. The Western obsession with Arab terrorism not only overlooks the fact that terrorist activity between Arabs and Jews has been reciprocal, but, more generally, that attempts to remove an effect without touching its causes are utterly futile. Terrorism between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews is the product of deep divisions, entrenched strategies, and fundamental grievances, and will not disappear so long as both sides cling to their present political ambitions and convictions.

The state of Israel was established by means of terrorist violence against the Palestinian Arabs during the war of 1947-48, and its governments have engaged in a steady campaign of violence against Arab civilians ever since. Thus, when the Palestinian refugees began to launch sporadic raids into what had become Israeli territory in the early 1950s, the Israeli Government responded with terrorism of its own, following a policy that its first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion had urged in 1948:

Blowing up a house is not enough. What is necessary is cruel and strong reactions. We need precision in time, place, and casualties. If we know the family, strike mercilessly, women and children included. Otherwise, the reaction is inefficient. At the place of action there is no need to distinguish between guilty and innocent.

Excerpt from Ben Gurion’s diary, published in Yedioth Ahronot, 17 April 1983.

This policy has characterized Israeli dealings with Palestinians ever since. Predictably, many Palestinians reacted with violence to Israel’s steady campaign of expansion in the West Bank, which has featured a 40 year military occupation over the Palestinian population, confiscation of Palestinian land, establishment of Jewish civilian settlements, strangulation of the Palestinian economy, widespread violations of Palestinian human rights (beatings, arbitrary imprisonment, collective punishments, destruction of property, restrictions of freedom of movement, torture, targeted killings).

What Israeli leaders realized in the 1970s, that the rhetoric of ‘terror’ could be used as a propaganda device to not only discredit their Palestinian opponents but also to obfuscate and to deflect attention away from their own controversial policies in the occupied territories. The effect has been to demonize the Palestinians and, thereby, to cause the audience to not even inquire into the causes of the Palestinians’ recourse to violence, and grievances, and, thereby, to be wholly oblivious to Israeli policies that have provoked the Palestinians’ reactions.

A prime example is a widely circulated book edited by Benjamin Netanyahu entitled, Terrorism: How the West Can Win published in 1986, featured in Time Magazine shortly thereafter, and often used as a text in courses in American universities during the late 1980s and 1990s. While the book offered the standard definition of ‘terrorism,’ the editor and the contributors used the “doublethink” strategy by applying the term selectively and echoing the familiar strategy that the
only way to combat terrorism is to “to weaken and destroy the terrorist’s ability to consistently launch attacks,” even at the “risk of civilian casualties.” Very little was said about the possible causes of terrorist violence beyond vague allusions to Islam’s confrontation with modernity or passages of this calibre from Netanyahu’s own pen:

The root cause of terrorism lies not in grievances but in a disposition toward unbridled violence. This can be traced to a worldview that asserts that certain ideological and religious goals justify, indeed demand, the shedding of all moral inhibitions. In this context, the observation that the root cause of terrorism is terrorists is more than a tautology. (p. 204)

The scholar can pass off comments like these as pure propaganda—if not a brand of psychological lunacy—but it is significant that Netanyahu’s book reached a large audience, especially since its contributors included not only academics and journalists but important policy makers as well. Netanyahu himself went on to become the Israeli Prime Minister, and among the American contributors were the Secretary of State George Schultz, UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and Senators Daniel Moynihan and Alan Cranston, each of whom voiced sentiments similar to those of Netanyahu. The upshot was that powerful people perpetuated the image of a terrorist as a carrier of “oppression and enslavement,” having “no moral sense,” “a perfect nihilist,” and whose elimination is the only rational means for the West to “win.”

And the effects of this rhetoric have been dramatic. The single most devastating use occurred in September 1982, when the Israeli government claimed that 2000 “terrorists” remained in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla (Beirut) after the supposed evacuation of Palestinian fighters. The Israeli forces allowed Lebanese militia to enter the camps, and within the next two days, some 3000 Palestinian civilians were massacred.

In more recent years, the Israeli government has justified its use of tanks, Apache attack helicopters, and F16 fighter planes against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, all in the name of fighting terrorism. As a result, over 5000 Palestinians in these territories have been killed since September 2000, an an estimated 75% of these were unarmed civilians.

That the Israeli government could so easily succeed in convincing people that Israel was eliminating the “terrorist infrastructure” of the Palestinians—rather than a good deal of the institutional structure of Palestinian society—illustrates how the rhetoric of ‘terror’ is a causal factor in generating even more terrorism. Pro-Israeli articles immediately appeared in major Israeli and American publications explicitly justifying the deaths of Palestinian civilians.

- Washington Post Columnist Michael Kelly urged Israelis to "unleash an overwhelming force" against Palestinians and to "go ahead and escalate the violence" and to "destroy, capture, and expel" (Washington Post, 15 August 2001). Wall Street Journal columnist Ralph Peters claimed that the killing of Palestinian civilians, including children, who “shield” terrorists—“human monsters” who are enemies of Israel or the U.S.—is “justifiable” (“Civilian Casualties: No Apology Needed”, Wall Street Journal, 25 July, 2002).

- One result was that the bulk of the Israeli public and the American Congress were led to endorse the actions of the Israeli military, giving a green light for a continuation of its
offensive against “terrorism.” President George W. Bush was able to speak of Israel’s Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, as a “man of peace” without being laughed off the editorial pages of the country’s newspapers. Prominent senators like John McCain could urge Americans to “stand with Israel against Arab tyranny and terror” (speech to AIPAC on April 26, 2002), and Hillary Clinton who in visiting Israel in 2002, when asked whether the Palestinians deserve some consideration from the US Government responded "Our job is to support Israel's decisions."

- The other result was that the flames of outrage and revenge were fanned, once again, among Palestinians and their sympathizers, and a rash of suicide bombings took the lives of scores of Israeli civilians in the aftermath.

As Edward Said wrote: "It is simply extraordinary and without precedent that Israel's history, its record - from the fact that it..is a state built on conquest, that it has invaded surrounding countries, bombed and destroyed at will, to the fact that it currently occupies Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian territory against international law - is simply never cited, never subjected to scrutiny in the U.S. media or in official discourse...never addressed as playing any role at all in provoking 'Islamic terror.'" Edward Said in "The Progressive." May 30, 1996.

My point is that the massive numbers of articles and books that classify Palestinian resistance to Israeli policies as “terrorism,” together with the portrayal of “terrorists” as some sort of monsters unworthy of moral dialogue, effectively shifts the political focus away from the designs, policies, and actions of the Israeli Government in the occupied territories, and its blatant violations of Security Council resolutions, towards the more sensational reactions by the Palestinians. The result was that it has made it much easier for Israel to persist in its policy of expansion and its denial of any meaningful self-determination to Palestinians. Its strategy manifests this logic: to commit a crime, demonize your victims.
5. A Proper Response to Terrorism

The problem
Let me make sure I'm understood on this point: terrorism is a problem, and the world should do everything in its power to make sure it doesn't recur again. As weaponry becomes more sophisticated, the potential grows that acts of terrorism on the part of those who are opposed to the status quo will be increasingly devastating. Very likely, faced with the threat of further terrorist activity against its citizens a nation has no choice but to beef up its security. Terrorism is criminal activity and must be treated as such. Steps have to be taken to apprehend and prosecute anyone suspected of criminal activity. But just as we do not allow our police blowing up entire neighborhoods in the pursuit of one criminal on the loose, so too, we should not permit our military to devastate or occupy foreign countries because we do not like the activities of some of the individuals who happen to be in those countries. There are other ways to deal with such a situation, e.g., in terms of the international court of justice, international police action, or collective sanctions against countries who offer protection to international criminals.

The US State Department Recommendations
In this connection, let me call your attention to the recommendations of the State Department for dealing with terrorism.

First, make no concession to terrorists and strike no deals.
Second, bring terrorists to justice for their crimes.
Third, isolate and apply pressure on states that sponsor terrorism to force them to change their behavior.
Fourth, bolster the counterterrorist capabilities of those countries that work with the United States and require assistance.

My Recommendations
But the State Department's tough line, and the defensive measures and resort to police or military action, are only part of the solution to the problem of terrorism. Much more importantly, in my opinion, when our nation—or any nation—is faced with repeated acts of terrorism against its interests, its foreign embassies, its people, we must ask why this happening, and then, be willing to scrutinize very carefully the policies that have led people to be so upset with us.

In short, I recommend some additional measures:

1. Inquire into the causes of particular terrorist acts or terrorist campaigns, specifically, into the underlying grievances and objectives.

2. Examine whether any policies, practices, or actions on the part of our government, or any government or party, has contributed to these grievances. If so, ask if these grievances are legitimate. If they are, encourage a revision or abandonment of those policies to remove the grievances. If not, improve diplomatic efforts and public relations campaigns in defending these policies.
But this isn't all. There is little hope of progress in solving the problem of terrorism without examining the causes from which it springs; otherwise, we will be treating only the symptoms, threatening to create even worse symptoms, without addressing the underlying causes of the disease. To the extent to which the rhetoric of ‘terror’ impedes rather than illuminates this examination is itself part of the problem. Obviously, to point out the causes and objectives of particular terrorist actions is to imply nothing about their legitimacy—that is an independent matter—nor is it a capitulation to terrorist demands. To ignore these causes and objectives is to seriously undermine attempts to deal intelligently with terrorism, since it leaves untouched the factors motivating recourse to this type of violence. So my third recommendation is this.

3. Exercise caution about political rhetoric. Because the negative connotations of "terrorism" and "terrorist" can prejudice an audience and even preclude an examination of the facts, then we should either abandon this language in describing issues, actions, groups, and people, or use it in a fair and consistent manner.

We should never underestimate the power of language, for language conditions our thoughts and emotions, and these, in turn, fix our beliefs about what should be done, our intentions, and our actions. Political rhetoric, propaganda, slogans, fear-mongering, catchy phrases, even single words, can be very dangerous mechanisms for sanctioning violence and perpetuating injustice. You don't have to go back very far into history to understand this—witness the powerful totalitarian regimes of the 20th century—but what’s alarming is that we are veering dangerously close to a type of Orwellian atmosphere of doublethink today in the US.

You might think that this cannot really happen here given the freedom of our press and our democracy. But to this I say, only to the extent that the "free press" is heard will this kind of thinking make any real difference. As long as the media is dominated by voices that do not present real alternatives and that systematically distort reality, so long as this media is the mechanism whereby the vast majority of people form their opinions about the world, then the alternative viewpoints will make little dent in the dominating political currents.

A proper response to terrorism requires reign in the rhetoric of 'terror' because that rhetoric is an impediment to solving the problem of terrorism. If we allow this language to continue to render us powerless to think and debate, if we let it numb our minds and push us into the cesspool of doublethink, we will have only ourselves to blame.