

DEFINING AND THEORIZING TERRORISM: A GLOBAL ACTOR-CENTERED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

*Arriving at a consensual definition of the phenomenon of terrorism has been a particularly difficult undertaking. Some definitions are either too specific or too vague, concentrating on some essential “terrorist” aspect of the actions, strategies, or types of non-state organizations that engage in terrorism. In this paper I draw on global approaches from international relations and world systems theories to propose a definition of terrorism that skirts these issues by concentrating on terrorist **actors** rather than terrorist **behavior**. I argue that this approach has several advantages, including the dissolution of several empirical and analytical problems produced by more essentialist definitions, and the location of terrorism within a two dimensional continuum of collective-violence phenomena in the international system which discloses important theoretical insights. I proceed to examine the characteristics of terrorism by comparing it with other forms of violence in the international system. I propose that terrorism may be part of the cycles and trends of unrest in the world system, responding to the same broad families of global dynamics as other forms of system-level conflict.*