

and/or fear-inducing effects in a target group larger than the immediate victims with the purpose of coercing that group into acceding to the political demands of the perpetrators“. This definition is particularly helpful in several respects. Firstly, it specifically focuses on political terrorism as distinct from criminal use of terror, as in the enforcement of protection rackets. Referring to political terrorism does not mean that such terrorists cannot be considered criminals. Indeed, many analysts argue that doing so reduces their significance as actors fighting for a political cause.

Secondly, this definition specifically refers to state terrorism as well as sub-state terrorism, a distinction that is largely lacking in most post-9/11 studies on terrorism where almost the entire emphasis is on sub-state terrorism. This is important because the overwhelming majority of the victims of terrorism, certainly in recent decades, have been the victims of terror instituted by their own governments. Such terror has involved the deaths and detention of many millions of people in almost all regions of the world. It includes major terror campaigns in Stalin’s Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and post-war China, and the actions of many governments across Africa, Latin America, and Asia. It also includes the use of terror by colonial powers in many late colonial conflicts. Almost all of this is lost in current terrorism studies, where the emphasis may extend to state sponsorship of sub-state groups, but rarely acknowledges the activities of states, including some democracies.

Finally, Wardlaw’s definition is useful because it places emphasis on a key aspect of terrorism, the determination to cause fear in a wider community than those immediately targeted. This, too, applies to state terrorism, where detention without trial, torture, disappearances, and death squads have been employed and are still being employed in many countries. While the concern of this chapter is specifically with the American experience of sub-state terrorism, especially since the 9/11 attacks, it is necessary to remember this wider context, especially as there is a persistent tendency to apply the terms ‘terror’ and ‘terrorist’ in a pejorative sense, referring to legitimate political movements and individuals who cannot easily be described as terrorists.