

## The Theoretical and Conceptual Understanding of Terrorism: A Content Analysis Approach

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### Abstract

*The definition of terrorism has given rise to plethora of argument on what terrorism entails, hence there is no generally acceptable definition of terrorism. Terrorism is understood differently contingent on the context and source of the definition. Terrorists believe in fighting a just cause, whereas the state and non-supporters see them as terrorists or guerillas whose intention is to cause fear, destroy life and property. The conceptual analysis of terrorism in this study is focused on non-state sponsored terrorism. This research analyzed various literature ranging from scholarly, legislative, national, international and popular perspectives to establish an agreement on the definition of terrorism. The study utilized secondary information from existing academic literature in operationalizing terrorism. Findings revealed that a universally acceptable definition of terrorism is still in limbo, however, an objective and subjective definition of terrorism is tenable. Hence, there is need for an inter subjective understanding of what constitutes terrorism.*

**Keywords:** definition of terrorism, perspectives on terrorism, freedom fighter, political objectives, intention to cause violence or fear, non-state-terrorism.

### 1. Introduction

Terrorism is today considered one of the most serious global security threats to most countries. The Global Terrorism Database (2016) reported over 150,000 incidents of terrorism around the world from 1970 through 2015. Although terrorism has always been a part of modern civilization, it became more significant in the 1960s as has increased in intensity and frequency and has become a major international problem (Rapoport, 1984). Modern day terrorists employ terrorism as a means of political expression and this has assumed different dimensions by involvement of transnational elements hence creating what Jenkins (1975) described as a “new mode of conflict” (p. 1).

Notwithstanding, the long history of terrorism and involvement of scholars in defining the concept of “terrorism”, the operationalization of terrorism has been a challenging and yet an intriguing issue for criminal justice researchers and practitioners. Defining terrorism had created decades of debate over whether or not terrorism is real or just an imaginative concept. As a result, common definition of terrorism has not yet been established as the concept is conceptualized differently by different individuals (Weinberg, 2005; Onwudiwe, 2001; Schmid & Jongman, 2005). In noting the difficulty in defining terrorism, Onwudiwe (2001) emphasized on so many dictums used by researchers to define terrorism such as “today’s terrorist is tomorrow’s freedom fighter”, “terrorism to some is heroism to others”, “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” (p.28). Numerous researchers, criminal justice practitioners, and evaluators have examined the definition of terrorism in different ways (Dyson, 2012; Onwudiwe, 2001; Polland, 2011; Schmid & Jongman, 2005; Weinberg, 2005; Hoffman, 2006). Boaz (2002) aptly noted that “The matter of definition and conceptualization is usually a purely theoretical issue – a

mechanism for scholars to work out the appropriate set of parameters for the research they intend to undertake” (p.290). Hence, various perspectives on the definition of terrorism are reviewed below.

## **2. Defining the Problem: Terrorism**

Despite problems with defining the term, certain scholars have presented definitions from a rigorous perspective. Weinberg (2005), for instance, viewed terrorism as “a snare and delusion, a way of diverting the public’s attention from the failings of Western governments, the American and British ones especially” (p. 1). Others have viewed terrorism as the rational and objective opposition of the people against state terrorism, neocolonialism, mercantilism, liberalism, racism, colonialism and domination (Herman & O’Sullivan, 1989). In other words, a justified and excusable reaction to oppression. Weinberg (2005) revealed how terrorism has become an aggressive presence that affects government policy, military actions, and the security and peaceful existence of individuals in various nations. He defined terrorism “as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change” (p.3). Thus, terrorism in this sense transforms the victims of injustice into its perpetrators. As stated earlier, the concept of terrorism depends on labeling, who is labeled what and by whom. From the government’s perspective, the perpetrators of such an act are terrorists, but supporters see them as freedom fighters. Terrorism is defined below according to the three main perspectives on “definition of terrorism”.

### **2.1. Definition according to United States’ Laws and Government Agencies**

Building on the national definitions of terrorism, it is obvious that even government agencies have diverse conceptions of terrorism. The US Department of State defines terrorism as contained in Title 22, S.2656f (d) of the U.S. code as “pre-meditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (p. 1) (U.S. Department of State, 2007). In supporting the above definition, Hoffman (1999) depicted terrorism as the “deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political,” economic, religious, or ideological change (p. 43). Hoffman’s logic was that terrorists are rational beings with ability to decide whether to engage in such acts of violence or not. In other words, terrorists’ engagement in the “exploitation of fear through violence” is an aforethought or calculated move to achieve specific objectives. These definitions point to some rudiments of duress, pressure, and coercion that justify the acts of terrorism. Poland (2011) supported the above definitions but slightly differentiated it by highlighting “culture” to portray society’s abhorrence of acts of terrorism. Poland (2011) defined terrorism as the “culturally unacceptable use or threat of violence directed toward symbolic targets to influence political behavior” (p. 8).

Expanding on the political definition of terrorism, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (National Institute of Justice, 2017, p. 1). The U.S. Department of State’s and the FBI’s definition of “terrorism” share common characteristics. Both definitions portray the importance of including the “use of force or violence” to prompt a course of action that furthers the inevitable political motive. However, while the U.S. Department of State stresses the “intentional or calculated” dimension of terrorism as a precondition to commit acts of terrorism without bringing to fore the possibility of spontaneous acts of violence, the FBI emphasized on the methodology of committing the act which must be unlawful, hence, differentiating it from acts of legitimate combatants. The US Department of State also requires that several persons act collectively in the act of terrorism thus limiting the definition to only “group” or “groups” with no emphasis on the destructive impact of lone terrorists. Its definition fails to consider the psychological effects of terrorism notwithstanding that the violent acts of terrorism is deliberately considered to have widespread psychological consequences beyond the direct victim or victims (Hoffman, 2006).

The United States Department of Defense defines terrorism as "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological" (Department of Defense, 2017, p. 1). These three governmental agencies *to-wit* the US Department of Defense, FBI and U.S. Department of State captured three common themes—the use of violence, political motivations, intention to create fear, and intimidation or coercion hence producing terror in its victims. On a more comparative note, the FBI’s definition identifies a wider category of terrorist targets and objectives.

Its definition is the only one of the three that requires physical violence directed against governments, its citizens and property, thereby extending the notion of terrorism to include violence against physical objects such as government infrastructure. Apart from political objectives, the FBI's definition further recognizes social objectives as essential terrorist objectives. In contrast, violence against object is not specifically provided in other national definitions mentioned above. However, the US Department of Defense emphasizes on the "threat" of unlawful violence and specifically cites religious aims alongside fundamental political and ideological objectives as rational for acts of terrorism. Thereby stipulating that the "threat of unlawful violence" is enough to constitute terrorism. Notably, the US Department of State omits the social and ideological aspects as contained in the FBI's and Department of Defense's definition of terrorism.

While the concept of terrorism is inevitably subjective, including the *unlawful use of violence* in the definition labels ant colonial revolutionary groups such as The Indian Independence Movement, Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, and the National Liberation Front as terrorists, despite the fact they were seeking to free themselves and their people from the control of transatlantic empires of the European powers (Weinberg, 2005). Thus, those terrorists are freedom fighters in the eyes of the people because they are fighting for justice even though the law labels them as terrorists. Hence, Yassir Arafat (as cited in Hoffman, 1999) contends that The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land by the invaders, the settlers and the colonialists cannot possibly be called a terrorist. (p. 26)

Terrorism is highly violent in that terrorists seek to intimidate, create fear and attempt to weaken the fabrics of the people, the society, and governments so as to force them to comply with their demands. Makinda (2002) succinctly stated that "terrorism maims and kills innocent people, undermines certainty in social activities, destroys property, and undermines the norms, rules, and institutions in which security is embedded" (p. 23). Weinberg (2005) asserted that the purpose of terrorism is to terrify, attract attention, provoke an over-reaction by the authorities, and maintain discipline within the terrorist organization itself.

Beyond the above definitions, the concept of terrorism is not monolithic per se (Mitchell, 1991). A typology of terrorism includes distinctions between state and non-state (sectarian) terrorism; domestic (e.g., the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City) and international terrorism (September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States by al-Qaeda); revolutionary and sub-revolutionary terrorism; repressive and criminal terrorism; religio-political (e.g., Boko Haram in Nigeria); single-issue terrorism (e.g., Animal Liberation Front in the United States); and other ideological distinctions (Wilkinson, 2000).

## **2.2. International Perspectives**

From the international arena, various entities have defined terrorism based on the essential parameters of what constitutes terrorism. Legal definitions from international bodies such as the 2006 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Canada and some European countries provided what may be referred to as an "agreement" on the definition of terrorism, notwithstanding the lack of internationally or universally acceptable definition (Walter, 2003). The United Nations General Assembly embraced its first resolution on international terrorism by adopting Resolution 3034 (XXVII) on December 18, 1972. The Resolution stipulates measures to prevent international terrorism which endangers people's lives through acts of violence, thus, causing grief, exasperation, resentment, injury and anguish to innocent people (Council on Foreign Relations, 1972). In this respect, terrorism attacks the core values of the Charter of the United Nations which idealizes respect for human rights, ensuring total observance of the rule of law and with fundamental objective to maintain peace and resolve conflicts worldwide. This perspective focused mostly on the core implications of terrorism based on the objective of the resolution. Hence, it sees acts of terrorism as violations of individuals' fundamental rights, which means that several acts of violence could be termed terrorism inasmuch as they violate human rights or unlawfully result in death.

The League of Nations Convention, 1937 (which never entered into force), defined terrorism as "criminal acts directed against a state and intended to create terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public"(article, 1), (United Nations, 1937; Council on Foreign Relations, 2017). Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 49/60 (United Nations, December 9, 1994), describes terrorism as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes" (para. 3).

These acts of terror are considered criminal and unjustifiable notwithstanding the circumstances or any form of objectives to justify such acts of violence. The provision further listed other motives such as ideological, racial, ethnic and religious. Furthermore, the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (United Nations, 1997), made provisions to the effect that any act “calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public . . . or particular persons for political purposes and included acts that jeopardized friendly relations between states and peoples or that threatened the territorial integrity and security of a state” is termed terrorism (p. 2). The statutory provisions of the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings and the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 49/60 indicated that such a state of terror must be politically motivated, supporting earlier definitions provided by US national agencies. While the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 49/60 definition is broader in terms of listing out various objectives peculiar to terrorists, the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings omitted every other objective except political, thereby restricting the scope of terrorists motivations.

Obviously, a more general definition of terrorism involves acts of violence aimed at hurting, forcing, or threatening societies in order to accomplish political or ideological goals resulting from religious extremism or economic and social factors (Bullock, Haddow, Coppola, & Yeletaysi, 2009). For instance, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, religious fanaticism has undeniably continued to play roles in the ideological drive behind the violent activities of groups such as Al Qaeda and Boko Haram. Terrorism resulting from religious fundamentalism is not peculiar to Islam alone; indeed, the White supremacist groups in the United States like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) were also driven by Christian extremism into acts of terrorism several years ago. According to Schmid and Jongman (2005), equating terrorism with only political goals is erroneous because some terrorists’ actions are aimed at religious, economic, or social reform. Therefore, it is inaccurate to base the entire definition of terrorism on political motivation.

### **2.3. Perspectives of Experts and Scholars on Terrorism**

Apart from the lack of consensus among governmental and international agencies on a sole definition of terrorism, professionals and scholars in the field of politics and criminal justice are similarly incapable of reaching a unanimous agreement on the definition of terrorism. In his first edition of “political terrorism, Alex Schmid explored numerous definitions of terrorism in an attempt to establish a reasonably comprehensive and satisfactory definition of the term “terrorism” (Schmid, & Jongman, 1988). His adventure to solve this world wide riddle dwindled in his second edition. Not realizing his goals earlier enough, he conceded in the revised edition of “political terrorism” that the exploration for an acceptable definition continues (Schmid, & Jongman, 2005). Scholars like Walter Laqueur sees the attempt as a fruitless undertaking considering the amount of time and efforts involved in isolating the repeated elements of terrorism from 109 different definitions. Laqueur's argument is buoyed by several words classifications that occurred in the 109 different definitions identified by Schmid and Jongman (Laqueur, 2003; Hoffman, 2006).

Despite the above argument, Schmid and Jongman (2005) noted terrorism as a form of political crime, stressing on the methods to actualize change. Those involved in these acts of terror are termed terrorists who methodically kill, destroy lives and properties, and threaten violence against societies, groups, and government in order to realize their goals. Usually, terrorists operate in clandestine cells and use tactics that consist of attacks followed by quick escapes. They involve strategies that give them advantage and power over the physical dominance of their adversaries (Poland, 2011). Schmid (2011) further argued,

Terrorism refers on the one hand, to a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties. (pp. 86–87). Here, Schmid offered a very broad but concise definition that has received strong recognition in academics. He expatiated on what actually motivate terrorists to exhibit terror. His analysis consisted of a conglomeration of several scholarly definitions on terrorism, including national and international views, most posited that terrorists’ motivations are political, criminal, and personally minded in nature. However, Schmid’s definition of terrorism does not address the moral vagueness of terrorism that has generated so much controversy among scholars.

In his revised edition of *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman identified the key characteristics of terrorism as follows (Hoffman, 2006):

- ineluctably political in aims and motives;
- violent – or, equally important, threatens violence;
- designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target;
- conducted either by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia) or by individuals or a small collection of individuals directly influenced, motivated, or inspired by the ideological aims or example of some existent terrorist movement and/or its leaders;
- and perpetrated by a sub national group or non-state entity.(p.43).

Based on the above, terrorists are distinguished from other types of criminals. While other types of criminals operate without political motives and their activities are not usually designed to have massive psychological effects, terrorism are deliberately created to cause fear through violence or the threat of violence for political objectives. Terrorism are intended to cause in-depth psychological consequences on both the direct victim or victims and society at large. Hoffman's definition is also a collation of definitional characteristics from other scholars and legal entities.

In conceptualizing the act of terrorism as an intentional violence by non-state actors, Lizardo (2008) defined terrorism as A type of violent interaction initiated by a non-state actor, which is not formally recognized as a legitimate wielder of the means of violence or a valid initiator of violent interactions, directed against the representatives (human, material, or symbolic) of a formally recognized state actor in the international system, which does not follow the institutionalized rules and conventions of military engagement. (p.102)

Crenshaw (1981) and Enders and Sandler (2006) also defined terrorism involving deliberate use of violence, threat of symbolic low-level violence by persons, conspiratorial organizations, or independent ideological opposition groups within a nation. Thus, the focus of these definitions is based on acts of violence perpetrated by sub-national actors or non-state sponsored actors with the intention to impose fear on a population targeted by these groups. Crenshaw's perspective supported the common motive for terrorist attacks by establishing that certain political objectives motivate terrorists to act violently. However, Jalata (2011) viewed Lizardo's (2008) and Crenshaw's (1981) definitions as focusing only on certain aspects of terrorism without addressing all other forms of terrorism.

Thornton (1964) defined terrorism as the use of terror to gain influence over political behavior. In his definition, terrorism is seen as a symbolic act. He noted the characteristic impact of terror and argued that the insurgents must break the link between the masses and the incumbents or office holders within the society. Second, he argued that acts of terror must either eliminate the fundamental backings that strengthen the moral fiber of the society or significantly deceive the masses to believe that the government is nonchalant to the critical problems of the people. Thornton recognized two types of terror: (a) enforcement terror, which involves terror utilized by government agents to cease insurgents' attempts, and (b) agitation terror, which refers to terrorists' acts of violence to overthrow an existing power. In this definition, both states and insurgents can be labeled *terrorists*. Onwudiwe (2001) differentiated the use of terror from terrorism by noting that governments use *terror* whereas insurgents use *terrorism*. While government agents such as law enforcement officers manufacture terror or threats of fear, terrorism is executed by insurgents or revolutionaries. This indicates that not only individuals and groups are involved in acts of terrorism but that the state also perpetrates terror. Discussions of state terrorism must also include terrorist tactics used by an established government directly or indirectly through encouragement or funding of any element of terrorism, which entails the use of violence against government of other countries, its agencies or citizens, sub-national groups within the government, or foreign groups (Herman, 1999).

Thus, the main characteristics of terrorism involve the use of violence to intimidate the government and the people to agree to terrorists' demands. According to Dyson (2012), special interest organizations define terrorism to reflect their entity's interests. For instance, an ethnic or religious group will define terrorism to comprise of government agencies or individuals who use violence against its members or supporters or who are anti-ideological to their course.

Similarly, a freedom of choice group might define terrorism to include antiabortion violence while a timber company might include environmental extremists who sabotage their equipment in an effort to stop timbering (Dyson, 2012). So, defining terrorism is still amorphous, as people define terrorism according to what they believe in—what is considered terrorism in one place may not be termed terrorism in another. Notwithstanding, the plethora of scholarly arguments, assertions, postulations and confusions in the acceptable construction of terrorism, some elements of criminological theories are influential in understanding terrorism and its proliferation.

### **3. Theoretical Framing of Terrorism**

Criminological theories, properly framed, can provide the context for explaining terrorism and its causes in general (Agnew, 2010; Rausch and LaFree, 2007; Rosenfeld, 2002; Onwudiwe, Tsado, Ejiogu, McGee-Cobbs, & Okoye, 2016). Notwithstanding the dilemma in having a universal understanding of what terrorism entails, the elements of these criminological theories will provide the social and logical bedrock to recognize the scourge of terrorism.

Dollard, Miller, and Doob (1939) provide an apt elucidation of causes of violent crime such as terrorism. Based on their frustration-aggression theory, frustration and aggression are necessary conditions for violence. This means that thwarting an individual's expected goal attainment leads to heightened emotion, which can direct that individual to take aggressive action (in the form of violence) against the party assumed to be responsible for the misfortune. According to Baron and Richardson (2004), frustration is defined as the blocking of goal attainment, which then leads to aggressive behavior that is comparable to the extent of bridging the opportunity to attain goals or realize dreams. Both frustration and aggression work *pari passu* in that the existence of one leads to the occurrence of the other. Accordingly, aggressive behavior requires the existence of frustration for it to be triggered and the existence of frustration leads to aggressive behavior. Gurr (1970), Margolin (1977) and Nachmias (2004) also agreed that relative deprivations from political, economic, and personal needs and denial to achieve those expectations can spike violent civil conflicts. Frustration is the expected result if attainments of these expectations are blocked.

Terrorists are angry over particular issues and feel frustrated because that their cause has been exploited by those in power; at the same time, they are frequently economically marginalized, unemployed, or otherwise cannot attain their desired goals. Thus, the principles of frustration-aggression theory appositely fit the scenario in most terrorist torn countries today. Edigin (2010) argued that the frustrating conditions in certain parts of the world that resulted from the denial of access to the natural resources coupled with the ecological bastardization and environmental dilapidation of oil exploration activities generated frustration, which eventually breeds aggression and the attendant attention-seeking through violence. For instance, Mid-Eastern terrorist groups like al-Qaeda are rebelling against the Western countries because of the purported U.S. foreign policies against Islamic countries and the adoption of Western culture, which they believe is anti-Islamic and thus deprives them of economic, religious, and political growth. The frustration of not having the same opportunities as other countries has resulted in aggression against the United States and has exacerbated extremists' violent behavior.

In furtherance of the above theory, Robert Agnew's (2010) General Strain Theory (GST) of terrorism offers an appropriate understanding of terrorism causes. He argued that both "strain" and "grievances" are the main basis of terrorism. Agnew (2010), also noted that present strain theories of terrorism attribute terrorist acts to various grievances associated with relative economic deprivation, religious and socio-cultural issues relating to modernization, neo-imperialism and neocolonialism; hatred over national, financial and military supremacy of the United States and other Western World; intra and inter religious disputes; racial/ethnic discrimination; human rights violations; harsh state authoritarianism and etcetera (Post 2007; Onwudiwe, Tsado, Ejiogu, McGee-Cobbs, & Okoye, 2016).

Agnew (1985) did not base his theories solely on problems of achieving positively valued goals as did the traditional strain theories (Durkheim, 1951; Merton, 1938); rather, he added the concept of blocked avoidance of painful situations. He contended that both blocked opportunities and inability to avoid stressful circumstances creates strain. Such negative situations can trigger anger and frustration and thus put pressure on individuals, particularly juveniles with weak coping mechanisms. For instance, the radicalization tactics and recruitment methods of terrorist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram targeting young Americans, Europeans, and Nigerians have lured numerous young people into terrorism. Hence, vulnerable juveniles became brainwashed into believing that they are fighting for a just cause that will yield great reward in heaven.

Similarly, Agnew (1985) and Dollard et al. (1939) claimed that crime or delinquency results from anger and feelings of frustration that develop when one experiences strain resulting from blocked opportunities. While Agnew (2006) contended that frustration is a type of anger, Dollard et al. (1939) argued that frustration precedes aggression. In other words, blocked goals lead to frustration and frustration eventually compels aggression. Notably, the degrees of strain and the different ways individuals perceive and tolerate negative situations contribute to the level of pressure on an individual to act out and depend on individual characteristics and environment. Strain theory is a fundamental criminological theory that explicitly explains terrorism in practical language. For example, through their statements, videos, and websites terrorists explain the cause of their actions in terms of the strain of deprivation, poverty, and military occupation as well as threats to traditional and religious values (Agnew, 2010). A plethora of academic literature on terrorism involved case studies of terrorist organizations to explain the relationship between strain and formation of such groups. Most studies agreed that strain plays a significant part in the creation of terrorist organizations. (Hoffman, 2006; Post 2007). However, Agnew (2010) argued that there is a possibility of similar cases of strains not resulting to terrorism. His findings supported earlier assertions that the tendency to commit criminal activities because of strain is dependent on factors such as the degree of strain, the different ways individuals perceive and tolerate negative situations, and the amount of internalized social control. Notably, strain, frustration and aggression are not the absolute explanation of terrorism; there are other social contributing factors to the developments of terrorism. Agnew (2012), suggests that a more complete explanation of terrorism need to extrapolate variety of theories and the multifaceted relationships existing among them to explain the contributing factors that lead to terrorism.

The social reaction theories such as the labeling and the conflict perspectives also explain terrorism by focusing on the impact of formal institutions in the society in creating delinquents such as terrorists. According to Tannenbaum (1938) “criminal behavior is a product of the conflict between a group and the community at large” (p. 111). Conflict arises because of differential conceptions of what is right and wrong in the society (Becker, 1963). Hence the values of these groups are reflected in the laws governing the community and any behaviors contrary to these values are labeled as crime and the perpetrators are tagged criminals. The application of the term terrorism or tagging a group as terrorist conveys a moral judgment (Weinberg, 2005). However, the concept of terrorism depends on labeling; specifically who is labeled what and by whom. From the perspective of laws and the government the perpetrator of such an act is a terrorist, but from the perspective of the followers or supporters, the perpetrator is tagged “freedom fighter.” As Boaz (2002) noted that, “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” (p. 287). Terrorism is a tactic used by those tagged as terrorists to achieve group goals and objectives such as freedom, liberation, justice, and equality. Fundamentally, radical criminologists have viewed causes of crime from a conflict perspective that stresses how the role of capitalism and its analogues influence criminal behavior (Lynch & Michalowski, 2010). Marx argued that conflict results from historical inequality in the distribution of resources and power in society (Michalowski, 1996). The effect of this inequality is a conflict of interests between the owners of capital or the dominant class (bourgeoisie) and the working class (proletariat), those without power. According to Marxist criminologists, class struggle affects crime because the definition of crime is a reflection of the influence of those in authority, which determines how law and justice are administered in the society. They further interpret every crime as resulting from class struggle, while the rich criminalizes the actions of the poor in order to maintain their status, the poor struggles to survive by involving in crimes of accommodation.

From more mainstream assumptions, rational choice theory explains that offender’s motivations to involve in criminal acts are determined by the potential cost of action and the anticipated profits. Cornish and Clarke (1986) describes motivations to commit crime as an individual’s effort to meet common personal needs and involves creating opportunities for meeting those needs. Individuals are expected to have the ability to weigh the pleasure to be gained against the likely punishment while considering committing an illegal behavior and also have the ability to decide against the act (Williams & McShane, 2010). Relating Cornish and Clarke’s assertions to terrorism, Crenshaw (1981) argued that, because terrorism is politically motivated, most or all terrorism campaigns depend on rational political choice. In an attempt to realize benefits or needs, terrorist organizations decide to use acts of terror to oppose a government politically. Thus, terrorist behavior is rational, in the sense “that terrorist organizations possess internally consistent sets of values, beliefs, and images of the environment” (Crenshaw, 1981, p. 385). Terrorism is therefore considered a rational means to advance anticipated goals.

In other words, a terrorist organization has the ability to calculate the potential cost of action against anticipated benefit and subsequently decides to disobey the law notwithstanding the certainty of punishment.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Conceptualizing the term “terrorism” from a theoretical background basically stretches its understanding from plethora of scholarly ideological frameworks. Despite, that researcher have not been able to concede to a universally acceptable definition, emphasis should be placed on the main parameters of terrorism considering the legal, national, international, academic (mainstream and conflict perspective included) and political definitions. Notably, scholars of terrorism and practitioners have agreed that the primary consideration for defining the act of terrorism entails deadly violence, coercion and intimidation of civilians or targets in order to attract national attention but there is lack of agreement on methodology, motives and responsible agencies. Hence the search for a generally accepted definition of terrorism continues. Considering the versatility of the conception of terrorism, arriving at a common definition seems almost impossible. In the absence of one, however, scholars must establish a unified ethical, academic, logical, lawful, and political *locus* in the study in order to understand the entire dimensions of terrorism (Jalata, 2011). Operationalizing terrorism should entail the distinctive characteristics or parameters attributed to terrorism by scholars, government and international organizations: violence or the threat of violence for political effect (Sandler & Siqueira, 2006; Boaz, 2002; Department of Defense, 2017); acts that are premeditated (planned and calculated) to generate panic and coerce certain actions (Hoffman, 1999); the illegitimate use of force and violence against persons or property (government and private included)(National Institute of Justice, 2017); political motivation (Crenshaw, 2001; Hoffman, 2006); and acts that are directed against civilian targets to attract government attention that are not bound by rules of warfare (Shugart, 2006; Schmid & Jongman, 2005).

An inter-subjective definition involving both the objective element – commission of crime; and subjective element encompassing motives and intention of the perpetrators summarizes the whole efforts in defining terrorism. However, to ensure effective counterterrorism policies, terrorism must be objectively defined based upon accepted laws, rules and principles. Scholars of terrorism must also consider the utilitarian benefit of defining the concept, hence giving credence to various legal interpretations, rules of behavior, practical interpretations of the term, “terrorism” and including suitable punishments. Such definitions will bring to fore the “cost benefit” of indulging in the acts of terrorism. The anticipated definition of terrorism may certainly help in the struggle to arrive on a universal definition of terrorism.

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