

WHAT IS TERRORISM?

President Bush has called on all Americans to fight terrorism. Full of patriotic fervor, I started out the door, determined to do my part. Then, it came to me that the President hadn't told me what terrorism was. Well, I thought, he's a busy man, and it probably slipped his mind. Surely, I could figure it out for myself.

Obviously, I thought, people who strike terror into the hearts of others must be terrorists. But then, I remembered that—during WWII—newspapers, radios, and newsreels were all jubilant at how we were striking terror into the hearts of Germans, Italians, and Japanese. Since we were the good guys, we obviously couldn't be terrorists. Nope, terrorism wasn't simply inducing terror.

Then, I thought of the September 11th attacks. Those attacks had been directed primarily against civilians. That had to be it! Terrorism was attacking civilians.

But then I remembered that we had a military arm during the Cold War, the Strategic Air Command, whose primary function was to bomb civilian targets. (The Tactical Air Command took care of military targets.) Fighter pilots used to joke that SAC stood for "schools and children".

I also remembered the fire-bombing of Hamburg, the carpet-bombing of other European cities, the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the napalming of Vietnamese villages. Since we were the good guys, we obviously couldn't be terrorists. Nope, terrorism wasn't simply attacking civilians.

Of course, we were at war then; so perhaps terrorism only exists when no war has been declared. Hmmmmm, I seem to recall that Al-Qaida had declared war on the United States several years before the 9/11 attacks.

I also remembered that Congress had never declared war against Vietnam, nor against Iraq in either of the two Gulf Wars. There was no declaration against the mighty military machine of Grenada, or against nasty Noriega in Panama. Since we had attacked without a declaration of war in all of those cases, and since we were good guys, we obviously couldn't be terrorists. Nope, terrorism wasn't simply attacking without declaring war first.

Then I remembered that the 9/11 attackers had all been wearing civilian clothes. Aha! It's not terrorism if you are in uniform, but it is if you are in civilian clothes!

But then I remembered that many American Revolutionaries wore no uniforms, and there were the heroes of the European resistance movements in WWII who wore no uniforms, and the Allied commando units that used civilian disguise. Since these groups were all good guys, they obviously couldn't be terrorists. Rats! Terrorism doesn't have anything to do with what clothes the terrorists are wearing.

I finally decided that the only definition that worked was this:

When we and our allies do something nasty, it's **not** terrorism. But when somebody else does the same thing to us, it **is** terrorism.

Whew! I'm glad that I got **that** straightened out. I was about to go out and strike terror into the hearts of all the wrong people!

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