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### Citation for published version

Blakeley, Ruth (2008) The Elephant in the Room: A Response to John Horgan and Michael Boyle. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 1 (2). pp. 151-165. ISSN 1753-9161.

### DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17539150802184561>

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**The elephant in the room**  
**A response to John Horgan and Michael J. Boyle**

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<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17539150802184561>

**Keywords:** State terrorism; terrorism studies; state violence; repression; torture; human rights; Global North; Global South; liberal democratic states; emancipation

### **Introduction**

This paper is written in response to John Horgan and Michael J. Boyle, whose article, 'The Case Against a "Critical Terrorism Studies"', appeared in the last issue of this journal. I welcome the opportunity to respond, and will focus on those issues they raised that relate to state terrorism as used or sponsored by liberal democratic states of the Global North, which I had previously argued should be prioritised as a research agenda within Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) (Blakeley 2007a). I will also attempt to respond to some of their broader concerns. I will begin by clarifying what I mean by liberal democratic states of the Global North, and outlining the significance of these states in relation to state terrorism.

The states to which I am referring are states that tend to identify themselves with each other based on similar political systems, in which it is claimed that the rights of the individual are upheld within a democratic system, and where economics are based on free market principles. These states tend to be relatively well off and are largely situated in the Northern Hemisphere, with the exception of Australia and New Zealand. Recently within IR, the term 'Global North' has been used to describe this grouping of states. The terms 'North' and 'South', were first adopted by the Brandt Commission to move away from notions of East and West which became redundant with the end of the Cold War. As the Commission argued, 'in general terms, and although neither is a uniform or permanent grouping, "North" and "South" are broadly synonymous with "rich" and "poor", "developed" and "developing"' (Brandt Commission 1990, p. 31). The terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' are terms that have been deployed to go beyond a simple geographical dichotomy, and beyond a state-centric approach that precludes class differences from our conceptions of the differences within and between states, regions and hemispheres (Sklair 2002). These terms are used to denote an appreciation of the fact that there are minority areas and peoples within the South whose experience and history identifies them more closely with particular elites within the North. Likewise, there are minority areas and peoples within the North whose experience of exploitation, marginalisation and oppression is more akin to that of the majority of people situated in the South.

This is significant for studies on the use of state terrorism for two reasons. Firstly, in cases where state terrorism is used by states that self-identify as liberal democratic against

their own people, the experience of those victims is likely to mirror experiences of populations in the Global South where most state terrorism occurs. Secondly, while state terrorism has often involved the use of terror by a state of the Global South against its own people, as in the case of the Latin American dictatorships of the Cold War, it is not uncommon for such states to enjoy support for their practices from an external state from the Global North. In other words, the elites of a Global North and a Global South state may be complicit in terrorising groups of people that are specifically singled out within the Southern state. It is worth noting that not all liberal democratic states have been complicit in using and sponsoring state terrorism. As Peter Lawler has argued, certain middle power democracies such as New Zealand, Sweden, Canada, Norway, and Finland, among others, have never officially sanctioned repression overseas. Their foreign policies have tended to reflect a commitment to a humane internationalism which differs markedly from ‘the muscular militarism’ most recently exercised in the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq (Lawler 2005, pp. 428, 436). The historical record shows that liberal democratic states such as the US, UK and France have regularly sponsored state terrorism within states of the Global South, and the widespread involvement of many European states in the policy of extraordinary rendition, discussed below, is indicative of the fact that even middle power countries not renowned for using or sponsoring state terrorism may nevertheless be complicit. While these forms of state terrorism are largely absent from debate, CTS is making headway in overcoming this silence within the discipline.

In this paper I first address the claim that the call for a greater emphasis on state terrorism by liberal democratic states in terrorism studies constitutes a ‘reinventing of the wheel’. I show that there continues to be a selective application of definitions of terrorism so that state terrorism in which liberal democratic states are complicit continues to be widely ignored. This results in considerable gaps in the literature, which I identify. In so doing, I show that a credible research agenda exists and should be pursued, and that that this goes well beyond simply reinventing the wheel. I then show that the absence of state terrorism by liberal democratic states from debate results from a complex range of factors that influence scholars across the social sciences, which I discuss in detail. I then show that CTS scholars are already embarking on research that will help overcome the gaps in the literature, and that such work is being complemented by the work of other scholars from various social science disciplines. Finally I address the question raised by Horgan and Boyle concerning the transparency of scholars associated with CTS. I show that certainly where work on state terrorism by liberal democratic states is concerned, an explicit aim is to explore the use of state terrorism within the broader context of the foreign policy objectives of liberal democratic states. Those objectives have consistently involved widening access to resources and markets in the Global South, and competing for political and economic dominance. Scholars involved in work on state terrorism have been and continue to be transparent about this, arguing that the use of state terrorism only makes sense within this wider context. In addressing this I comment briefly on the question of emancipation, which Horgan and Boyle argue has not been adequately explained by CTS scholars, to show that a priority of those working on state terrorism by liberal democratic states should be to challenge foreign policy practices that involve state terrorism and other forms of repression.

### **Reinventing the wheel?**

An important aim of scholars associating with the CTS agenda is to foster further studies on state terrorism by liberal democratic states from the Global North, since this has been a widely used strategy by the US, Britain, and France, among others, but has received

relatively little attention among terrorism scholars within IR, as well as across the social sciences. Horgan and Boyle have suggested that such calls constitute a ‘reinventing of the wheel’, because they associate those calls with criticisms that CTS scholars have made of how terrorism has been defined, which, they argue, is simply going over old ground. Furthermore, they point out that many terrorism scholars do acknowledge that the state is ‘a primary, if not the most important, agent of terror’ (Horgan and Boyle 2008, p. 56), and that in this regard, it is not clear how CTS is offering anything novel. My contention here is firstly, that it is not the definitions of terrorism that are being challenged so much as their applications, and secondly, that acknowledging that states, including Northern democratic ones, are perpetrators of terror does not adequately overcome the dearth of research in this area. In this regard, CTS does offer something original, since it goes well beyond simply reworking definitions, or acknowledging the complicity of liberal democratic states in state terrorism. It establishes a credible research agenda and begins the analytical work that is needed. This includes, as I will show below, identifying incidents of Northern state terrorism, situating them within a taxonomy of all forms of political violence, analysing their origins and purposes, identifying which state actors are involved, and assessing their impacts, within the context of wider foreign policy objectives.

It is the case that to label acts of repression ‘state terrorism’, they need to be consistent with accepted definitions of terrorism, and that if state actions fall outside of that remit, they should be understood as another form of political violence. This is not to say that there is a consensus on even the key elements of the definition of terrorism, but that there is a group of themes that do overlap. Nevertheless, I have found that many acts of violence committed by Northern democracies do fit existing definitions of terrorism, and that in turn, existing definitions are more than adequate for encompassing acts of terror committed by the state. One aspect of my own work has been to explore whether the use of torture constitutes a form of state terrorism and I conclude that in some circumstances it does (Blakeley 2007b). Yet Horgan and Boyle argue that ‘the underlying point of the CTS critique of current definitions of terrorism appears to be that many other forms of violence – for example, state terrorism – fall out of conventional definitions of terrorism’ (Horgan and Boyle 2008, p. 56). This has not been my experience, and neither has it been my intention to rework definitions of terrorism, since, as they note, numerous terrorism scholars have explored the many problems associated with defining and conceptualising terrorism, and have come up with definitions that are adequate. Indeed, as work by Christopher Mitchell, Michael Stohl, David Carleton and George Lopez shows, accepted definitions do not in and of themselves preclude actions by states. They argue that to be labelled terrorism, acts carried out either by the state or by non-state actors must involve ‘purposive behavior or intention on the part of the “terrorist actor”’; ‘the act or threat of violent harm to a victim(s)’; ‘observation of the effects of the act or harm by some ultimate target(s)’; ‘identification by the target with the victim’; ‘some degree of terror induced in the target(s) through a “demonstration effect” and the act of identification’; ‘altered behavior (“compellance”) or abandoned behaviour (“deterrence”) as a direct result of the terrorist demonstration’ (Mitchell et al. 1986, p. 5). This definition is distinguished from other forms of coercion and violence by the intention of the actor and the direction of the attempt to influence, in the sense that any actor deploying the strategy ‘must have the intention of inducing extreme fear in some population of observers as the main objective for the strategy to count as “true” terrorism’ (Mitchell et al. 1986, p. 6). Similarly, as I have previously discussed (Blakeley 2007a), the definition offered by Paul Wilkinson (1992, pp. 228-229), and repeated widely by IR scholars, does not preclude the state as a perpetrator.

Nevertheless, I have previously critiqued the application of these definitions, which has been selective in that it has tended to result in scholars of terrorism focusing primarily on

terrorism committed by non-state groups. This has led to little attention being paid to the use of state terrorism by the powerful states in the Global North, particularly in the Global South. Challenging how definitions of terrorism are applied formed the basis of my brief critique of work by Paul Wilkinson (Blakeley 2007a). Horgan and Boyle insist that Wilkinson does acknowledge that states are the greatest perpetrators of terror, and that he has pointed to the complicity of the US in sponsoring state terrorism in Central and Latin America to illustrate this. Occasional acknowledgements on Wilkinson's part do not constitute a research agenda. Indeed, Wilkinson indicated that in his own work, 'repressive state terror does not receive any detailed comparative analysis,' primarily because 'the subject of revolutionary and sub-revolutionary terror is already vast' (Wilkinson 1974, p. 43). Similarly, Leonard Weinberg and William Lee Eubank contend in this issue that orthodox scholars have examined state terrorism by Northern states against their own people, pointing to the example of Italian state terrorism in the 1970s. Yet this does not alter the fact that the vast majority of work on terrorism continues to focus on that perpetrated by non-state actors or by authoritarian regimes. Indeed as Weinberg and Eubank note, work on state terrorism in Stalin's Russia, Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, and in communist regimes in Eastern Europe is extensive. However, as I show below, terrorism as used or sponsored in the Global South by liberal democratic states from the Global North continues to receive very little attention.

Unfortunately, among those scholars that acknowledge state terrorism by liberal democratic states, most take the same position as Wilkinson – that its study is necessary, but not for them. This has shaped the work undertaken by terrorism scholars, and goes some way to explaining why state terrorism was left out of the world's leading database on terrorism, developed by the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at St Andrew's University, in collaboration with the RAND Corporation (Blakeley 2007a). There is also very little scholarly literature published in the key journals that discusses the use of state terrorism by liberal democratic states. Indeed, Andrew Silke's review of 490 articles in the core terrorism studies journals from 1990 to 1999 reveals that only 12 articles, fewer than two percent, examined state terrorism at all (Silke 2004a, p. 206). Of these an even smaller subset will have addressed state terrorism by liberal democracies. This is also reflected in the programme for the 2008 International Studies Association Annual Convention. From the programme I identified 173 papers on terrorism or the 'War on Terror', of which just six were on state terrorism. Of these six, four were concerned with state terrorism by liberal democracies, and all four were on a panel which I convened on the subject of state terrorism. Of the remaining two, one was entitled 'Why a state can't be a terrorist', and it is not clear whether the other is concerned with state terrorism by liberal democracies.

State terrorism by liberal democratic states therefore continues to be an elephant in the room, even though there are numerous cases of such states using and sponsoring state terrorism, along with other forms of repression. Contrary to Horgan and Boyle's argument, there are significant gaps in the literature on the complicity of liberal democratic states in state terrorism. Filling those gaps goes well beyond reinventing the wheel, and constitutes a clear and credible research agenda. Here I point to a number of those gaps which demand new research, although this is by no means an exhaustive list. Questions remain about the continuing support by the US for Colombia's armed forces, which are known to have used state terrorism widely. Indeed, as Doug Stokes (2005) has argued, US complicity in state terrorism in Colombia constitutes a 'war of terror'. The US also continues to provide extensive training to military forces all over the world, the nature of which is not fully known since much of it is classified, although the past record of the US in this regard does not paint a promising picture, since its counterinsurgency training for its own and overseas forces during the Cold War contributed to widespread state terrorism in Indochina and Latin

America (Blakeley 2006, 2007b; McClintock 1992, 2001). Further work needs to be done to explore whether current training is in any way linked to state terrorism. There is scope therefore for establishing a counter-terrorism database, which records incidents in which counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency activities have resulted in violations of human rights among civilians (Kurtulus 2007). The full extent of US abuses of human rights in the 'War on Terror' invite further work, including assessing the policy of extraordinary rendition, in which other democratic states, especially in Europe, are complicit (Grey 2006). This may well fit the definition of state terrorism, but as yet, there has been no detailed work to explore it within a taxonomy of forms of political violence. With US and British forces involved in counterinsurgency operations in Iraq, and NATO forces involved in the same in Afghanistan, and given what we already know about the repressive nature of US counterinsurgency strategies during the Cold War, there is a need for work to determine whether current operations also involve acts of state terrorism and pose the same threats to human rights. Any analysis of these issues by IR scholars would be further strengthened through engagement with scholars from disciplines across the social sciences, discussed in more detail below.

### **Why is state terrorism by liberal democratic states marginalised?**

Even though state terrorism is far more destructive than non-state terrorism, and has often been sponsored by liberal democratic states from the Global North both at home and in the Global South, very few scholars within the social sciences have studied it. There are multiple and complex reasons why scholars across the social sciences have instead chosen to explore terrorism committed by non-state actors or so-called 'rogue states'. The term 'rogue states' has been used as a tool of propaganda by leaders of liberal democratic states to refer to states it considers to be hostile. However, as has been argued by scholars including Eric Herring (2000) and Noam Chomsky (2004), the term could also be used to describe the US. The reasons why scholars tend to focus on terrorism by non-state actors or specific 'rogue states', invariably situated in the Global South, can be divided into two categories: methodological and motivational. The combination of these reasons has been a powerful force in shaping the parameters of debate, resulting in state terrorism by liberal democratic states being almost completely absent from scholarship within the social sciences. In outlining some of them here, I hope to shed light on why many scholars across the social sciences have chosen to focus on non-state rather than state terrorism.

### **Methodology**

There are certain peculiarities within each of the social science disciplines that have contributed to the marginalisation of state terrorism. These relate to whether and how attempts are made to define terrorism and state terrorism, and how those definitions are then applied, if at all. Very few sociologists have studied state terrorism, primarily because there has been little work within sociology on terrorism more broadly (Gibbs 1989; Turk 2004). Because labelling acts as terrorism promotes condemnation of the actors involved, definitions of terrorism, Jack Gibbs (1989, pp.329-330) argues, may reflect political or ideological bias. Conceptualising terrorism therefore requires an assessment of competing definitions in relation to specific problems associated with terrorism, including whether the state can be a perpetrator of terrorism. Yet there has been a general indifference on the part of most sociologists to conceptualising terrorism. This, according to Gibbs, results from an insistence within sociology that a distinction should be maintained between substantive theory and conceptual analysis. This has caused many sociologists to privilege theory over the resolution

of conceptual problems. Gibbs argues that instead, these should go hand in hand, because detailed conceptualisations would enable the development of a definition of terrorism that was empirically applicable, and this in turn could result in the development of a sophisticated theory of terrorism. Over 15 years after Gibbs set out his agenda for further research on terrorism within sociology, Austin Turk (2004) echoed this call. This suggests that progress in sociology has been limited.

There has also been a lack of engagement with the question of state terrorism by liberal democratic states within criminology, a discipline born out of sociology. While this may in part be due to the lack of will to conceptualise terrorism, as in sociology, it also has to do with the purpose of the discipline itself, which is to study crime. It is the state itself that defines what is criminal, so the parameters of study for the discipline are therefore set by the state – criminologists study what the state has determined is criminal (Green and Ward 2004, p. 1; 2005, p. 432). Indeed, as international law scholarship shows us, states themselves have been very reluctant to have state terrorism defined as a separate category. In this regard, states have successfully prevented the criminalisation of state terrorism under international law. As Tal Becker shows, during the Cold War most Western states rejected the notion that government violence could be classified as state terrorism and argued that the resort to violence by the military forces of a state was adequately regulated under international law (Becker 2006, p. 91). More recent efforts to incorporate state terrorism into the UN Charter's definition of terrorism, thereby giving it international recognition, were thwarted by the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in 2004, which argued that it had not found the claims for the codification of state terrorism within the UN Charter 'to be compelling'. It therefore recommended that, based on the language of UN Resolution 1566, the definition of terrorism adopted should provide the following description of terrorism:

...any action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the Geneva Conventions and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004) that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature and context, is to intimidate a population or compels a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act (UN 2004).

As Becker concludes, this means that 'terrorism is to be generally understood as an act perpetrated by a non-State actor that is designed to intimidate a population or to achieve a political objective through the intentional infliction of harm' (Becker 2006, p. 88). Since the state, or in this case states, have determined that state terrorism should not exist as a category which can be codified, it is not surprising that scholars concerned with crime tend not to study state terrorism as such. There are some notable exceptions, including Penny Green and Tony Ward (2004; 2005), Ronald Kramer and Raymond Michalowski (2005), Jude McCulloch and Sharon Pickering (2005), Ruth Jamieson and Kieran McEvoy (2005), William Chambliss (1989), and Eugene McLaughlin and John Muncie (2001).

Interestingly, Green and Ward, leading criminologists who have sought to promote the study of state crime, including state terrorism by liberal democratic states, within the discipline, have concluded that key inputs to the study of state crime have been made not by criminologists but by political scientists, IR scholars and anthropologists (Green and Ward 2005, p. 431). Certainly anthropologist Jeff Sluka (2000) has made an important contribution with regard to state terrorism, but he too has lamented the lack of engagement within the discipline of anthropology, citing a fellow anthropologist, Linda Green, in the preface to his own work, who argued:

Overwhelming empirical evidence demonstrates that state violence has been standard operating procedure in numerous societies where anthropologists have conducted fieldwork over the past three decades. Despite an alarming rise in the most blatant forms of transgression, repression and state terrorism, the topic has not captured the anthropological imagination (Green in Sluka 2000).

Fears among anthropologists of the consequences of research in this area may be a factor in the lack of anthropological studies on state terrorism, discussed in more detail below. A minority of politics and international relations scholars have similarly expressed concern about the absence of state terrorism, particularly by liberal democratic states from the Global North, from their own discipline. Yet a review of the work carried out on state terrorism by a minority of scholars from anthropology, criminology and sociology indicates that they draw extensively on the small body of work that has emerged within IR which assesses state terrorism by liberal democratic states. This may be because of the focus of much IR scholarship on the activities of states, even if the majority of that work where terrorism is concerned focuses on threats to the state. By contrast, other disciplines within the social sciences tend to focus on actors other than states or specific institutions within the state. The fact that scholars from other disciplines have found work from IR so useful where state terrorism is concerned is testament to the achievements of a small number of IR scholars who have developed a robust research agenda that has gained respect. There is nevertheless much work to be done to update the work that was begun in the late 1970s and 1980s by Edward Herman (1985), Noam Chomsky and Herman (1979a; 1979b), Alexander George (1991) and Stohl and Lopez (1984), and certainly the ways in which definitions of terrorism are applied within IR, as discussed above, continue to hamper progress in this area.

In addition to definitional and conceptualisation issues, the availability of data on terrorism further contributes to a lack of debate on state terrorism within the social sciences. The main sources of data on incidents of terrorism are governments or government-sponsored academic institutions and think tanks (Herman and O'Sullivan 1989, p. 69). Therefore, while liberal democratic states are willing to invest heavily to produce data on terrorist incidents and threats against their own interests, discussed in more detail below, obtaining data on acts of terrorism committed by those states is extremely difficult, since only very infrequently do they advertise their terrorist activities or intent (Chambliss 1989, pp. 203-204; Gibbs 1989, p. 330; Mitchell et al. 1986, p. 2; Nicholson 1986, p. 31). Indeed in most cases governments seek to conceal the extent to which they use terrorism, and when such activities are exposed, they tend to be justified as 'necessary measures' or more benignly as 'police action' (Mitchell et al. 1986, pp. 2-3; Nicholson 1986, p. 31). When such activities are exposed, and presented as something other than state terrorism, considerable analytical effort is required to determine whether such an act does constitute state terrorism, since they are unlikely to be included in the major data sets of terrorist incidents.

### **The Roles, Motives and Interests of Academics**

The problems relating to methodology may be further exacerbated by the motives of academics themselves. In a minority of cases, research into state terrorism can be physically dangerous, particularly when it involves field work in areas where state terrorism has occurred, as anthropologist Jeff Sluka notes in the preface to his edited volume, which brings together work by a panel of international anthropologists that have all undertaken research in areas 'marked by extreme forms of state repression and terror', and who may or have already suffered recriminations as a result (Sluka 2000, pp. ix-x). Indeed Myrna Mack, a renowned anthropologist who spent years investigating the destruction of rural communities in



Guatemala under the successive US-backed military regimes from 1954 until the early 1990s, was herself stalked for two weeks by a military death squad before her assassination on 11 September 1990 (Human Rights First 2003). In most cases, scholars do not have to contend with such threats to their personal safety, but this does not make their fears of such threats any less real. There may also be other reasons for their silence on the subject.

It could be that scholars are travelling the road most travelled. Since terrorism is perceived in policy and academic circles to be an issue of considerable concern, they may simply be responding to the perceived need for research in this area. It could also be that scholars are simply oblivious to state terrorism by liberal democratic states as a research area for the same reason that many scholars explore non-state terrorism – this concern dominates the discipline, whereas there is little work available on state terrorism by liberal democracies so it does not occur to academics to pursue it. Or it could be that scholars consider this to be work that is already being carried out, particularly if they are aware of the few titles that have emerged in recent years on state terrorism in Latin America during the Cold War, or on US conduct in the ‘War on Terror’, with specific reference to torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. This may be why Wilkinson acknowledged but did not take up the subject himself.

On the other hand, it could be that scholars are deterred from undertaking work that assesses the complicity of liberal democratic governments in state terrorism, because individual academics deem the associated costs to themselves to be too high. Sometimes their job (on which their livelihood depends) exists to undertake work aimed at helping protect the state by assessing threats against liberal democratic states. This does not mean to say that they are actively deterred from undertaking work on state terrorism. Indeed, it is not difficult to get panels and papers on the subject accepted for inclusion in the programmes of leading academic conferences. A further reason for the relative silence on state terrorism by liberal democracies may be that even though individuals recognise that states are complicit in terrorism, they find this uncomfortable, and would prefer not to have to confront the awkward conclusions that research on state terrorism by liberal democratic states might lead to.

Frequently, individual academics are employed by governments, directly through think tanks and government institutions, and indirectly through government funding councils, to undertake research into terrorist threats against the state, or to advise governments on how to counter such threats, as in the case of RAND and the CSTPV, discussed above. Indeed considerable government funding has been made available for such research in the years since 9/11 in the US and the UK, and is therefore guided by government agendas and policy concerns (Silke 2004b, p. 58). US and UK governments have a captive audience among IR academics faced with increasing pressures to secure external funding for research, in light of which they can and will meet government demands for data and analysis of groups considered to be a threat to national security. This does not preclude those academics from being critical of unpopular foreign policy choices that they argue have helped generate terrorism, as Horgan and Boyle (2008, p. 5) point out. Indeed Frank Gregory and Paul Wilkinson (2005), in their assessment of Britain’s performance in the ‘War on Terror’, funded by the ESRC and published by Chatham House, are critical of the junior rather than partnership role that Britain has taken in the ‘War on Terror’, pointing out that ‘Riding pillion with a powerful ally has proved costly in terms of British and US military lives, Iraqi lives, military expenditure, and the damage caused to the counter-terrorism campaign’. Such critique stems from the fact that many IR academics are motivated by a wish to contribute to security and peace, and in the course of their research on terrorism, they are willing to speak out if they consider that government policy undermines the prospects for peace and security.

The close links between liberal democratic governments and academics undertaking such research has nevertheless impacted on the field of terrorism studies, in that it further privileges work on threats by non-state actors against democratic states and their interests, and marginalises work that examines the complicity of those states in terrorism. This can be illustrated with reference to the RAND Corporation. In addition to Wilkinson, various academic experts on terrorism have close links to RAND, which in turn has significant affiliations with members of the current US administration, including Donald Rumsfeld (Flynn 2005) and Condoleeza Rice (National Security Council 2004), both former RAND Board members. Other leading academics associated with both RAND and the CSTPV are Bruce Hoffman, who temporarily left the RAND Corporation in 1993 to found the CSTPV at St Andrew's, and who remains an honorary senior researcher of the CSTPV, and Brian Jenkins, a senior analyst with RAND, who is also a member of the CSTPV's advisory council (Burnett and Whyte 2005, p. 8). These connections have a significant effect upon terrorism studies. As Burnett and Whyte point out, individuals associated with the CSTPV and RAND retain key editorial positions in the two most prominent English language journals in the field of terrorism and political violence: Wilkinson as co-editor of *Terrorism and Political Violence*; Hoffman and Jenkins as members of its editorial Board; and Hoffman as editor in chief of *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, a journal originally founded and editorially managed by RAND (Burnett and Whyte 2005, p. 9). The dominance of research on non-state terrorism is a product of the agenda setting by policymakers where their own complicity in terrorism is ignored and threats to the states that they represent are prioritised.

Even those scholars not affiliated with such institutions and government bodies shy away from studying state terrorism by liberal democratic states because it is uncomfortable and even dangerous. For most people, the question they tend to ask in relation to terrorism is how they can protect themselves. If they start to look at the complicity of liberal democratic states in terrorism, however, they are forced to admit that, as Michael Nicholson argues, their own government, which ideologically they support, is involved in atrocities (Nicholson 1986, p. 35). It is, therefore, psychologically more comfortable not to get involved in this kind of research, and instead to engage in research that helps to overcome problems faced by the state. This is the conclusion reached by Neil Smith in a review of a collection of Noam Chomsky's essays, where he argues that opinion on Chomsky's work is polarised precisely because of this discomfort:

Reading that your revered leaders are ruthless hypocrites is painful and calls for action. Any such action would involve sacrificing both leisure and certain aspects of privilege and power. It's easier to deny the claims, accept the power structure and assume that we are uniquely right with a divine mission in the world (Smith 2008).

As discussed above, various scholars acknowledge state terrorism, even if they choose not to study it, but for some, it is possible that they would prefer not to face these facts. This helps to explain the predominance within terrorism studies of problem-solving theory (Gunning 2007), described by Robert Cox as theory that 'takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given framework for action' (Cox 1981, p. 128). The aim of the theory is, therefore, 'to make these relationships and institutions work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble' (Cox 1981, pp. 128-129). For terrorism studies scholars, the aim of the work is not to challenge these institutions and power relations, but to consider the problem of terrorism within the context of these existing institutions and power dynamics. Because realist and liberal approaches within IR scholarship have carried significant weight, the parameters of analysis for most terrorism studies scholars have been dictated by them.

The same is true of the field of Security Studies, as Richard Wyn Jones has argued, and the problems he highlights are applicable to terrorism studies. The state is the only significant actor for these approaches, and its security is paramount (Wyn Jones; 1999, pp. 94-102). This results in a fetishization of the state (Wyn Jones 1999, p.96) whereby the security of individuals is 'subsumed under the ambit of the state', and is frequently 'sacrificed to the demands of realpolitik' (Stamnes and Wyn Jones 2000). This emphasis on state security, when coupled with the close ties between academic experts and the state at the height of the Cold War, meant that 'Security Studies, implicitly or explicitly, generated information and analysis for states, and specifically for the ruling elites within them' (Stamnes and Wyn Jones 2000). Not surprisingly, these dominant approaches tend to accept the benign character of the foreign policies of Northern democratic states. At worst, when such states use force, it is assumed that this is in response to credible threats, or as a means of protecting other, weaker states or groups. This is beginning to change, since a number of scholars associated with realism, for example Walt (2005), and liberalism, for example Ikenberry (2006), have published works that critique US practices in the 'War on Terror', but there is still much to be done. Horgan and Boyle raised concerns over my statement that critically oriented scholars 'need to reclaim the term "terrorism"', which they claimed I was arguing should be used to 'show the abuses of "Northern democracies"' (Horgan and Boyle 2008, p. 55). My actual argument was that 'critically oriented scholars need to reclaim the term "terrorism" and use it as an analytical tool, rather than a political tool in the service of elite power' (Blakeley 2007a, p. 233). Even though individual scholars do not necessarily set out to marginalise the study of state terrorism by their governments, the consequence of their decisions, which in turn are often the result of the agenda setting of policymakers, is precisely that. This inadvertently furthers the interests of elite power, because it puts the state beyond reproach.

### **A credible research agenda**

I have shown that the reasons why state terrorism by liberal democratic states from the Global North is marginalised within terrorism studies, and across the social sciences, are numerous, and that to bring it squarely onto the agenda requires that we overcome significant obstacles. As discussed above, there are significant gaps in the literature that demand attention. These include US counterinsurgency in the Andean region, US foreign military training, counterinsurgency efforts as part of the 'War on Terror', extraordinary rendition, and the counter-terrorism operations of numerous liberal democratic states. Already scholars from various disciplines within the social sciences have developed individual research agendas to address some of these questions. My own work has involved a detailed analysis of state terrorism by the US since 1945, looking specifically at its military interventions and training of military forces in the Global South, and the use of torture (Blakeley 2006, 2007b). This work updates and extends the work begun by Chomsky and Herman (1979a, ; 1979b) in light of the end of the Cold War and the advent of the 'War on Terror'. As Chomsky notes, the current 'War on Terror' is the second such war declared by a US administration (Chomsky 2001). The Reagan government was the first to launch a war against terrorism in Central and South America in the last decade of the Cold War. Another significant contribution will be a forthcoming monograph which explores state terrorism by Global North states in the Global South, in the context of their wider foreign policy objectives (Blakeley 2009, forthcoming). Other scholars are also engaged in ongoing research on the use of state terrorism by liberal democratic states. These include Jeff Sluka, who continues his anthropological work on state terrorism, anthropologist Glen Bowman who focuses on Israel-Palestine, and Michael Stohl (2006), whose work on state terrorism in the field of

communication studies is also ongoing. Developing collaborative projects may be a fruitful means by which to bring state terrorism to the fore in academic debate. Engaging with scholars from various disciplines would also enrich the research being undertaken. Insights from the ethnographic work undertaken by anthropologists could strengthen the analysis of policy by IR scholars. Psychologists and sociologists could add further dimensions on the effects of state terrorism on individuals and communities, and communications scholars could strengthen our understandings of state terrorism as portrayed and justified in the media. There is also scope for exploring the interaction between state violence and non-state violence. The argument has been made in various circles that the response by the US and its allies to 9/11, and subsequent actions in Iraq that were couched in terms of the ‘War on Terror’, have contributed to the militarisation of specific sectors of society, both in the intervened states, and at home. Then UK Home Secretary, John Reid, for example, quoted by *The Independent* in 2006, stated that ‘Iraq and Afghanistan did not cause terrorism. But as we are all aware, that does not mean to say that foreign policy is not a factor in the radicalisation of young people. It clearly is’ (Reid in Brown 2006). More thorough research into the relationships between state violence and those resisting such interventions using violent means would further strengthen the field. A case can also be made for developing teaching in our universities that addresses these issues from a range of disciplinary perspectives.

### **A different intellectual project?**

Finally, Horgan and Boyle ask ‘whether there is a different intellectual project at work here’, where ‘the goal is to link the causes of “terrorism” to the bad behaviour of Western governments, capitalism or social economic inequalities’ (Horgan and Boyle 2008, p. 58). They state that if this is the case, the CTS project needs to be transparent. My own work does not focus on the causes of non-state terrorism, which in the above articulation is set up as a response to Western practices. I will therefore leave that question for others to address. Nevertheless, I, and the few other scholars that have studied state terrorism by liberal democratic states, have always been transparent about one of the main aims of our work, an explicitly normative one, which is to assess and challenge the use of coercive practices by liberal democratic states, particularly state terrorism, to achieve their foreign policy objectives in the Global South, which have included the spread of global capitalism to ensure access to resources and markets. In this regard the work does look specifically at the relationship between state terrorism and capitalism, and where relevant, pursuant social and economic inequalities. Specifically it is concerned with cases where liberal democratic states consider the use of terror by themselves or by their elite allies in the Global South to be functional to the achievement of their aims (Blakeley 2006, 2007b; Stokes 2005). Indeed, state terrorism only makes sense when we link it to the wider foreign policy objectives it is intended to serve.

In my own analysis of US interventions in Latin America during the Cold War, declassified documents indicate that while the US publicly defended such interventions as a means of containing communism, there was often an underlying material imperative. Officials explicitly pointed to the economic threats posed to the US when left-wing governments were elected, and frequently stated that interventions to support repressive regimes would serve US capitalist interests. The coup in Argentina which saw the establishment of a military dictatorship from 1976 to 1982, for example, unleashed widespread, largely indiscriminate repression, in what became known as the Dirty War. Just two days after the coup, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had expressed his approval of the economic benefits that could ensue for the US. William Rogers informed Kissinger that

“we’re going to look for a considerable effort to involve the US – particularly in the financial field,” and Kissinger replied, “Yes, but that’s in our interest” (Kissinger 1976). Estimates of the numbers of people that were killed or disappeared under the military dictatorship range from 9,000 to 30,000, many of whom were also tortured in Argentina’s secret detention centres (Amnesty International 2003). The US Embassy in Argentina had itself compiled documentation of nearly 10,000 human rights violations, most of them disappearances by 1979, which it sent to the State Department “for the Department’s permanent records and use” (1979). Despite this knowledge, military support for the regime was ongoing. There are many similar examples of US sponsorship of state terrorism in Latin America during the Cold War, where declassified documents show just how much that support was driven by US efforts to protect and promote US capital (Blakeley 2009, forthcoming).

In analysing these links, there is also an emancipatory goal. In the first instance this goal is to halt the use of state terrorism by exposing it. The case of the Chilean Diaspora is instructive. Pinochet’s regime was gradually undermined in part as a result of efforts by political exiles from Chile, including academics, to raise global awareness of the atrocities committed by the regime, resulting in its condemnation by other states (Ropp and Sikkink 1999). This helped bring an end to the regime and to years of repression, in which The Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (CNCTR) found that during and in the years following the coup, 2,279 people were killed. Of those, 815 were victims of execution and death by torture, 957 disappeared following arrest, and the remainder were killed either as a result of war tribunals, during political protests, alleged escape attempts, or gun battles (CNCTR 2006). Identifying state terrorism and raising awareness about it is one way that CTS scholars can assist those struggling against repression. Emancipation also implies that elites be dissuaded from using or sponsoring terrorism. To date this is the area in which the least amount of work has been undertaken by those of us studying the issue, but it should be afforded greater attention. State terrorism is often used or sponsored by liberal democratic states as a response to a perceived threat to its own interests; in Latin America during the Cold War the US used and sponsored terrorism as a means to counter the perceived threat from left-wing insurgent groups (Blakeley 2006, 2007b). As Ken Booth argues, ‘when powerful states use violence [...] they are not acting in a manner calculated to make violence less likely; if they achieve success in their own terms, they do so only by proving to others that strategic violence can have political utility’ (Booth 2005, p. 273). This undermines their moral legitimacy. One of the challenges for scholars within CTS is therefore to challenge the perceptions of elites that consider specific groups of people to constitute security threats. This may help prevent violations of human rights as well as the undermining of states proclaiming themselves to be liberal democratic ones. The starting point is to explore the consequences of state terrorism, not only for victims, but for perpetrating states. A leading figure in France’s counter-insurgency campaign in Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s, Jean Jacques Massu, years later admitted that the widespread use of torture, often a tool of state terrorism, served no useful or necessary intelligence purpose in overcoming terrorism, but had turned most of the Algerian population against the French, pushing them into the arms of the Front de Libération National (MacMaster 2004, p. 9). One priority for those working on state terrorism within CTS must be to critically examine state responses to threats that involve the use or sponsorship of state terrorism, evaluate its strategic usefulness as well as its impacts on human rights, and then to challenge elites that deploy such practices.

## **Conclusion**

Work begun in the 1970s and 1980s on state terrorism by liberal democratic states from the Global North is badly in need of updating. The call for a re-emphasis on state terrorism from scholars identifying with CTS does not constitute a reinventing of the wheel. Rather it stems from the recognition that while many scholars working on terrorism acknowledge that liberal democratic states have used and sponsored terrorism, few have responded to the challenge of undertaking research in this area. State terrorism by liberal democracies continues to be an elephant in the room. There are significant gaps in the literature as a result. Far from going over old ground, the few scholars engaged in such work are taking existing definitions of terrorism and using them to identify and map acts of state terrorism, and are then undertaking detailed analyses of the links between such incidents and the foreign policy objectives of the states involved, as well as their effects on human rights. In the process, new areas in need of further research are emerging, not least because of the foreign policy practices of numerous liberal democratic states engaged in the US-led 'War on Terror', as this paper has outlined. Normatively this work has three aims: to raise awareness of incidents of state terrorism, thereby assisting those struggling against it; to challenge existing power structures and institutional practices that permit the use and sponsorship of state terrorism by those states, including the media, policymaking and academia, which, through their own practices, contribute to its marginalisation from debate; and to directly call to account those states that use terrorism as a response to perceived security threats. The presence of individuals and groups of scholars undertaking work on state terrorism in various disciplines may be the key to overcoming two problems: the dearth of research in this area and the risk of unhelpful subdivisions between those identifying with CTS and other scholars of terrorism. Work by scholars in various social science disciplines will result in improved mapping of state terrorism, will enrich the analysis, and will help to focus the minds of those interested in state terrorism on a positive research agenda with an emancipatory aim, rather than on unhelpful introspection on the limits of terrorism studies within the discipline of IR.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Richard Jackson, Eric Herring, and Jeroen Gunning for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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