Introduction

"Acts of God"
"Wrath of God"
"Terrorism"
Combining some threads
Politicization of the definitional process
Towards a generic model of definitional game-playing?
Is God a Terrorist?
Misrepresentation of "God" with respect to risk management
Conceptual gerrymandering
Conclusions
References

Introduction

Concerns about the "Wrath of God" in contrast with "God as Love" have long been part of the debate in religious circles. Theologians of different religions have stressed one perspective over the other. The question might be perceived as relatively distant from the practical realities of an international community faced with "terrorists".

The following exploration is inspired by the film *The Man Who Sued God* (2001) in which a man whose "comprehensively insured" fishing boat was destroyed by lightning was refused compensation by the insurance industry because the small print provided for exemptions in the event of such "Acts of God". The owner then proceeded to bring legal proceedings against the main religious groups, who all claim to be representatives of God, in order to be compensated for the destructive consequences of that "Act of God". The case turned on whether the religious groups believed that God existed, and whether they effectively represented God and could in consequence be legitimately sued. The script was written by Don Watson. The film has been widely reviewed [more]

The film is a comedy but the core theological, insurance and legal questions relating to the widely used legal device of an "Act of God" are especially relevant at a time of the death of 30,000 people in Bam (Iran, 26 December 2003) -- declared to be an "Act of God".

The following exploration could be considered frivolous and trivial were it not for the importance attached to "Acts of God" by the insurance industry (and therefore in contract law), by theologians, and in the light of the religious dimension introduced both by the devout Christian leadership of the Coalition of the Willing into the pursuit of the "war against terrorism" as well as by those yjherjy oppose as instigators of that "terrorism". Christian fundamentalists have identified eight major "Acts of God" between 1991 and 1999 that are understood to be warnings to the USA by God as a result of its asking Israel to give up land for peace (see *God's Final Warning to America*) [more]. Increasingly the collective response to (and preparation for) "Acts of God" is allocated far less institutional resources than what are categorized as "Acts of Terrorism".

Statistics in the USA indicate that 88% of all accidents are caused by unsafe acts of people, 10% by unsafe conditions, and 2% by "Acts
of God” [more], although in the case of aircraft accidents it is estimated by the insurance industry that 38% are due to "Acts of God".

It is interesting that the secular nature of international legal conventions makes no provision for "Acts of God" [more], although the **United Nations General Conditions of Contract** defines "Force majeure" to include "Acts of God" -- perhaps the only acknowledgement of God by the UN?

Others, as noted below, have explored the theme "Is God a Terrorist?". One of them carefully and amusingly demonstrates that, according to the Old Testament, God must necessarily be considered a self-confessed terrorist. Related themes have been humourously explored by *The Onion* (notably *Lord Under Investigation For Failure To Provide*, 1997; *God Diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder*, 2001).

"Acts of God"

Some definitions:

- An event which is caused solely by the effect of nature or natural causes and without any interference by humans whatsoever. Insurance contracts often exclude "acts of God" from the list of insurable occurrences as a means to waive their obligations for damage caused by hurricanes, floods or earthquakes, all examples of "acts of God". (Lawinfo.com)

- As an example, for many years, the various actions of the weather have been considered an "act of God". While now it is mainly useful as a classification label by insurance companies (a subset of the "bad risk" classification), it has its origins in the belief that these weather events were related to the actions of a God. In the past, the weather was very poorly understood. It basically followed a seasonal pattern, but sometimes it would do completely unexpected things. A cyclone, hurricane or tornado would be greatly devastating, but poorly understood. In a similar category are earthquakes, volcanos and tidal waves. Because the general definition of a God's power relates to the things that are not understood, these events were closely associated with the actions of a God, or of gods…

In recent years, the perception has changed. Things like the weather, earthquakes and volcanos are better understood. This understanding is perhaps only superficial in reality as these events still cannot be controlled, and the prediction is poor. But the understanding is sufficient to have these things seen as natural events. There is now a scientific viewpoint on them, which separates it from the supernatural, and ultimately from the association with a god. With the scientific ideas of complexity, infinite sensitivity and chaos, people basically now claim to understand it. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that they know all about it only to the extent that they can classify it into a class of "things" that are too complex to understand. In other words to say that something is scientifically understood, often only means that it has been found to be like something else. It can then be classified as a particular type of system which has a name --- And if it has a name then it is obviously understood.

The important point here is that with this increase in understanding, however shallow it is, the elements of the "supernatural" class decreases. If the definition or perception of a god is linked with this supernatural class, the definition has also been changing. This is particularly important if we are to consider the visible evidence of the presence of a god. (The Identity of God)

- In endeavouring to clarify whether the progressive desertification of the Sahara was an "Act of God", John P. Pratt (*The Sahara: An Act of God?* Meridian Magazine, 22 Jan 2001) distinguishes between two definitions:
  - Some dictionaries focus on forces of nature which are uncontrollable
  - The other definition focuses on natural events which cannot be foreseen: "an extraordinary interruption by a natural cause (as a flood or earthquake) of the usual course of events that experience, prescience, or care cannot reasonably foresee or prevent.". This he takes to be the common legal definition. However he finds evidence that predictable events -- and increasingly hurricanes and earthquakes are predictable to some degree -- are indeed included as "Acts of God".

Pratt then adds a third perspective, namely "What does God consider to be an "act of God"?" By that I mean a third definition: what does God take credit for doing? Is the sunrise an act of God?"

- Within the United Nations "Acts of God" are referenced, without more definition, in such contexts as the following:
  - **United Nations General Conditions of Contract** 14.3 *Force majeure* as used in this Article means acts of God, war (whether declared or not), invasion, revolution, insurrection, or other acts of a similar nature or force.
  - **United Nations Office for Project Services** For purposes of this Order, Force Majeure is defined as an event beyond the control of the Vendor, not involving the Vendor's fault or negligence and not foreseeable and includes acts of God, natural disasters, war (whether or not declared) and other events of a similar nature or force.

Concerns with how exactly God may act in the light of the combined insight of theology and science have been usefully summarized by Robert J. Russell (*Agential Models of God's Interaction With the World*, 2000). Agential models deal explicitly with contemporary science and its philosophical implications to explore the concept of God as interacting with, but not intervening in, the world. They, in turn, include three distinct approaches, each of which has been widely developed in the theology and science literature: top-down causality, whole-part constraints, and bottom-up causality. However, most scholars insist that a combination of these approaches will be needed eventually for an adequate account of non-interventionist divine action.

"Wrath of God"

Some definitions:

- There are many places in the Bible that refer to God's Wrath. Most times it is not talking about His emotion alone, but it is referring to a specific series of events that will happen at an appointed time. The events are God's angels killing the wicked people of the world. (*The Wrath of God*)
• For Frederick S. Leahy (The Wrath of God in Relation to the Atonement): If, for example, we do not believe that God is a God of wrath as well as a God of love, and that his essential holiness means the inevitable punishment of sin, then we shall not believe in the substitutionary and vicarious nature of Christ's death on the Cross. That is why the doctrine of God's holy wrath borne by his Son at Calvary is repugnant to the liberal theologian. He has an erroneous view of God. The Bible makes it clear that the unforgiven sinner stands under God's curse and that 'the wrath of God abideth (or rests) on him' (John 3:36).

• W. J. Grier (The Wrath of God, 1971) points out that one of the evidences of decay and departure in the professing Church is the large-scale rejection of the teaching of the Scriptures on the wrath of God and their treatment as representing a perspective of bygone ages. For Grier, as an introduction to many examples of divine wrath: "To adopt such views one would have to repudiate a large part of Scripture from Genesis through to Revelation".

• Mark A. Copeland (The Epistle to the Romans: The Wrath Of God (1:18-32), 2003) provides a helpful checklist of why God manifests his wrath and how God manifests his wrath

• The time of God's wrath is referred to in both the Old and the New Testament. It is a historic event in which God starts to deal directly with the satanic forces and the evil people responsible for the destruction of the earth. (Wrath of God)

Associated with the sense of the "Wrath of God" is the fear that such potential wrath may engender. Jonathan Gallagher of the Adventist Sabbath School noted the relatively recent emergence of a new phobia termed theophobia:

"Terrorism"

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Definitions of Terrorism) notes that:

The question of a definition of terrorism has haunted the debate among states for decades. A first attempt to arrive at an internationally acceptable definition was made under the League of Nations, but the convention drafted in 1937 never came into existence. The UN Member States still have no agreed-upon definition. Terminology consensus would, however, be necessary for a single comprehensive convention on terrorism, which some countries favour in place of the present 12 piecemeal conventions and protocols. The lack of agreement on a definition of terrorism has been a major obstacle to meaningful international countermeasures. Cynics have often commented that one state's "terrorist" is another state's "freedom fighter". If terrorism is defined strictly in terms of attacks on non-military targets, a number of attacks on military installations and soldiers' residences could not be included in the statistics.

A recent book discussing attempts by the UN and other international bodies to define terrorism runs to three volumes and 1,866 pages without reaching any firm conclusion. The UN body identifies the following international approaches to such a definition:

1. League of Nations Convention (1937): "All criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public".
2. UN Resolution language (1999): "1. Strongly condemns all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, wherever and by whomsoever committed; 2. Reiterates that 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 are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them". (GA Res. 51/210 Measures to eliminate international terrorism)
4. Academic Consensus Definition: "Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought" (Schmid, 1988).

As pointed out by Michael Jordan (Terrorism's Slippery Definition Eludes UN Diplomats, Christian Science Monitor, 3 February 2002):
There are already 12 different terrorism "conventions," or treaties, on the books - created piecemeal over the past few decades. They criminalize activities such as airplane hijacking, hostage-taking, nuclear terrorism, and assorted bombings. In addition, the UN Security Council established a Counter-Terrorism Committee shortly after Sept. 11 to force member-states to harmonize antiterrorism laws, in areas such as financing. Since then, more and more countries have ratified the treaties. Still, some countries, some actions, slip through the cracks, observers say.

Some other definitions:

- For the US Department of State (Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2001): No one definition of terrorism has gained universal acceptance. For the purposes of this report, however, we have chosen the definition of terrorism contained in Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656(d). That statute contains the following definitions: The term "terrorism" means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant (1) targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. The term "international terrorism" means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country. The term "terrorist group" means any group practicing, or that has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism.

- For the US Department of Defense: The calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.

- As defined by the FBI, "the unlawful use of force against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in the furtherance of political or social objectives". This definition includes three elements: (1) Terrorist activities are illegal and involve the use of force. (2) The actions are intended to intimidate or coerce. (3) The actions are committed in support of political or social objectives. (FEMA-SS)

- Use of terror, especially the systematic use of terror by the government or other authority against particular persons or groups; a method of opposing a government internally or externally through the use of terror

- Any act including, but not limited to, the use of force or violence and/or threat thereof of any person or group(s) of persons whether acting alone or on behalf of, or in connection with, any organisation(s) or government(s) committed for political, religions, ideological or similar purposes, including the intention to influence any government and/or to put the public or any section of the public in fear. (European Council of International Schools 2003)

- Acts of murder and destruction deliberately directed against civilians or military in non-military situations. (Jewish Agency for Israel)

- Act of terrorism, terrorist act -- (the calculated use of violence (or threat of violence) against civilians in order to attain goals that are political or religious or ideological in nature; this is done through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear) (WordNet)

- The act of terrorizing, or state of being terrorized; a mode of government by terror or intimidation. --Jefferson. (Hyperdictionary)

In response to the confusion regarding the definition of terrorism, the Rational Radical (October 2001) suggested the following clarification in determining whether an act is "terrorism" or not. In this view it would be more useful to eliminate subjective evaluations of the goals of the violence, and instead, utilize two other factors -- the expected result of the violence, and the nature of the actor -- to then distinguish among four different types of acts involving the application of force:

- Expected result of the violence: Let's define an action as "terrorism" if the use of violence would reasonably be expected to harm innocent civilians. This is to be distinguished from a "military" action, where the use of violence is not reasonably expected to harm innocent civilians.

- Nature of the actor: A "state" action would be one conducted by a sovereign government. A "guerrilla" action will be one conducted by a non-governmental entity.

- Four different types of violent acts: Hence, we can have both state military actions and state terrorism actions. Likewise, there can be both guerrilla military actions and guerrilla terrorism actions.

The key act through which terrorism is now defined to legitimate US government response against terrorism is the Patriot Act (31 October 2001):

- New definitions of terrorism expand scope of surveillance. One new definition of terrorism and three expansions of previous definitions also expand the scope of surveillance. PATRIOT â§ 802's definition of "domestic terrorism" (amending 18 USC â§ 2331) raises concerns about legitimate protest activity being prosecuted as terrorism, especially if violence erupts, while additions to three existing definitions of terrorism (int'l terrorism per 18 USC â§ 2331, terrorism transcending national borders per 18 USC â§ 2332b, and federal terrorism per amended 18 USC â§ 2332b(g)(5)(B)) expose more people to surveillance (and potential "harboring" and "material support" liability, â§ 803, 805). [more]

Carroll E. Payne Jr (founder of the World Conflict Quarterly) argues that: According to these definitions the "Boston Tea Party" was a terrorist act and the British troops had every right to fire at the "Boston Massacre". Until a working definition is agreed to internationally, the problem of state sponsored terrorism and Terrorist vs. Freedom Fighter will not be resolved. Once nations can agree on who is a terrorist and what is terrorism then the extradition of people accused of terrorism between nations can proceed. A clearly stated,
internationally accepted, definition of terrorists and terrorism will ultimately result in the reduction of tensions between nations in solving international crises.

The problem has become especially acute for the insurance industry. As terrorism coverage continues to be excluded from more and more property and casualty policies, insurance industry leaders are advocating a global definition of terrorism. (Insurers Push for Global Terrorism Definition, Insurance Journal, 25 July 2002)

One of the most problematic aspects of achieving any definition is clarifying the relationship between terrorism and any form of struggle for liberation. In this respect the analysis of Boaz Ganor (Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?) is especially helpful (see below).

Combining some threads

The United Methodist Women have responded in part to some of the challenges of the above (Terrorism: a problem of definition) arguing that:

From the Roman point of view, the bandits who were hanged on either side of Jesus at the cross may have been "terrorists." However, they may have been "freedom fighters" from the point of view of the occupied, colonized zealous members of Palestine of Jesus' day. The word "terrorism" is fraught with complexities. There is a problem of definition. Therefore, one needs to make a distinction between the doer and the deed.

A helpful way of naming the doer and the deed is suggested by Peter C. Sederberg in his book, Terrorist Myths, Illusion, Rhetoric and Reality. He urges his readers not to confuse the actor (terrorist), the action (terrorism), and the effect (terror). He says, "...the inclination to equate sin with sinner (or terrorism with terrorist) may be an inevitable shorthand in everyday relations, but it impairs analysis. Once we apply such a label, that is all we tend to see".

They also stress:

Further, terrorism is not a God-sent act. Terrorism is a human-designed, human-executed act. In Jesus' days, when anxious people asked why the Tower of Siloam accidentally fell and killed many people, Jesus said that it was a calamity, and the people who were killed in the tragedy were not worse sinners than others who lived in Jerusalem (Luke 13:4). Let us not confuse human acts with God's acts in times such as this.

For Rev. Garry Dombrosky, Campus Chaplain and Assistant Professor of Applied Religion of University College of Alberta Concordia.

"This was not an act of God but an act of evil. It is the same evil that came upon Christ. It is the same evil which God triumphed over in the victory of Jesus Christ." [more]

For Pastor Don Schneider, president of the Adventist Church's North American Division:

"Some people say this is an act of God; they're wrong. When an Adventist Disaster Response worker helps someone hurt by these tragedies, that's an act of God. When people of all faiths get together and pray for the victims and their families and co-workers, that's an act of God. But when people create chaos and havoc and destruction, that's not even the act of people who believe in God. God's getting blamed today for causing the disaster, and He didn't have anything to do with it." [more]

Michael Wong (Terrorism in the Bible, 2001) asks the question: "What is terrorism, if not the events of Exodus?" He then proceeds to provide a useful comparison in parallel columns of Osama Bin Laden with Moses, both of whom claimed divine inspiration and assistance in their campaigns of terror. He then suggests that Moses -- as "one of the first arch-terrorists in recorded history" -- was Osama Bin-Laden's role model:

Both had legitimate grievances to air, and both thought that the proper way to air those grievances was by visiting pain, hardship, and death upon innocent civilians. Both thought that God was on their side (the same God!), both spared some of their hatred for any of their own people who step out of line, and both stepped away from privileged lives of wealth and power in order to do so. So what's the moral of this story? The next time someone rhetorically asks about the source of Osama Bin Laden's evil, point him to the Bible. If fundamentalists believe in a God who is capable of terrorism, we should hardly be surprised when they deal with their problems by resorting to terrorism themselves! Indeed, we should count ourselves lucky that Christian fundamentalists have few real problems to complain about (hence their whining about non-issues such as their desire to turn public schools into Sunday schools), or we could be facing a lot more domestic terrorism, even worse than the usual abortion clinic bombings and shootings.

In Australia, the Department of Veterans Affairs has now indicated that the Defence Service Homes Insurance now contains a "terrorism exclusion endorsement". This excludes any cover for "death, injury, illness, loss, damage, liability, cost or expense directly or indirectly arising out of or in connection with any act of terrorism". Terrorism is defined as anything designed to influence the government of any nation or any act in pursuit of "political, religious, ideological or similar purposes" designed to intimidate the public, and carried out by anyone, either acting alone or as a group. And in case ex-soldier home owners decide to defend themselves against an act of terrorism, forget that too. The exclusion means there will be no cover for any injury or loss "resulting from, or arising out of or in connection with
any action in controlling, preventing, suppressing, retaliating against, or responding to any act of terrorism". From this it may be concluded that terrorism has been declared by Australian government insurers to be equal to an Act of God.

On USA national television, Christian leaders, such as Jerry Falwell (who asserted that Muhammad was a terrorist), have said outright that the act of terrorism of 9/11 was due to God visiting His judgment upon an apostate America -- God's judgment against feminism, homosexuality, and abortion. Or they have said that He "allowed" it because He has some kind of grand plan that somehow includes the vicious murder of thousands of innocent people. Islamic militants, meanwhile, rejoice that Allah has blessed their efforts to bring down the "infidels." Thus a choir of religious voices call the events of September 11 "an act of God." [more]

For Doris Drisgil (The Ultimate Terrorist):

Natural disasters have long been termed, "acts of god." To a rationalist, this phrase holds the strongest irony. Have all the earthquakes and floods that have killed thousands of people over millennia been willful acts of an intelligent, omnipotent god? If that is true, this supernatural being who has us in his power is the worst terrorist ever imagined. If he has the ability to regulate natural events, and chooses to cause disasters that result in undeserved pain and death, then how can anyone consider him good? Many believers will say that natural disasters can't be blamed on god. Are they admitting that their god doesn't have full control over everything that happens? Certainly a less-than-all-powerful deity would be more believable than the omnipotent but cruel god of traditional beliefs. Yet nearly all monotheists insist that their god is omnipotent, and we just don't understand this reasons for doing what he does.

For the EternityNow Ministries (Is God a Terrorist?, 2001): "God is not a terrorist, and recent events are not the result of his displeasure and his judgment".

Hope is deferred and the heart is made sick when we don't believe God accepts, loves and affirms us. The way you believe God sees you will shape how you see Him, how you see yourself, and will dominate the landscape of your Christian experience. Now, more than ever, American Christians need to see the love of God is real, vital and abundantly available. You have reeled in shock as you witnessed the horrors of war on your own soil. You have tackled the mind-numbing questions of "Why?" or "How could a thing like this happen?" and "What happens next?"

John Norman (An Effective and Reasonable Next Step in the War on Terrorism, 27 January 2002) takes as his point of departure the statements of Exodus (chapters 10, 11 and 12) in a careful analysis of George Bush's declaration that you cannot differentiate between terrorists, and also that anyone providing financial support to terrorists should be regarded as a terrorist as well:

Terrorism can be defined as the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians in order to coerce a given society and their leaders to change their political stand on given issues. The earliest recorded historical incidence of terrorism is found in sacred texts, and regards a certain Middle Eastern society who had been kept as slaves for various generations in a neighboring country. The leader of that other country was asked to let those people go, but he was stubborn and wouldn't do it. So, in order to coerce his decision a supernatural being by the name of Jehovah unleashed a series of calamities on that leader's nation. There were ten of these calamities, and the first nine cannot be characterized as outright terrorism, since they involve what might be called natural disasters. The tenth of these calamities, however, is different: "...About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts..."

Now it has been argued that these were not innocent people, since all Egyptians shared in the guilt of this enslavement. But if we accept that, then we are bound to give credence to the extreme view that there are no innocent Israelis, Americans, etc., thus making them fair targets.

As argued by Charles Love of St. Andrew's United Church (Is God a Terrorist?): "A simplistic, literal reading of this story permissively opens the door to any imaginable act of aggression that we might hurl at any perceived enemy: God showed us in Egypt how to deal with them. Haul out the Old Testament and bombs away". Although God is acclaimed to be the epitome of Good, John Norman summarizes his argument that you cannot let any terrorist off the hook by referring to how nice a person he is outside of his terrorist activities. Given his point of departure, he concludes (whether humorously or not):

Now, since you cannot differentiate among terrorists, and since anyone who knowingly gives financial support to a terrorist should be considered as a terrorist, then the first step I propose is for Bush to order Ashcroft to close down every church in the United States where people worship this god, and, since the members support this god through their donations, to declare them to be supporters of a terrorist.

Some of the above points raise the question as to whether the actions of George Bush and Tony Blair -- profoundly held by them to be in conformity with God's Will -- are to be considered "Acts of God". In acting on behalf of God, to what extent are they to be considered agents of God? It was precisely this kind of thinking that was rejected by the USA before the UN General Assembly with respect to 9/11: "The representative of the United States said the barbarities of 11 September had been acts of war perpetrated by men who had perverted the basic elements of civilized life and had dared to call their deeds acts of God. The terrorists could not deceive the world by attempting to wrap themselves in Islam's glorious mantle." [more]
Politization of the definitional process

The many examples above point to the core difficulty of any effort at definition and clarification, namely that every such effort is bedevilled by claims and counterclaims -- and especially about the quality of evidence and the legal context within which proof of any assertions is presented. This is exemplified by the common statement that "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter".

As noted by Boaz Ganor (Defining Terrorism: is one man's terrorist another man's freedom fighter?) in an excellent analysis (which is itself subject to this problem): "However, when dealing with terrorism and guerrilla warfare, implications of defining our terms tend to transcend the boundaries of theoretical discussions". It is the politicization of analysis that cautions against optimistic expectations that definition is fundamental to "the attempt to coordinate international collaboration, based on the currently accepted rules of traditional warfare" (in Ganor's terms). Any "objectivity" may indeed be simply a way of framing "terrorism" to the advantage of particular agendas whilst ignoring or marginalizing its implications for others. Ganor himself is in a difficult position in this respect as Director of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (Israel) given the ambiguities of Israel's perceived role in relation to terrorism.

Ganor takes as his point of departure the 109 definitions of terrorism identified by Alex P. Schmidt and Albert J. Youngman (Political Terrorism, 1988) in a survey of academics in the field. From this he concludes:

- **Terrorism or Revolutionary Violence?** He questions the conclusion, in this respect, that a political motive makes revolutionary activity acceptable and that the end justifies the means.

- **Terrorism or National Liberation?** He concludes that: "The claim that a freedom fighter cannot be involved in terrorism, murder and indiscriminate killing is, of course, groundless. A terrorist organization can also be a movement of national liberation, and the concepts of 'terrorist' and 'freedom fighter' are not mutually contradictory." He argues that efforts to present them as distinct: "strengthens the attempt by terrorist organizations to present terrorism and the struggle for liberation as two contradictory concepts. It thus plays into the terrorists' hands by supporting their claim that, since they are struggling to remove someone they consider a foreign occupier, they cannot be considered terrorists."

- **Targeting 'the innocent'?** As noted above, causing harm to the "innocent", "innocent civilians" or "civilians" figures in some definitions of terrorism, notably in the emotive arguments of religious groups. Ganor argues that: "Politicians in countries affected by terrorism at times make political use of the definition of terrorism by attempting to emphasize its brutality. One of the prevalent ways of illustrating the cruelty and inhumanity of terrorists is to present them as harming 'the innocent'.". But for him: "'Innocent' (as opposed to 'civilian') is a subjective concept, influenced by the definer's viewpoint, and therefore must not be the basis for a definition of terrorism. The use of the concept 'innocent' in defining terrorism makes the definition meaningless and turns it into a tool in the political game."

- **Proposing a Definition of Terrorism** In the light of the above concerns, he proposes the definition: "terrorism is the intentional use of, or threat to use violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims". With respect to "civilians", he notes: "Terrorism is thus distinguished from other types of political violence (guerrilla warfare, civil insurrection, etc.). Terrorism exploits the relative vulnerability of the civilian "underbelly"--the tremendous anxiety, and the intense media reaction evoked by attacks against civilian targets. The proposed definition emphasizes that terrorism is not the result of an accidental injury inflicted on a civilian or a group of civilians who stumbled into an area of violent political activity, but stresses that this is an act purposely directed against civilians. Hence, the term "terrorism" should not be ascribed to collateral damage to civilians used as human shields or to cover military activity or installations, if such damage is incurred in an attack originally aimed against a military target. In this case, the responsibility for civilian casualties is incumbent upon whoever used them as shields."

- **Guerrilla Warfare vs. Terrorism** Ganor addresses the ambiguities of this distinction: "Terrorism and guerrilla warfare often serve as alternative designations of the same phenomenon. The term "terrorism," however, has a far more negative connotation, seemingly requiring one to take a stand, whereas the term "guerrilla warfare" is perceived as neutral and carries a more positive connotation". However: "The proposed definition, as noted, distinguishes terrorism from guerrilla activity according to the intended target of attack. The definition states that if an attack deliberately targets civilians, then that attack will be considered a terrorist attack, whereas, if it targets military or security personnel then it will be considered a guerrilla attack. It all depends on who the intended victims are." Ganor also allows for the possibility that: "A situation is certainly possible in which an organization might decide to move from the stage of terrorism to the stage of guerrilla warfare, and vice-versa, thereby changing its character from one involved only in, or mainly in, terrorism, to one involved mainly in guerrilla warfare."

- **Individual Terrorism and Urban Guerrilla Warfare** Ganor stresses that this area of potential ambiguity is addressed by the identity of the intended target. "An attack against military personnel, or against a leading decision-maker who formulates policy (including
counter-terrorist policy), could be considered, according to the proposed definition, an 'urban guerrilla' activity. However, if the target is a civilian not acting in a decision-making capacity, but merely someone who is at most a political or social symbol (a well known singer, a journalist, a past leader, a judge, the head of a community or ethnic group, etc.), this will be an act of 'individual terrorism' according to the proposed definition."

- **The Aims of Terrorism and of Guerrilla Warfare** He argues that "the type of goal sought is irrelevant (so long as the goal is political). The terrorist and the guerrilla fighter may have the exact same aims, but they choose different means to accomplish them." He concludes: It may be difficult at times to determine whether the victim of an attack was indeed a civilian, or whether the attack was intentional. These cases could be placed under the rubric of a "gray area," to be decided in line with the evidence and through the exercise of judicial discretion. The proposed definition may therefore be useful in the legal realm as a criterion for defining and categorizing the perpetrators' activities. In any event, adopting the proposed definition of terrorism will considerably reduce the "gray area" to a few marginal cases."

- **Defining States' Involvement in Terrorism** Ganor argues that: "States can be involved in terrorism in various ways: from various levels of general support for terrorist organizations, through operational assistance, initiating or directing attacks, and up to the perpetration of terrorist attacks by official state agencies. All forms of state involvement in terrorism are usually placed under the general category of 'terrorist states,' or 'state sponsored terrorism.' Such a designation has taken on the character of a political weapon; rival states ascribe it to one another, and terrorist organizations use it against states acting against them....Various countries have engaged in attacks against leading activists of terrorist organizations--planners and initiators of attacks, commanders of operational units, saboteurs and even the organizations' leaders. On such grounds, these countries have often been accused of engaging in terrorism themselves."

But for Ganor: "According to the proposed definition of terrorism... actions by a state against terrorist activists cannot be defined as 'terrorism,' even if only because the latter are not actually civilians. Individuals engaging in terrorist activities, even if not wearing a uniform, exclude themselves from the civilian community, and rules protecting civilians no longer apply to them. Thus, just as the definition views decision-makers as 'legitimate' targets in guerrilla warfare, so targeting terrorists who head operational, administrative or political branches in a terrorist organization should not itself be considered a terrorist activity, since these are the people responsible for policy formulation and decision making in the organization." In this connection, Ganor explicitly sets aside "questions bearing on the legitimate confines of a struggle against terrorism and on the rights of states to fight terrorists in the territory of another sovereign state."

- **The Importance of Defining Terrorism** Ganor provides a valuable summary of the needs for an adequate definition. However he fails to address in any way the basic question of how evidence is to be acquired or presented before competent legal authorities in support of any charge of terrorism. This has proven to be a significant issue in relation to "targeted killings" where it is sufficient for the military authority to claim that they possessed such evidence and acted on it (as judge, jury and executioner) -- whether or not evidence to the contrary might have been available had the "accused" been alive at present it.

- **The Attitude of Terrorist Organizations Toward the Definition** For Ganor: "The international adoption of the proposed definition, with its distinction between terrorism and guerrilla warfare -- and its concomitant separation from political aims -- could motivate the perpetrators to reconsider their intentions, choosing military targets over civilian targets -- guerrilla warfare over terrorism-- both because of moral considerations and because of 'cost-benefit' considerations." Ganor summarizes the thrust of his argument as follows: "The struggle to define terrorism is sometimes as hard as the struggle against terrorism itself. The present view, claiming it is unnecessary and well-nigh impossible to agree on an objective definition of terrorism, has long established itself as the 'politically correct' one. It is the aim of this paper, however, to demonstrate that an objective, internationally accepted definition of terrorism is a feasible goal, and that an effective struggle against terrorism requires such a definition. The sooner the nations of the world come to this realization, the better."

Several questions must be asked however:

- to what extent definitions of terrorism are developed (by bodies of whatever political persuasion) to protect (and "whitewash") the agendas of those that promote them?
- given the problematic, and highly secretive, approach to evidence of terrorism, does not any definition leave itself open to abuse (as in the case of "targeted killings") by "terrorists", or by those that oppose them (especially when the relationship to due legal process is treated in such cases under clauses of exception)?
- given the subtlety of some distinctions, especially under operational conditions, to what extent does the problematic ability to collect and present evidence, and to assert and prove its validity, not completely undermine aspirations for an "objective" consideration of "terrorism"?
- to what extent the process of defining terrorism is itself politicized (as with that of "aggression") and subject to efforts to define the space in which such definition should be agreed, to dominate the debate within that space, to be able subsequently to claim "universal" consensus of responsible parties in reaching consensus?

Despite the excellence of his analysis, however, the value of Ganor's work is diminished by his failure to use his scheme to confront, as a striking example, the evidence (presented by some) for "terrorism" by the Irgun and Haganah prior to the emergence of the State of Israel. It is such omissions which similarly undermine efforts to clarify the definition of "terrorism" within the USA by failing to distinguish when the USA itself have engaged in, or supported, "terrorist activities" (as claimed by some) in a manner currently considered reprehensible by George Bush.

In the case of the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization) how is the King David Hotel bombing on 26 July 1946, commanded
by Menachem Begin (subsequently Prime Minister of Israel) and resulting in the death of 91 people, to be assessed in the light of Ganor's definition? The extent to which Irgun was terrorist or not has been explored elsewhere (see for example Jean Shaoul. Terrorism and the origins of Israel, 2003; J. Bowyer Bell. Terror Out of Zion: The Fight for Israeli Independence, 1996; Nader Khaireddine Abuljebai. The Different Types of Israeli and Zionist Terrorism ), notably pointing to the inappropriateness of seeking to establish any moral equivalence between the activities of Irgun and PLO activists [more | more | more].

It would appear to be the case that no international definition of "terrorism" can be agreed without recognizing the extent to which many of those parties to such a definition may themselves have been engaged in "terrorist activities", whether exceptionally, inadvertently or systematically -- or legitimately (if erroneously) perceived to have been so engaged. this suggests an international equivalent to South Africa's innovative Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

It is such questions which justify the further exploration of the theme "Is God a Terrorist" -- especially given the strong possibility that the process of defining terrorism is driven in part by the needs of the insurance industry to avoid exposure to risk, and by other parties to avoid confronting their own historical realities and tendencies.

Towards a generic model of definitional game-playing?

This section draws attention to a number of areas of decades-long controversial debate over matters of definition. The familiarity with some of these areas may prove helpful in providing a larger context through which to explore the newer process of definition of "terrorism" -- and the relevance of the question "Is God a terrorist?"

Aggression: The process of international debate regarding the definition of aggression provides a classic case for reflection on the nature of such definitional processes. Efforts towards such a definition were initiated under the League of Nations in 1933. They were relaunched under the United Nations in 1950 with no conclusion. A further effort was started in 1967 and continued for seven years with the adoption (without a vote) of a consensus definition in 1974. Member states were by no means agreed upon its meaning. (see Benjamin B. Ferencz. The United Nations Consensus Definition Of Aggression: Sieve Or Substance, 1995) [more]. A number of issues were avoided to achieve consensus [more]. This definition is of course focused on that relating to states. It does not address wider understandings of aggression amongst ethnic groups and in interpersonal relationships [more]. Given that "terrorism" could be considered a subcategory of "aggression", it is clear that consensus was achieved at the cost of excluding a variety of important dimensions. It notably failed to provide adequately for the activities of the Coalition of the Willing in invading Iraq.

Slavery: Recognition of "slavery" as unacceptable has taken centuries. Slavery nevertheless exists today despite the fact that it is banned in most of the countries where it is practiced [more]. It is also prohibited by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1956 UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. Current forms include: bonded labour, forced labour, child labour, commercial sexual exploitation of children, trafficking, early and forced marriage, traditional or ‘chattel’ slavery. Of special interest here is the degree of involvement of governments of the time in the slave trade, given its importance to their economies. Such governments of course include those of many of the industrialized countries of today. Also of particular interest is the controversial nature of the debate for abolition of slavery in such countries notably in the USA -- where the debate was not resolved rationally but through the American Civil War, 1961-65 of which it was a principal cause. The persistent forms of slavery, possibly with the complicity of the countries that have explicitly banned it, illustrates the ambiguities associated with the definitional problem.

Indigenous peoples: Recognition of indigenous peoples and the consequences of the marginalization to which they have been exposed over centuries, both in law and in society, has been slow in coming. The early decades of the last century saw them subject to the whims of state-sanctioned bounty hunters -- seeking their elimination in some countries. By being effectively defined as "subhuman" there were few constraints on their slaughter -- a mindset that saw its peak in the Nazi approach to the ethnic groups that they sought to exterminate. The operation of death squads to eliminate such peoples continues in parts of Latin America. The process of defining groups as outside society is echoed by Ganor's comment above that: "Individuals engaging in terrorist activities, even if not wearing a uniform, exclude themselves from the civilian community, and rules protecting civilians no longer apply to them". The definitional challenges relating to indigenous peoples persist in connection with land rights issues for which treaties may well have been signed in the past.

Communism / Socialism / Capitalism: The definition and handling of "dissidence", notably in relation to national security, has been intensively explored throughout the Cold War period and before. Under Communism it gave rise to notorious legal processes and executions in an effort to identify and remove those that were not acting according to the party line. In the USA, the process of the controversial hearings in the 1950s conducted by Senator Joseph McCarthy's Senate Committee on Government Operations, and those conducted by the House Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAC), are of interest because of their efforts to define threats to American society through "Communism" and "Socialism". Comparisons with the treatment of those suspected of terrorism have already been made.

Collaboration in time of war: During, or following, major wars, a number of countries have had to explore the boundaries of any definition of "collaboration with the enemy". Given George Bush's definition of support for terrorism, this is an especially controversial matter at a time when newly-declassified documents in the US National Archives and Library of Congress are indicating the level of involvement of the family of George Bush in support of the Nazi war machine. According to John Buchanan (Bush - Nazi Link Confirmed, New Hampshire Gazette, 2003) the documents indicate that Prescott Bush, the grandfather of President George W. Bush, served as a business partner of and U.S. banking operative for the financial architect of the Nazi war machine from 1926 until 1942, when Congress took aggressive action against Bush and his "enemy national" partners, notably seizing assets on 20 October 1942, under authority of the Trading with the Enemy Act. (see also John Buchanan and Stacey Michael. Bush - Nazi Deals Continued Until 1951 : Federal Documents, New Hampshire Gazette, November 2003) [more | more | more]. Of special interest in this case is the level of denial relating to the topic over 60 years by the media which only in October 2003 is finally exploring the matter [more].
"Civil society" and "NGO": The definitional game-playing in connection with the progressive recognition of "civil society" organizations in contrast to "NGOs" has been explored elsewhere (Interacting Fruitfully with Un-Civil Society the dilemma for non-civil society organizations, 1996). This has been evident both within the context of the UN system (originator of the term NGO) and in the academic community. Of special relevance here is the challenge of defining "terrorist organization" in relation to other non-governmental bodies, including liberation movements. Of particular interest is the difference in attitude in different cultures with different styles and traditions of organization.

Substance abuse: There has been considerable media coverage of the different aspects of substance abuse and the collective response to it. In the USA this was first marked by the Prohibition era (1919-1933) when the manufacture, purchase, transportation, import, export, and sale of alcoholic beverages was prohibited. This was possible because of the manner in which alcohol was successfully defined as "evil" to the electorate. More recent periods have seen efforts around the world to restrict access to narcotic drugs through various "wars on drugs". But in both cases the definitional problems may be seen in the quite different attitudes and policies adopted around the world -- in the light of "Sexual abuse" and "Terrorism":

"Sexual abuse" and "Terrorism": The nature of the definitional process, and the abuses to which it can lend itself, is worth exploring in the light of "sexual abuse", notably of children within the context of religious institutions (as has been made evident in legal cases in recent years regarding abuses from earlier decades). For example, one source asserts: "By far the most pervasive form of terrorism is sexual in nature" (Sexual Terrorism). It is the widespread nature of the phenomenon (and hence the greater familiarity with its implications), and the fact that it seldom results in physical death, that permits the controversial aspects of the definitional process to be explored as the basis for a generic model of definition in emotional charged contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison of political and sexual terrorism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political terrorism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terror experienced by victims of &quot;Acts of Terrorism&quot;, whether through direct exposure or the threat thereof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional use of threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians (&quot;innocent civilians&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Military personnel&quot; as legitimate targets (but of guerrilla warfare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptability of a declared &quot;political&quot; motive of &quot;liberation&quot; as part of a revolutionary political process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-supported (or tolerated) terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution-supported terrorism (characterized by provision of funds, shelter and resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment of evidence (or its destruction) and intimidation of potential witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Interrogation&quot; of perpetrators without adequate legal protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusation/condemnation by &quot;victims&quot; without effective appeal (as with cases of &quot;targeted killings&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of evidence and repudiation of witnesses (incl. assassination of witnesses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrecy: covert implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanction of moral authority: selective presentation of religious citations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionalism: pattern of abuse framed as isolated &quot;mistakes&quot; arising from regrettable actions of a particular individual not respecting institutional policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Trial&quot; by media and public opinion in advance of (and undermining) any due process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation of definition of political terrorism to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is God a Terrorist?

Proceeding on the assumption that there is a generic model of controversial definitional problems, characterized by a high degree of definitional game-playing, the framework elaborated above in the comparison of political vs sexual terrorism may then be tentatively applied below to a comparison of "Acts of Terrorism" vs "Acts of God".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison of acts of terrorism and acts of God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Acts of Terrorism&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Acts of God&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;God as terrorist&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terror experienced by victims of &quot;Acts of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism&quot;, whether through direct exposure or the threat thereof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional use of threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims: Civilians (&quot;innocent civilians&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Military personnel&quot; as legitimate targets (but of guerrilla warfare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptability of a declared &quot;political&quot; motive of &quot;liberation&quot; as part of a revolutionary political process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-supported (or tolerated) terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution-supported terrorism (characterized by provision of funds, shelter and resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment of evidence (or its destruction) and intimidation of potential witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Interrogation&quot; of perpetrators without adequate legal protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusation/condemnation by &quot;victims&quot; without effective appeal (as with cases of &quot;targeted killings&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of evidence and repudiation of witnesses (incl. assassination of witnesses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrecy: covert implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanction of moral authority: selective presentation of religious citations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionalism: pattern of abuse framed as isolated &quot;mistakes&quot; arising from regrettable actions of a particular individual not respecting institutional policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Trial&quot; by media and public opinion in advance of (and undermining) any due process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation of definition of political terrorism to exclude (or include) certain forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Acts of God&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terror experienced by victims of &quot;Acts of God&quot;, whether through direct exposure or the threat thereof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional use of threat (eg Wrath of God; Hell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims: &quot;Innocents&quot; (eg &quot;first born&quot; of Egypt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Evil&quot; people as evolving such a response in the legitimate warfare between &quot;Good and Evil&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptability of a declared &quot;political&quot; motive of &quot;liberation&quot; (eg liberating the Jews from Egyptian slavery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchically-accepted terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism supported by religious institutions representative of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment of evidence for alternative explanations (or its destruction) and intimidation of potential witnesses by religious institutions representative of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Interrogation&quot; of those framed as instigators, by religious institutions representative of God, often without adequate legal protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusation/conviction on the basis of evidence from &quot;victims&quot; without effective appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of evidence for alternative explanations and repudiation of witnesses by religious institutions representative of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrecy: unpredictable implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanction of moral authority of religious institutions representative of God (concerning the Wrath of God)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionalism: pattern of calamities framed as isolated incidents arising from regrettable actions of sinful mankind not then representative of God's Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Trial&quot; by media and public opinion of declared apostates in advance of (and undermining) any due process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation of definition of terrorism to exclude (or include) certain forms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This approach points to the possibility that a number of arguments presented earlier as evidence against "God being a Terrorist" are problematic. These include:

- "Natural causes": Restricting an "Act of God" to acts of nature or natural causes and "without any interference by humans whatsoever" precludes any possibility that God may act through humans (possibly without their awareness), as many religions would vigorously assert. As, the Creator of humans "in his image", the actions of humans must partake in some measure of the quality of God -- whatever the conclusion on the freedom of humans to act independently of the will of an omnipotent, omnipresent God. For Doris Drisgil (The Ultimate Terrorist): "Many believers will say that natural disasters can't be blamed on God. Are they admitting that their God doesn't have full control over everything that happens?". Debate continues to focus on whether nature is good, evil, or morally neutral -- especially in the light of any belief that the world (and nature) was created by an omnipotent God. The problem of the evil in the world created by God has bedevilled theology down the ages (see William B Drees, Is Nature Ever Evil? 2003) and produced a variety of questionable solutions. These are the focus of theodicy in demonstrating the existence and role of God without reference to supernatural sources, and that the evil in the world does not conflict with the goodness of God.

Given the increasing perception that "nature is dead" as a result of human intervention in planetary ecosystems, it might be argued that many natural disasters (such as flooding, etc) are indeed caused by humans through nature as an intermediary. The point was made in 1997 on World Disaster Reduction Day: "Some people believe that natural disasters, including floods, cyclones, and drought, are "acts of God," but the recent steep rise in losses due to natural disasters suggests a more worldly cause." This perspective has been developed by UNEP (The State of the Environment: Past, Present, Future? 2002) with the indication that that, while humans for millenniums have feared "Acts of God" such as deluge and drought, they now are vulnerable to much worse: "Acts of Man" played out through nature [more]. In reporting on flooding, Martin Woolacott (Mozambique flood disaster,
for those meriting retribution. As demonstrated by John Norman ("Innocence"). Whether this suggests that God should change or that those persons and property. Despite this, it may indeed be a God of Love, he also has the capacity detailed in the Bible to use his powers of destruction in ways indistinguishable to the victims (or their relatives) from those of terrorism.

For Gianni Tibaldi: It is the mysterious secretive dimension that establishes the truth nature and power of "Terrorism" and constitutes its very special character -- which may be usefully compared to the mysterious, undefined attributes of "God". The more leaders, sources, bases, and support are hidden and "shadowy" -- and its identity is unknown -- the more "Terrorism" causes the spread of uncontrolled fear and destructive permanent effects. As an "Act of God", an earthquake demonstrates the uncontrollable and unforeseeable omnipotence of "God", signs of His implacable wrath, really increase the effects of the terror because of the sense of guilt and powerlessness of human people. An earthquake indeed becomes a very effective metaphor of terrorism -- both as a terrifying act and as the evidence of implacable wrath of a hidden, uncontrollable and unforeseeable power. This "defication" excites a psychodynamic process of "transfer": the victims project the image of "God" as mysterious, wrathful and punisher onto "Terrorism" and the terrorists identify themselves with a "God" that is powerful -- because secret and impossible to catch. Within this process the victims became more and more vulnerable and the terrorists more and more possessed by a delirium of omnipotence.

It is interesting to note that as envisaged above, "Acts of God" involve commission (in the form of natural disasters, etc) rather than acts of omission (which may be less obviously disastrous). Thus Michael Buerk, the BBC reporter (whose work in 1984 triggered Bob Geldorff's worldwide Band Aid and Live Aid initiatives in response to massive starvation in Ethiopia) noted in a follow-up report in 2004 that peasants there continue to have faith each year that God will bring the rain (known as the "tears of God") that will stave of further starvation. But he concludes that they are regularly "betrayed by their God...who punishes them".

"Predictability": From the perspective of the insurance industry it is the unpredictability of "natural disasters" that makes them problematic for actuaries in ensuring the economic viability of an insurance policy -- hence their exclusion as "Acts of God". However many such disasters are now more predictable scientifically (as with "bad weather" for which insurance policies are available) -- and as are the "social disasters" of war and terrorism that it is the business of futurists and the intelligence community to render predictable. It is curious that "Acts of God" are not at least extended to cover all disasters not resulting from the predictable failure of "machinery" of any kind.

"Premediation": This criterion is favoured in the definition of terrorism of the US Department of State and would appear to be restricted to human premeditation. However this would arbitrarily preclude consideration of the implications of the omniscient quality of God who, for example, must in some measure have "premeditated" the "Act of God" against the civilians of Bam. There is also the issue of actions that are experienced as terrorism by the victims but which are consciously undertaken at God's command. This would be the case with regard to the massacre of all the native inhabitants of the Promised Land -- as commanded of Moses and Joshua by God: "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." (1 Samuel 15.2) [see discussion by A.C.Nobes. Massacre of the innocents: Was the God of the Old Testament a brutal murderer?]. There is some question regarding the involvement of God in influencing President McKinley regarding his instigation of the Philippine-American War (1899-1913) at a cost of some 300,000 lives [more] that parallels God's role in relation to influencing George Bush and Tony Blair on Iraq with similar loss of life [more]. Presumably the deaths of the Filipinos could be similarly justified.

"Political motivation": It might be assumed that God has no political motivation according to the definitions of politics of political scientists and politicians. It would however be difficult to challenge the possibility that God has the functional equivalent of "political motivation" -- especially in his efforts (recognized by many religions) to out-maneuver opposition to his policies by those of more malign intent. Again, in the light of the US Department of Defense definition, the use of violence by God may well be intended "to coerce or intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological" -- as demonstrated with respect to the Pharaoh of Egypt.

"Illegality": The FBI definition of terrorism focuses on the "unlawful use of force against persons or property". It would be presumptuous indeed for the FBI to question the legality of God's use of force given that it must be assumed (especially by a country so uniquely blessed by God) that it was indeed God that created the laws of force and has long freely used them against persons and property. Despite this, it may indeed be the case that God does not restrict himself to action according to the laws of the USA. Whether this suggests that God should change or that those laws should be modified to reflect this is another matter.

"Innocence": Some claim that a God of Love does not act destructively against "innocents" but reserves his destructive wrath for those meriting retribution. As demonstrated by John Norman (An Effective and Reasonable Next Step in the War on
Thanksgiving, Evidence in the Plastic Turkey Era

Baghdad

Elsewhere it has been argued, in the light of George Bush's widely publicized "acts of "God"?

The insurance industry and contract law identify "Acts of God" as insurance industry whose exposure to risk is thereby immunity from legal brand certain

Is there indeed, as suggested in the film, a tacit "deal" between those of "God" were forced to recognize of God were forced to recognize

In the movie of God were forced to recognize (2001), which inspired this paper, the defendants as nominated (or self-acclaimed) representatives of God were forced to recognize that their best defence against a multi-million dollar class action suit was to deny the existence of "God" -- as defined by the insurance industry. Clearly, here also, "God" cannot be a "terrorist" if he does not exist. This is however equally embarrassing because then it raises issues as to what business religion and the insurance industry are actually in.

Reactions to 9/11 confirm that the status of "evil" has had considerable impact on modern thinking as explored by Susan Neiman (Evil in Modern Thought, 2002) who notes that "The 1755 earthquake that destroyed the city of Lisbon, and several thousand of its inhabitants, shook the Enlightenment all the way to East Prussia.". The reason was that philosophical thinking was at a turning point. Natural events (though caused by supernatural actors), were now beginning to be understood through scientific like investigations. "Evil" would be restricted, in such thinking, to acts of human beings, not acts of God or nature. Neiman takes "intellectual reactions to Lisbon and Auschwitz as central poles of inquiry", claiming that : "the problem of evil is the guiding force of modern thought."

Misrepresentation of "God" with respect to risk management

It could be assumed that there are currently three distinct approaches to risk management:

- **investment in religion:** This is the classical approach to the sense of existential insecurity and any need for a truly comprehensive long-term security. "God" is then regularly consulted like an insurance broker -- both for short-term risks, life and after-life policies (of a longer-term nature). This suggests a very particular approach to "God" and a very particular understanding of the business that "God" is in.

- **investment in policies obtained from the insurance industry:** This is the classical secular approach which is challenged in its comprehensiveness by exceptional force majeure (including "Acts of God" and "Acts of Terrorism"). Religious institutions (as discussed below) themselves have extensive shareholdings in this approach to security, raising questions about whether their own security is really comprehensive.

- **investment in technology offering increased security:** Although classical in many respects, it is perhaps this approach which is perceived by the Christian-led Coalition of the Willing as offering greater security than either of the above. Exponential increases in surveillance systems, military hardware, and associated equipment are in process of implementation. To the extent that they substitute for the security offered by "God" they ironically emulate some of the reported characteristics of "God". In the USA programs such as Total Information Awareness (TIA) aspire to emulate the omniscience of "God". The "Son of Star Wars" antimissile shield effectively emulates an aspect of the omnipotence of "God".

In the movie The Man Who Sued God (2001), which inspired this paper, the defendants as nominated (or self-acclaimed) representatives of God were forced to recognize that their best defence against a multi-million dollar class action suit was to deny the existence of "God" -- as defined by the insurance industry. Clearly, here also, "God" cannot be a "terrorist" if he does not exist. This is however equally embarrassing because then it raises issues as to what business religion and the insurance industry are actually in.

Is there indeed, as suggested in the film, a tacit "deal" between religions and the insurance industry through which insurance gets to brand certain disasters as being the sole responsibility of "God" (as a form of placement advertising for religion and thereby ensuring immunity from legal obligation), in exchange for the considerable investment made by religious institutions in the multi-billion dollar insurance industry whose exposure to risk is thereby reduced?

The insurance industry and contract law identify "Acts of God" as a subcategory of force majeure -- as are "Acts of Terrorism". Given a purportedly omnipotent God, would it not be more correct to consider all forms of force majeure as "Acts of God"? Or is there some implication that force majeure holds acts that are of "God" as well as of some other entity (perhaps more strongly identified with "evil")? Is there some sense in which some aspects of force majeure, such as "Acts of Terrorism" may well be of greater (or equal) power to those of "God"?

Elsewhere it has been argued, in the light of George Bush's widely publicized offering of a Thanksgiving "plastic turkey" to his troops in Baghdad (28 November 2003) -- that increasingly modern civilization is effectively entering a Plastic Turkey Era (Politicization of Evidence in the Plastic Turkey Era, 2003). In line with those arguments, it might then be asked whether the "God" that is thanked at Thanksgiving, as defined by the leadership of the Coalition of the Willing, should also be be recognized as a "plastic turkey".
Conceptual gerrymandering

As argued by Karen Armstrong (When God goes to war, Guardian, 29 December 2003): "We can be certain of one thing in 2004. Unless there is some unimaginable breakthrough, we will see more religiously inspired terrorism."

The citations above are striking in their assertiveness with regard to understanding of what is by definition beyond human understanding -- in the absence of conventional forms of tangible evidence. In this light "religiously inspired terrorism" could be interpreted to mean any form of "terrorism" inspired by evidence that is available only to those with special interpretative insight, access or convictions (see Grouppthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale, 2002). There is then a form of convergence between the traditional insights claimed and interpreted by priesthoods (and devout believers) with those insights obtained by people with unique access to "intelligence" (as claimed by the intelligence community) and those, like George Bush and Tony Blair, who have privileged access to it (whether assisted by insights from "God" or not). Like Bush and Blair, many will follow the path of acting on their own private understanding of what they profoundly believe "God" wishes. This parallels the behaviour of the suicide bombers labelled as terrorists. In both cases, after "getting out of bed" or "off their knees" (as exemplified by President William McKinley in the case of the American war on the Philippines), they can claim to be following God's command.

The citations point to an appalling degree of definitional game-playing and denial for a supposedly mature civilization. Conceptual boundaries are willfully redrawn in different exercises of conceptual gerrymandering (see Conceptual gerrymandering and definitional game-playing, 2002). The experience of terror, and the perspective of the victim, is systematically ignored in any approach to a definition (which might acknowledge how terror is otherwise induced). The emphasis is placed on whether the terror is caused "legitimately" in military action according to the conventions of war or "illegitimately" by other forms of action. The fact that the former may cause as much destruction and terror, or more, is ignored. The UK fire-bombing of cities (Dresden, etc) and their civilian populations, and the USA destruction of cities and populations (Hirosshima, Nagasaki), is considered "acceptable" in comparison with the heinous, "evil" acts of modern "terrorists". Games are played with "military" personnel as "legitimate" targets of acceptable conflict (whatever the regrettable collateral damage) in comparison with the "illegitimacy" of targeting the populations that support them -- with special exceptions being made for "targeted killings" of people who are defined (without due process) as having lost the right to be treated as "civilians".

Wherever the definitions touch on the possible role of "God", boundaries are carefully drawn -- through further conceptual gerrymandering -- in order not to implicate "God". Although "God" is thoroughly implicated wherever possible by the insurance industry. In concluding the case in the movie The Man Who Sued God (2001), the presiding judge notes that the collusion between religions and insurance with regard to "Acts of God" constituted an oppressive exploitation of policy holders that was "offensive to reason and religion and most certainly wrong in law." The plea of the insurance industry that the term "Act of God" was commonly understood as only to be taken figuratively (as a legal fiction) was challenged. The case pointed to the possibility that the insurance industry, with the connivance of religions, was misrepresenting "God" and the nature of his actions -- and as such exposed the insurance industry to sanction under the relevant articles of any Trades Description Act regarding "misleading advertising".

Returning to the original question -- "Is God a terrorist from the perspective of the Coalition of the Willing" -- it can be readily asserted that from the perspective of those experiencing terror that it makes little difference whether the terror is apparently free of human intervention (natural causes) or directly caused by humans labelled as "terrorists" or "military" personnel. Increasingly, from the perspective of the insurance industry, "Acts of God" and "Acts of Terrorism" are equivalent.

If some at least of God's actions cannot be distinguished by the experiencer, or by the insurance industry, from "Acts of Terrorism", then there is surely a strong case for assuming that "God" is indeed a "terrorist" from the perspective of the insurance industry at least. This is completely unacceptable to most religious believers (despite Biblical supporting evidence), who are then forced to engage in even more complex forms of conceptual gerrymandering to focus solely on "God as Love" and to exclude any recognition of the "Wrath of God" -- except where it is framed as "legitimate" retribution against "evil" (for example, David Frum, Richard Perle. An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror, 2003).

It is this logic which supports the "shoot to kill" policies of the Christian-led occupying forces of the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq -- on the assumption that the person shot (whether a child or not) is necessarily a legitimate "terrorist" suspect. Again for the experiencer, it is completely irrelevant whether the shooting soldier is an instrument of the "God of Love" or of "God the Terrorist". It is difficult to feel that death is honourable when defined as collateral damage.

Clearly the insurance industry and contract law have done a major service to humanity through their ability to define "Acts of God" so clearly within an increasingly material world -- at a time when religions are increasingly incapable of doing so meaningfully. At the same time religions will continue to claim that because "God" is omnipresent, he is necessarily present in every act and phenomenon, necessarily including both "Acts of God" and "Acts of Terrorism" -- being omnipotent he is necessarily the essence of force majeure in all of its forms. Thus, with the assistance of the insurance industry, religions are placed in a position to assert that "God" is indeed a "terrorist", but that it is the Coalition of the Willing that is buying into a very simplistic understanding of "God" and of "terrorism". It is effectively promoting a lesser "God" accessible to human comprehension -- the "God" of "You are either with US or against US" -- and "If the latter, US will strike you down".

Conclusions

This argument raises questions about the nature of the "God" whose blessing is repeatedly sought for the efforts of the Coalition of the Willing, and notably by its leadership (see Sally McFague. Models of God, 1987). Is it the (male) "God" that fundamentalists are so fearful may be alienated by an apostate society -- evoking strikes against the unrighteous? Is the "God" so understood to be considered as selective in his blessing? Is he to be understood as cultivating favourites? Does he repeatedly need to be reminded of his favourites'
desperate need for such blessing -- or does he believe that his blessings are ensured in such a continuous manner (through a form of "broadband" access) that such requests are a symptom of dysfunctional neediness?

At the core of any response to the question "Is God a terrorist" is human ability to comprehend a "God" that can operate in two seemingly incommensurable modes -- "loving" or "wrathful". Susan Neiman (Evil in Modern Thought, 2002) highlights the contradictory nature of "God" as being "good" (but sometimes allowing or doing "evil") -- as all powerful (but allowing, even contributing to, human suffering).

In this connection it is intriguing to recall the statement by Jesus "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." (John 8:12). Science has drawn attention to the duality inherent in the nature of light (as it is to be understood by humans), namely the way in which light operates through either a "particle" or a "wave" mode. Others have responded to the paradox of whether Jesus was God or human by pointing to the dual nature of light and his use of the light metaphor (Raymond Chiao, The Quantum Wave of Faith, 2002). According to Michael J. Bozack (Conjugate Properties and the Hypostatic Union, 1987) "God-man and the wave-particle have properties which transcend either nature acting separately... Reconciliation of the hypostatic union and the wave-particle dualism is dependent on the role of human perception".

Use is also made of light as a metaphor in Islamic mysticism as indicated by this verse of the Quran: "Allah (God) is the Light (soul) of the heavens and earth." According to Wahid Bakhsh Rabbani (Islamic Sufism): "Now, since God's being is pure light (Nur) and since according to the cult of Wahdat-ul-Wujud (oneness of being), God's Being penetrates everything in the universe including space, the building blocks of the universe, which are nothing but God's Light which, on devolution, appeared in the form of wave-like particles or particle-like waves... penetrating the entire field of matter and space whose oneness has already been established by both the scientists and the Sufis".

More intriguing however is the possibility that the metaphor is also of value in pointing to the paradoxical duality between the "loving" and "wrathful" dimensions that are apparently intrinsic to the nature of "God" -- who could then indeed be considered as a "terrorist" in one mode without detracting from the "loving" nature of another. In the light of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, efforts at definition of the exact nature of "God" then only lead to uncertainty. A helpful discussion of this matter is provided by Gene Poole (Benevolent vs. Wrathful Deities: Understanding the Double Bind, 2000) in the light of Vajrayana (Tibetan Buddhism).

Will the future see the processes of the current debate over the definition of "terrorism" in the same scornful light as the frequently-told tale of the scholastic preoccupation with determiing the number of angels that could stand on a pinhead? [more | more]

References
Boaz Ganor. Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter? [text]
Anthony Judge:
- Ubiquity of "terrorism" and definitional game-playing. 2001 [text]
- Interacting Fruitfully with Un-Civil Society the dilemma for non-civil society organizations. 1996 [text]
- Mapping the Network of Terror. 2001 [text]
- Transforming the Encounter with Terrorism. 2002 [text]
- And When the Bombing Stops? Territorial conflict as a challenge to mathematicians. 2000 [text]
Martin Kettle. How can religious people explain something like this? The Guardian, 28 December 2004 [text]
Alex P Schmidt and Albert J Youngman. Political Terrorism. Amsterdam, SWIDOC, 1988
Brian Whitaker. The definition of terrorism. Guardian, 7 May 2001 [text]