

Words Matter.

Posted On:December 31, 1969

Definitions are very useful when words have power over our minds. Terrorism is one of those words. For some people, the only time "terrorism" is used is when an act of violence is committed by a Muslim. But playing loose and fast with a definition has resulted in calling a radicalized Muslim, who murdered 13 of his fellow military at Fort Hood, a perpetrator of "workplace violence."

Acts of violence by Muslims are not always terrorism, such as honor killings of family members (womenfolk) who have behaved in un-Islamic ways. But a case can be made that even this sort of action is a variety of terrorism: intimidating other women to watch their step. However, just striking fear into the hearts of men (or women) is not enough to qualify. The always erudite Abigail Esman, who writes for the IPT (Investigative Project on Terrorism), provides the following definitions, citing the CIA, FBI, and NATO, all which know what they are talking about.

The CIA definition is: premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups of clandestine agents. (The problem with this definition is it would eliminate the Fort Hood killer from being a terrorist because he murdered military, not civilian victims and was not a member of a subnational group.)

The FBI comes closer: the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

In this case, murderers of abortion doctors would qualify (social objectives), as would the young White man who murdered Black church members (again, a social objective).

NATO adds another important element: The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives.

Adding religion as well as ideology are important elements. Religion, when fanatically believed, is as much an ideology as fanatical political beliefs.

Lone-wolf mass murderers fall somewhere in between definitions. Some, like the mass murderer in Las Vegas, is still mystery. We cannot understand his motive. But mass murderers in Europe or the United States who are not members of a terror group may still be influenced by such groups because they are Muslim (or neo-Nazi). In the past, individuals who were believers in the Anarchist ideology murdered with expectations that their murdering would expedite their cult's goals.

We need to conclude, then, that a person is a terrorist when he believes that his action will further an ideological end. Being mentally ill doesn't negate being a terrorist. One can be a religious or ideological murderer and in addition be mentally ill. He must think that his action has desirable ramifications. Hate crimes with no ultimate goal do not qualify. An angry killer who murders a specific target or a killer who is mentally deranged has no ideological purpose.

Words also matter a great deal today in the academic world, where critical thinking used to be taught. Today, there is all sort of nonsense about words that "offend" some people, words that must be expelled. Sports teams mascots get the brunt of this nonsense. Jonah Goldberg tells us that the once beloved mascot of the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., "Iggy the Crusader," is being expelled. Not only Muslim students object to the term "crusader," but also a whole stratum of apologists who cannot apologize enough for the Christian-Muslim Crusades that were fought 1,000 years ago.

Unfortunately, they have their history wrong. The Crusades were not an imperialistic Christian attack on the peaceful Muslim world. The imperialist was Islam, a new faith that swept the long-standing Christian (and even older Jewish) worlds in the Middle East and North Africa, murdering, enslaving, and forcibly converting huge swaths of people. The Crusades began when European Christians finally pushed back. The Crusades were an attempt to take back lands that had been theirs---but in the end, the Christians lost. So much for imperialism! Words matter. Know propaganda when you see it.

683 words

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