

**Why Do Labels Matter? Conceptualizing ‘Terrorism:’**  
**Exemplifying the Analytical Utility of the “Essentially Contested Concept”**  
**Classification Through Its Application to ‘Terrorism’**

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## Introduction

In 1992, Michael Gold Biss claimed, “Terrorism is fundamentally a[an essentially contested concept] because ‘one person’s terrorist, is another person’s freedom fighter.’”<sup>1</sup> This use of a popular adage to illustrate the nature of debates associated with conceptualizing terrorism hearkens to the broad literature that reiterates the normatively loaded and pejorative nature of terrorism.<sup>2</sup> Put simply, the label ‘terrorist’ is often used to label both violent actors that a state does not approve of and groups perceived to be opposing the state and/or its interests. This has been extended by academics like Nicholas J. Perry, Sam Jackson and Conor Cruise O’Brien to support the notion that the use of ‘terrorism’ as a classification for a specific violent act or set of actions is analytically imprecise, historically indistinct, and legally vague and overbroad.<sup>3</sup> These claims are lent further credence by the scholarly and policy literatures’ collective failure to establish a single, universally accepted, definition of terrorism.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the existing literature relating to the phenomenon of terrorism focuses on attempts to establish a single, universally-accepted definition (or conversely, to explain why no such definition has, as of yet, been established).<sup>5</sup> Scholars also place significant focus on identifying the root causes of terrorism, as well as proposing methods through which to combat the actions of specific violent non-state actors.<sup>6</sup> Notably, all of these foci highlight what has been

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gold-Biss. “The Discourse on Terrorism: Political Violence and the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism.” Ph.D. Dissertation. *The American University* (1992): 108.

<sup>2</sup> See Christopher J. Finlay. “How to Do Things with the Word ‘Terrorist.’” *Review of International Studies*, Volume 35, Issue 4 (October 2009): 751-774 for a comprehensive overview of the existing literature that specifically addresses this subject matter.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas J. Perry, “The Numerous Federal Legal Definitions of Terrorism: The Problem of too Many Grails,” *Journal of Legislation* 30, no. 2 (1 May 2004): 249-274; Sam Jackson, “Non-normative Political Extremism: Reclaiming a Concept’s Analytical Utility,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2016): 1-16; Conor Cruise O’Brien. *Herod: Reflections on Political Violence*. (London: Hutchison, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> See Alex P. Schmid. “The Definition of Terrorism.” In Alex P. Schmid (ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011): 39-98.

<sup>5</sup> A select sampling of this literature includes (but is not limited to) the following publications: Alex P. Schmid, A.J. Jongman and Michael Stohl. *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature*. (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1988); Jack P. Gibbs. “Conceptualization of Terrorism.” *American Sociological Review*, Volume 54, Issue 3 (1989): 329-340; Alex P. Schmid. “Terrorism and Democracy.” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 4, Issue 4 (1992): 14-25; Louise Richardson. “Terrorists as Transnational Actors.” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 11, Issue 4 (1999): 209-219; Andrew Byrnes. “Apocalyptic Visions and the Law: The Legacy of September 11.” Professional Address at the ANU Law School for the Faculty’s ‘Inaugural and Valedictory Lecture Series. (May 30, 2002); Walter Laqueur. *A History of Terrorism*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction: 2001); Bruce Hoffman. *Inside Terrorism*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006); Boaz Ganor, *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle* (Herzliya: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Notable examples of this literature include, but are not limited to: Martha Crenshaw. “Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches.” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 1 (December 1987); Walter Laqueur. *A History of Terrorism*. (New Brunswick, NJ:

characterized as the intractable debate as to what elements specifically constitute ‘terrorism.’ Implicitly, this line of inquiry begs the question as to why establishing a universal definition of terrorism is so significant. To that end, one of the prevalent attitudes towards the lack of accepted universal definition that exists within the existing literature is epitomized by Boaz Ganor’s particularly unhelpful query, “Will we not know terrorism when we see it?”<sup>7</sup>

According to Alex P. Schmid, Ganor’s use of this quotation is an attempt to exemplify one of many purported justifications for the scholarly literature’s persistent failure to universally define ‘terrorism.’ Diverging from opinions like those represented by Schmid and Ganor, other scholars have used the same lack of an agreed-upon definition of ‘terrorism’ as the basis to claim that it constitutes one of W.B. Gallie’s “essentially contested concepts.”<sup>8</sup> While scholars like J.A.S. Wild assert that Gallie’s classification is inadequate as “a final explanatory framework,” others like John N. Gray and Christine Swanton claim that “[stronger] variants of the essential contestedness hypothesis” seemingly invalidate propositions for any in-depth conceptual analysis.<sup>9</sup> In contrast with arguments as to whether Gallie’s thesis constitutes a hypothesis or a framework, this paper suggests that the analytical utility of the idea of an “essentially contested concepts” derives from its existence along a continuum. In providing for the existence of the “essential contestedness” continuum, David A Baldwin’s illustration of the debate as to whether ‘security’ constitutes an “essentially contested concept” is extended to ‘terrorism.’<sup>10</sup> To that end,

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Transaction: 2001); Bruce Hoffman. *Inside Terrorism*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006); Marc Sageman. “The Stagnation in Terrorism Research.” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 26, Issue 4 (March 2014): 565-580; Assaf Moghadam. *Dangerous Liaisons: Global Jihad and the Evolution of Terrorist Cooperation*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017); Robert Anthony Pape. *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 2003); Ethan Bueno De Mesquita. “Conciliation, Counterterrorism, and Patterns of Terrorist Violence.” *International Organization*, Volume 59, Issue 1 (2005): 145-176. Max Abrahms. “Why Terrorism Does Not Work.” *International Security*, Volume 31, Issue 2 (2006): 43-78; Audrey Kurth Cronin. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Boaz Ganor, *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle* (Herzliya: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> J.A.S. Wild. “On the Language of Terrorism and International Law.” *Hiroshima University of Economics* (広島経済大学研究論集, Volume 25, Issue 4 (March 2003): 52.

<sup>9</sup> Christine Swanton. “On the ‘Essential Contestedness’ of Political Concepts.” *Ethics*, Volume 95 (1985); John N. Gray. “On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts.” *Political Theory*, Volume 5 (1977).

<sup>10</sup> David A. Baldwin. “The Concept of Security.” *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23 (1997): 5-26.

for the purposes of this paper, ‘terrorism’ is conceptualized in accordance with both Schmid and Albert Jongman’s 1988 academic consensus definition and the definition proposed in the 2005 Draft Comprehensive Convention Against International Terrorism. The cases of the African National Congress (ANC), the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ), and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are then situated along this continuum, in order to provide for the analytical utility of using Gallie’s classification to conceptualize ‘terrorism’ as an “essentially contested concept.”

### **W.B. Gallie’s Formulation of “Essentially Contested Concepts”**

In 1956, social and political theorist and philosopher, W.B. Gallie coined the phrase “essentially contested concept” as part of his attempt to explain how it is possible that there can exist “apparently endless disputes for which neither [psychological causes, nor metaphysical afflictions] need be the correct explanation... perfectly genuine [disputes]: which, although not resolvable by argument of any kind, are nevertheless sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence.”<sup>11</sup> Gallie’s “essentially contested hypothesis” classification is predicated on seven prerequisite conditions. His 1956 article first identifies five criteria that are primarily descriptive in nature. First: the concept must be “appraisive, in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement.”<sup>12</sup> To that end, using an “essentially contested concept” must suggest a tacit value judgement. Second: the concept must have an “internally complex character.” That is, to be considered “essentially contested,” a concept must comprise multiple separate components that interact with one another in their separate capacities as elements of a whole. This interaction must ultimately constitute the concept’s character in

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<sup>11</sup> W.B. Gallie. “Essentially Contested Concepts.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Volume 56 (1956): 169.

<sup>12</sup> Felix E. Oppenheim. “The Language of Political Inquiry: Problems of Clarification.” In Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.). *Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 1 Political Science: Scope and Theory* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1975); Felix E. Oppenheim. *Political Concepts: A Reconstruction*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981); David A. Baldwin. “The Concept of Security.” *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23 (1997): 5-26.

order for it to be labeled “essentially contested.” Third: any explanation of the concept’s worth must necessitate references to both the individual, and the collective contributions of its components. Fourth: the achievement that the concept connotes must not be able to be predicted or prescribed. Finally: in order for a concept to be classified “essentially contested,” parties that dispute one another’s use of the concept in question must acknowledge and appreciate its “contestedness.”

Gallie goes on to expand on his initial description by delineating two additional criteria that serve to explicitly differentiate “essentially contested concept[s]” from “radically confused” concepts.”<sup>13</sup> To that end, his sixth criterion asserts that in order to be labelled “essentially contested,” a concept must have been derived from an exemplar whose authority is claimed on the basis of all of the disputing parties’ acknowledgement of its authority. Finally, Gallie’s seventh and last criterion argues that it must be plausible that the concept’s “contestedness” enables the original exemplar’s achievement to be best sustained or developed.

### **Mischaracterization of “Essentially Contested Concepts” in the Scholarly Literature**

In the decades following the 1956 publication of “Essentially Contested Concepts,” Gallie’s work has faced two significant challenges. Particularly within the political science and International Relations scholarship, there is a dearth of literature that actually uses the “essentially contested concepts” label to refer to terms and phrases that fit with the specified list prerequisite conditions for the classification.<sup>14</sup> The scholarly literature tends to use the “essentially contested concept” label in a more general sense, citing what prominent scholars perceive to be the overarching point of Gallie’s original article, and using the label in a manner that is incongruent with the seven criteria that were explicitly specified. To that end, scholars like

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<sup>13</sup> W.B. Gallie. “Essentially Contested Concepts.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Volume 56 (1956): 180.

<sup>14</sup> Wibren van der Burg. “Law as a Second-Order Essentially Contested Concept.” *Jurisprudence*, Volume 8, Issue 2 (2017): 230-256.

Andrew Vincent, Keith Dowding, Wibren van der Burg, and Jeremy Waldron have argued against the intellectual misrepresentation of Gallie's work. Vincent asserts that "[essentially contested concepts have] been subsumed into the subconscious of political studies... [and] now simply 'crop up' as a relative background commonplace of vocabulary that students of politics are expected to know something about."<sup>15</sup> Dowding makes a similar assessment, articulating that "essentially contested concepts" are "not merely [notions or ideas] over which there happens to be no agreement over a long time" specifying that Gallie's definition was coined specifically with reference to concepts that "because of their central role in normative theory can never achieve a universally agreed definition."<sup>16</sup> Van der Burg also asserts that Gallie's work is widely mischaracterized and misused, citing Jeremy Waldron in claiming that within contemporary scholarly literature, "the term ["essentially contested concept"] is used in a very loose way as meaning little more than a concept that is 'very hotly contested' with no resolution in sight."<sup>17</sup> Put simply, the widespread misrepresentation of Gallie's "essentially contested concept" classification in the scholarly literature is very problematic, because it results in the misconstruing of the point that Gallie was actually trying to make by coining the definition in the first place.

The problematic state in which the notion of "essentially contested concepts" finds itself is further compounded by an additional challenge. This second challenge is constituted by the criticism that has been levied at the formulation of Gallie's article; specifically, the establishment of necessary prerequisite conditions for an "essentially contested" without an explicit definition of the label itself. Joonas Pennanen explains that while "... Gallie tries to emphasize the fact that

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Vincent. *The Nature of Political Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 108.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Dowding, "Essentially Contested Concept." In Dowding, Keith. *Encyclopedia of Power* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2011): 222-223.

<sup>17</sup> Wibren van der Burg. "Law as a Second-Order Essentially Contested Concept." *Jurisprudence*, Volume 8, Issue 2 (2017): 231; Jeremy Waldron. "'Is the Rule of Law an Essentially Contested Concept (in Florida)?" *Law and Philosophy*, Volume 21 (2002): 137; 149.

there are no objective standards apart from the overall process of contestation,” his explicit delineation of discrete prerequisite conditions that “render... certain concepts “essentially contested” “leaves room for interpretation[, which leads] to confusion...[because readers are left unable to] properly understand... [his] distinctions.”<sup>18</sup> This is supported by Wibren van der Burg’s expression of a similar opinion about “the sometimes confusing and imprecise way [that Gallie] introduces and elaborates upon the [classification “essentially contested concept”].”<sup>19</sup> Scholars have also expressed confusion relating to the utility of the classification itself, based on the manner in which Gallie’s article represents and describes “essentially contested concepts”. This specifically relates to his framing of the objective behind the establishment of the classification in the first place. In refuting claims that Gallie seems to consider “essential contestedness to be a conceptual flaw, Alan Schwartz suggests that Gallie’s 1956 article makes it evident that he saw the utility of his “essentially contested” classification as stemming from its ability to “raise the level of quality of arguments.”<sup>20</sup> Diverging from Schwartz, William Connolly argues that the utility of the classification stems from the fact that its use is... “motivated by outside, often political considerations,” which means that recognition of a concept’s “contested” nature has the potential to “introduce... a measure of tolerance and receptivity to reconsideration of received views.”<sup>21</sup> In contrast to both Schwartz and Connolly, and with specific reference to the disciplines of political science and International Relations, Harvey Boulay argues that “the importance of Gallie’s “essentially contested concept” classification... stems from the difficulties that it causes with regard to “the presentation of political concepts” because of its implications as to the “inadequacy of operationalization as the main clarifier of concepts.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Joost Pennanen. “After Essentially Contested Concepts.” M.A. Thesis. University of Jyväskylä. (2012): 22.

<sup>19</sup> Wibren van der Burg. “Law as a Second-Order Essentially Contested Concept.” *Jurisprudence*, Volume 8, Issue 2 (2017): 231.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Schwartz. “Contested Concepts in Cognitive Social Science.” B.A. Honors Thesis. *University of California, Berkeley* (1992): 18.

<sup>21</sup> William E. Connolly. *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Harvey Boulay. “Essentially Contested Concepts and the Teaching of Political Science.” *Teaching Political Science*, Volume 4, Issue 4 (1977): 425.

### **“Essentially Contested Concepts” and the Definition of ‘Terrorism’**

There is general consensus that Gallie’s “essentially contested concepts” have been fundamentally misunderstood (and to that end, misused) in the contemporary scholarly literature. To that end, Keith Dowding’s claim that “essentially contested concepts” are “not merely [notions or ideas] over which there happens to be no agreement over a long time” is specifically pertinent to the scholarly literature discussing international policy and academia’s joint failure to establish a consistent, universally accepted definition of ‘terrorism.’<sup>23</sup> The many existing definitions of terrorism have influenced its characterization within the literature as one of the “essentially contested concept” referred to in Gallie’s 1956 article.

#### Attempts to Define Terrorism in International Policy

In 1994, there were 212 different definitions of terrorism in circulation throughout the international community. Ninety of these definitions were established as being used by governments and institutions on a recurring basis.<sup>24</sup> Intergovernmental efforts to codify a universal definition of terrorism date back to the League of Nations’ 1937 attempt to define ‘acts of terrorism’ as “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” in its proposed Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism.<sup>25</sup> After the Convention failed to pass, the next significant development in the quest to define terrorism came with Article 51(2) of the First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions’ implicit defining of terrorism in its prohibition against “acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Keith Dowding, “Essentially Contested Concept.” In Dowding, Keith. *Encyclopedia of Power* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2011): 222-223.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey D. Simon, *The Terrorist Trap* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> League of Nations, *Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism* (November 1937).

<sup>26</sup> Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977

The language of the 1977 Additional Protocol I and the failure of the 1937 Convention effectively preserved terrorism's liminal status as a crime without an explicit, universally accepted definition. This resulted in the conception of numerous national and intergovernmental organizations' definitions, many of which possess similar, but not identical, elements.<sup>27</sup> In 1992, the United Nations Crime Branch sought the formulation of a utilitarian international definition that would amalgamate existing scholarly debate on the matter with practical policy considerations. Inspired by this proposal, Leiden University's Alex P. Schmid put forward a suggestion for a short legal definition that used principles of an earlier proposed academic consensus definition to describe an act of terrorism as "the peacetime equivalent of a war crime."<sup>28</sup> Schmid's proposal was implicitly rejected by the international community, evidenced through the 1996 United Nations General Assembly Resolution (UNGAR) 51/210's subsequent accounting for terrorism as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes."<sup>29</sup> Subsequently entrenched as a staple that ensuing policy deliberations relating to terrorism rely on, this definition has since been elaborated upon, notably by 2004 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566, which defines terrorist acts as:

"criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and

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<sup>27</sup> Ben Saul, "The Legal Response of the League of Nations to Terrorism," *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, Volume 4, No. 1 (2006).

<sup>28</sup> Alex Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism, A Study in Compliance with CTL/9/91/2207 for the UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch (December 1992).

<sup>29</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism* (16 January 1997), available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49997ae127.html>

protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature.”<sup>30</sup>

It is of note that the initial UNGAR 51/210 definition also constituted the core of the proposed Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, first drafted by a United Nations General Assembly *ad hoc* committee in 2002, which describes terrorism as being specifically “intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants.”<sup>31</sup> Specifically, the most recent draft of this document, which manifested as the Draft Comprehensive Convention Against International Terrorism, defines terrorism as:

“unlawfully and intentionally” causing, attempting or threatening to cause: “(a) death or serious bodily injury to any person; or (b) serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a State or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or the environment; or (c) damage to property, places, facilities, or systems..., resulting or likely to result in major economic loss, when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.”<sup>32</sup>

The draft article further defines “participating as an accomplice, organizing or directing others, or contributing to the commission of such offences by a group of persons acting with a common purpose” as additional components of its definition of perpetrating an act, or acts of ‘terrorism.’<sup>33</sup>

#### Academic Definitions of Terrorism

In addition to these existing definitions of terrorism within international policy, academics have also sought to account for terrorism from a more theoretical perspective.

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<sup>30</sup> Security Council resolution 1566, *Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts*, S/RES/1566 (8 October 2004), available from [undocs.org/S/RES/1566](http://undocs.org/S/RES/1566).

<sup>31</sup> United Nations, “A More Secured World: Our Shared Responsibility,” *The Secretary General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change* (December 2004).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Notably, in 1988, Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman produced “the best known work on this problem of definitions” by collating an academic consensus definition of terrorism that merges the distinguishing features of terrorism. These features are derived from the 1985 input of 109 terrorism experts of international renown based on the distilling of submitted questionnaire responses into twenty-two distinct word categories.<sup>34</sup> Schmid and Jongman integrate the sixteen of these word categories with the highest frequency of recurrence, conceptualizing terrorism as:

“... an [1] anxiety-inspiring method of repeated [2] violent action, employed by (semi-) [3] clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for [4] idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The [5] immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen [6] randomly (targets of opportunity) or [7] selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. [8] Threat- and violence-based [9] communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to [10] manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a [11] *target of terror*, a [12] *target of demands*, or a [13] *target of attention*, depending on whether [14] intimidation, [15] coercion, or [16] propaganda is primarily sought.”<sup>35</sup>

2004 research produced by Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler subsequently confirmed the contemporary frequency of the elements that Schmid and Jongman had identified as the distinguishing features of definitions of terrorism.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Jessie Blackburn, Fergal F. Davis, Natasha C. Taylor, “Academic Consensus and Legislative Definitions of Terrorism: Applying Schmid and Jongman,” *Statute Law Review*, Volume 34, Issue 3 (1 October 2013): 239–261.

<sup>35</sup> Alex Schmid, “Terrorism – The Definitional Problem,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, Volume 2, No. 36 (2004): 382.

<sup>36</sup> Weinberg et. al. surveyed 73 academic definitions of terrorism drawn from 55 articles in three separate journals, calculating the frequency of the twenty-two word categories that Schmid and Jongman established in 1988. Their research substantiates Schmid and Jongman’s conclusion as to the necessity that any definition of terrorism specify:

- (1) its involving violence, the use of force;
- (2) the political reasons underlying its perpetration, and
- (3) its emphasis on inculcating fear and terror as the three most frequent word categories in both studies.

That notwithstanding, significant discrepancies between Schmid and Jongman, and Weinberg et. al.’s respective calculations of the frequencies of fourteen of the remaining word categories indicates that the psychological aspects associated with definitions of terrorism may not be as integral as Schmid and Jongman had initially suggested in 1988. (See Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler, “The Challenges of Conceptualization Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 777-794)

### The “Essentially Contested Concepts” Classification Applied to ‘Terrorism’

On many occasions, the “essentially contested concept” label has been used within the scholarly literature to classify ‘terrorism.’ An analysis of the explanations used by scholars to justify this application, however, reveals a startling deficiency in their grasp of the particulars associated with Gallie’s thesis. A prominent example of this occurs in Alex P. Schmid’s 2011 Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research. In his overview of the debates associated with defining ‘terrorism,’ Schmid articulates that “terrorism is an essentially contested concept in the sense that people find it difficult to agree on its meaning or the scope of that meaning... terrorism has, owing to the bloody historical record of the phenomena associated with the term, become a term of stigma.”<sup>37</sup> This particular statement is both notable and particularly alarming because it constitutes the sole explanation of why ‘terrorism’ can be considered to be an “essentially contested concept” Schmid presents in all 118 pages of a chapter titled “The Definition of Terrorism.” Other notable terrorism scholars like Boaz Ganor, Brian Jenkins, J. Bowyer Bell, Philip Schlesinger and Walter Laqueur have used Gallie’s notion of an “essentially contested concept” as an oversimplification of the issues associated with establishing a universally agreed-upon definition of ‘terrorism.’<sup>38</sup> Like Schmid, all of these scholars have either misunderstood (or chosen to willfully misunderstand) the utility of Gallie’s classification, which has enabled them to sidestep the general scholarly consensus as to the importance of defining terms within their academic work. To that end, they use Gallie’s “essentially contested concepts” to replace and metaphorically ‘dress up’ the phrase ‘difficult to understand concept,’ providing no demonstrable understanding of the tenets central to Gallie’s main argument in “Essentially

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<sup>37</sup> Alex P. Schmid. “The Definition of Terrorism.” In Alex P. Schmid (ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011): 40.

<sup>38</sup> Alex P. Schmid, Lecture on the Introduction to Terrorism at the AEGEE /COMT Conference Towards a European Response to Terrorism: National Experiences and Lessons for the Europe of 1992 (Mar. 16, 1989).

Contested Concepts.” This is obviously problematic because the application of the “essentially contested concept” label can only be valid from an academic standpoint if the proposed definitions of terrorism compete with each other in a way that means they cannot ultimately be reconciled with one another.

### **The “Essentially Contested Concepts” Classification Applied to ‘Security’**

‘Terrorism’ does, in fact, constitute an “essentially contested concept,” but not because its definition is unclear, or its meaning too abstract. It is necessary to explicitly outline what Gallie was trying to accomplish by establishing his specific prerequisite conditions for “essentially contested concepts” in order to fully understand why ‘terrorism’ constitutes an “essentially contested concept.”<sup>39</sup> David A. Baldwin’s break down as to the debate associated with conceptualizing ‘security’ as “essentially contested” provides a valuable starting point for this endeavor.<sup>40</sup>

Baldwin opens his depiction of the debate as to the “essential contestedness” of ‘security’ by describing John N. Gray’s claim that the “stronger variants of... [the “essential contestedness” hypothesis]... lead to a radical sceptical nihilism in which there are no grounds for preferring one conception [of a term] to another.”<sup>41</sup> Later in the article, a similar claim is made about Barry Buzan, who, Baldwin states, argues that ‘security’ is an essentially contested concept to “explicitly disavow... any intention of formulating a precise definition [of security] and suggest... that any attempt to do so is to misunderstand the function of essentially contested concepts in social science.”<sup>42</sup> Baldwin makes an observation as to the “questionable” nature of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> David A. Baldwin. “The Concept of Security.” *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23 (1997): 10-12.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. (Baldwin cites Christine Swanton. “On the ‘Essential Contestedness’ of Political Concepts.” *Ethics*, Volume 95 (1985): 813-814; and John N. Gray. “On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts.” *Political Theory*, Volume 5 (1977): 343)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. (Baldwin cites Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Boulder, CO: ECPR Press, 2007); 16, 374; and Barry Buzan. “Peace, Power and Security: Contending Concepts in the Study of International Relations.” *Journal of Peace Research*, Volume 21 (1984): 125.)

Buzan's arguments based on the claim that "the whole idea of an essentially contested concept is that various parties purport to have a clearer and more precise understanding of the concept than others."<sup>43</sup> To that end, Baldwin argues that "acceptance of [Buzan's] position would make the kind of conceptual analysis undertaken" by Gallie in his initial coining of the term "essentially contested concepts" "futile."<sup>44</sup> In contrast with the views of Buzan and Gray, Baldwin puts forward Christine Swanton's claim that there are "weaker forms of th[e] position that allow [for] differentiation between better and worse conceptualizations" of an "essentially contested concept" to justify the analysis undertaken in his article in the first place.<sup>45</sup>

Baldwin's break down of the debate on conceptualizing 'security also specifically refutes of two of Gallie's outlined criteria for an "essentially contested concept." In referencing Gallie's overarching description of an "essentially contested concept" as "so value-laden that no amount of argument or evidence can ever lead to agreement" on a single definition, Baldwin notes that Gallie's classification has itself been contested."<sup>46</sup> He then extends this observation to the seven stated prerequisite criteria for "essential contestedness," implying that it is problematic to use Gallie's "appraisive" criterion to identify "essentially contested concepts." In this context, Baldwin asserts that because there is a specific set of criteria implicitly associated with a concept that is considered 'appraisive,' labeling a concept as such necessarily negates its ability to be classified "essentially contested."<sup>47</sup>

In addition to negating Gallie's "appraisiveness" criterion, Baldwin also explicitly delineates his interpretation of Gallie's condition that a term must have its contestedness

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Baldwin brings forth this point, despite its later caveat that "ultimately, none of the better conceptualizations [of Gallie's "essentially contested concepts"] can ever be said to be the best." (David A. Baldwin. "The Concept of Security." *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23 (1997):10.)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

acknowledge[d] and appreciate[d].”<sup>48</sup> To that end, Baldwin claims that for a concept to be considered “essentially contested,” it “must actually generate vigorous disputes as to the nature of the concept and its applicability to various cases.”<sup>49</sup> Baldwin uses this explanation to challenge attempts to classify ‘security’ an “essentially contested concept” by asserting that the security studies literature is “virtually bereft of serious conceptual debate.”<sup>50</sup>

### Constructing the “Essential Contested-ness” Continuum

Baldwin’s delineation of the arguments made by Gray and Buzan, and Swanton, implicitly contradicts both of their classifications of “essential contestedness” as constituting a “hypothesis,” as well as J.A.S. Wild’s description of it as Gallie’s attempt to establish a “final explanatory framework.”<sup>51</sup> The consensus represented by the opinions of Swanton and Gray, as outlined by Baldwin, is that there are both “stronger variants” and “weaker forms” of the “essentially contested concepts” first described by Gallie.<sup>52</sup> When contextualized by assertions as to the importance of Gallie’s work “specifically in political science and International Relations,” it becomes apparent that neither Wild’s classification of “essentially contested concepts” as a framework, nor Gray, Buzan and Swanton’s labeling it a “hypothesis” is entirely accurate.<sup>53</sup> Evidenced by Baldwin’s description of the interaction between the observations of Swanton, Gray, and Buzan, Gallie’s “essentially contested concepts” are best described as existing on a continuum. To that end, one extreme of the continuum represents the “stronger variants”

<sup>48</sup> W.B. Gallie. “Essentially Contested Concepts.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Volume 56 (1956): 169.

<sup>49</sup> David A. Baldwin. “The Concept of Security.” *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23 (1997):11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. It is noteworthy that Baldwin’s argument that ‘security’ does not constitute an “essentially contested concept” cannot be extended to ‘terrorism.’ This is because, as evidenced by the previous section of the paper, the scholarly literature can be seen to place considerable focus on attempting to conceptualize ‘terrorism.’

<sup>51</sup> Christine Swanton. “On the ‘Essential Contestedness’ of Political Concepts.” *Ethics*, Volume 95 (1985); John N. Gray. “On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts.” *Political Theory*, Volume 5 (1977); J.A.S. Wild. “On the Language of Terrorism and International Law.” *Hiroshima University of Economics* (広島経済大学研究論集, Volume 25, Issue 4 (March 2003): 52.

<sup>52</sup> David A. Baldwin. “The Concept of Security.” *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23 (1997):10-12; Christine Swanton. “On the ‘Essential Contestedness’ of Political Concepts.” *Ethics*, Volume 95 (1985); John N. Gray. “On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts.” *Political Theory*, Volume 5 (1977).

<sup>53</sup> Harvey Boulay explains this “importance” as “stem[ming] from the difficulties” that the “essentially contested concepts” classification causes with regard to “the presentation of political concepts” because of the implications that it makes about the “inadequacy of operationalization as the main clarifier of concepts.” (See Harvey Boulay. “Essentially Contested Concepts and the Teaching of Political Science.” *Teaching Political Science*, Volume 4, Issue 4 (1977): 425.)

described by Swanton, which border on Gray's doomsday prediction of a "radical sceptical nihilism" in relation to academic attempts to define concepts in the first place.<sup>54</sup> The continuum's other extreme consists of Boulay's description of "operationalized... clarifi[ed] concepts" that are asserted to have clear-cut definitions.<sup>55</sup> The space between the two extremes, on the other hand, is constituted by varying strengths of the "weaker" variations of Gallie's "essentially contested concepts" described by Swanton.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Analytical Utility of the "Essential Contested-ness" Continuum**

To facilitate proper understanding of the analytical utility associated with both Gallie's notion of "essentially contested concepts," and the continuum constructed in the preceding section, it is first necessary to understand the rationale behind conceptualizing any concept as "essentially contested." This rationale comes in accordance with Baldwin's assertion that the core of what it means for a concept to be "essentially contested" rests on its "generat[ing] vigorous disputes as to the nature of the concept and its applicability to various cases."<sup>57</sup>

To that end, "essentially contested concepts" are notions, ideas, terms and phrases whose definitions are disputed on the basis of a competing 'clash.' 'Clash' is associated with the implicit question(s) that the competing definitions proposed are trying to answer. To that end, the 'clash' associated with a definitional debate on about an "essentially contested concept" inherently constitutes "the nature of the concept" and, to that end, "its applicability to various cases."<sup>58</sup> As such, the 'clash' associated with an "essentially contested concept" necessarily involves the convergence of two opinions on one idea. In the context of the definitional debate

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<sup>54</sup> David A. Baldwin. "The Concept of Security." *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23 (1997):10-12; Christine Swanton. "On the 'Essential Contestedness' of Political Concepts." *Ethics*, Volume 95 (1985); John N. Gray. "On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts." *Political Theory*, Volume 5 (1977).

<sup>55</sup> Harvey Boulay. "Essentially Contested Concepts and the Teaching of Political Science." *Teaching Political Science*, Volume 4, Issue 4 (1977): 425.

<sup>56</sup> Christine Swanton. "On the 'Essential Contestedness' of Political Concepts." *Ethics*, Volume 95 (1985).

<sup>57</sup> David A. Baldwin. "The Concept of Security." *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23 (1997):11.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

associated with one of Gallie's concepts," the 'clash' creates a situation where the point, or points of contention, between the two or more disputing parties cannot be resolved without negating the implicit arguments that both parties are trying to make about its nature, applicability, and operationalization.

### **Situating 'Terrorism' on the "Essential Contested-ness" Continuum**

In the context of 'terrorism,' the utility of the "essential contested-ness" continuum can best be illustrated by using it to situate specific case studies. To accomplish this, it is first necessary to identify the 'clash' associated with defining 'terrorism.' The scope of the definitional debates associated with conceptualizing 'terrorism' leaves the possibility for the identification of any number of different 'clashes.' As such, the continuum constructed for the purposes of this paper will necessarily be limited to the inherent debate between the definitions of 'terrorism' that are least contested in international policy, and the scholarly literature. As such, this paper will make use of the definition of 'terrorism' proposed in Article 2 of the Draft Comprehensive Convention Against International Terrorism that was first proposed by the United Nations in 2002. On scholarly literature's side of the debate, this paper will use the academic consensus definition of 'terrorism' proposed by Schmid and Jongman in 1988.<sup>59</sup>

As such, the 'clash' associated with the definitions of 'terrorism' associated with this paper is constituted by the dichotomy between these definitions.<sup>60</sup> While the definition of 'terrorism' taken from international policy lacks a specified 'means', the definition taken from

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<sup>59</sup> 2004 research produced by Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler later confirmed the frequency of the elements that Schmid and Jongman identified as the distinguishing features contained in definitions of 'terrorism' in 1988. Weinberg et. al. surveyed 73 academic definitions of 'terrorism' drawn from fifty-five articles in three separate journals, calculating the frequency of the twenty-two word categories that Schmid and Jongman established in 1988. Their research substantiates Schmid and Jongman's conclusion as to the necessity that any definition of 'terrorism' specify

(1) its involving violence, the use of force; (2) the political reasons underlying its perpetration, and (3) its emphasis on inculcating fear and terror as the three most frequent word categories in both studies.<sup>59</sup>

(See Alex P. Schmid, "Terrorism – The Definitional Problem," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, Volume 2, No. 36 (2004): 382; Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler, "The Challenges of Conceptualization Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 777-794.)

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix for Table 1: Comparison of the Definitions of 'Terrorism' that Most Represent Prevalent Views Held by the Scholarly Literature and International Policy.

the scholarly literature lacks a specified target relevant to its ‘ends.’ As well, the international policy definition focuses more on the detrimental effects that its ‘mode’ aims to achieve its ‘ends,’ while the formulation of the scholarly literature’s definition emphasizes what it expects to gain if it effectively implements the strategy implicit in its ‘mode.’ Finally, the international policy definition of ‘terrorism’ targets civilians, and/or non-combatants, and/or public property, and/or private property with the objective of affecting a collective entity (i.e. the population as a whole; a specific government or international organization), while the scholarly literature specifies “immediate human victims” as the target of its ‘means,’ without specifying the target relevant to its ‘ends.’

This more superficial type of comparison of the policy and scholarly definitions seemingly implies that ultimately, it will be possible to amalgamate the two definitions of ‘terrorism.’ It is only through the explanation as to the specific arguments that have been provided within the relevant academe that it becomes possible to understand why the two definitions are not ultimately reconcilable. Official publications created by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime claim that the United Nations General Assembly’s failure to establish a universal definition of ‘terrorism’ in international policy because “there is no consensus on [its] scope of application.” This claim is contextualized by Martha Crenshaw’s criticism of the use of ‘terrorism’ in international relations because “the term is often used in a careless or pejorative way for rhetorical reasons,” while the 2004 United Nations High Level Panel lamented that “a lack of agreement on a clear and well known definition undermines the moral and normative stance against terrorism.”<sup>61</sup> The High Level Panel also asserts that, from an international policy standpoint, “the search for an agreed definition usually stumbles on two issues... the argument

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<sup>61</sup> Martha Crenshaw. *Explaining Terrorism: Causes, Processes and Consequences*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2011): 206 ; Anthony Richards. *Conceptualizing Terrorism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 214.

that any definition should include States' use of armed forces against civilians.... [and, conversely] that peoples under foreign occupation have a right to resistance and a definition of terrorism should not override this right."<sup>62</sup>

These explanations imply that the real 'clash' associated with the international policy and scholarly literature's definitions of 'terrorism' that are being used in this paper is not over what terrorism is, but over the intended utility of establishing the definition. This suggests that the core of the disagreement between the definitions stems from the authors' perceptions of the utility that they might derive from their suggested definition. The 'clash' relevant to the definition of terrorism can thus be suggested as constituting the question of whether what Edward Said asserts represents the "implicit validation... of one's own brand of violence," is considered more beneficial than intellectual accuracy in identifying the key tenets of how 'terrorism' practically manifests. Based on this identified 'clash,' the "essential contested-ness" continuum relevant to these definitions can be conceptualized as existing between the two extremes represented by: (1) the utility of being able to validate actions taken in the context of a zero-sum game; and (2) specifically limiting the scope of the term 'terrorism,' in order to bolster a "moral and normative stance against terrorism" and general perception of the international regime.<sup>63</sup>

While the conceptualization of a "essential contested-ness" continuum does not provide for the explicit definition of a concept, it allows for a greater understanding of the dichotomies that characterize issues that present definitional challenges. This is best illustrated by situating the 'terrorism' constituted by three case studies along the specific continuum constructed by the preceding section of this paper.

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<sup>62</sup> United Nations, "A More Secured World: Our Shared Responsibility," *The Secretary General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change* (December 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Anthony Richards. *Conceptualizing Terrorism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 214.

### Case Study 1: The African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa

The ANC was founded in January 1912, with the asserted primary objective of defending the rights and freedoms of South Africans of all races.<sup>64</sup> This initially manifested as advocacy for voting rights for black and mixed-race South Africans, before focusing its efforts on ending governmental system of apartheid instituted by the Nationalist Party after the South African election in 1948.<sup>65</sup> Although the ANC initially employed only non-violent tactics, the governmental decision to ban the ANC from South Africa in April 1960 resulted in its formation of the Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) to fight against the government and its policies using tactics like sabotage and guerilla warfare.<sup>66</sup> The attacks perpetrated by the Umkhonto we Sizwe ultimately harmed civilians, non-combatants, and government and military officials, their underlying objective notwithstanding.<sup>67</sup> In 1990, the South African government removed the ban on the ANC, legitimizing it as a political party and ultimately enabling its participation in the 1994 South African elections.<sup>68</sup> As such, the case represented by the ‘terrorism’ perpetrated by the ANC falls somewhere between the two extremes of the “essential contested-ness” continuum. This is because, while, on the one hand, the label ‘terrorism’ was imposed on the ANC in a clearly utilitarian context, on the other, the efforts were made to remove the label and end its associated stigma once the ANC’s actions no longer conformed with the principles implicitly understood to constitute ‘terrorism.’

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<sup>64</sup> Heidi Holland. *The Struggle: A History of the African National Congress*. (New York, NY: G. Braziller, 1990); Saul Dubow. *The African National Congress*. (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Heidi Holland. *The Struggle: A History of the African National Congress*. (New York, NY: G. Braziller, 1990) Tom Lodge. “State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976 – 86.” *Third World Quarterly*, Volume 9, Issue 1 (1987): 1-27.

<sup>67</sup> Tom Lodge. “State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976 – 86.” *Third World Quarterly*, Volume 9, Issue 1 (1987): 1-27; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2018). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>68</sup> Saul Dubow. *The African National Congress*. (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000); Nancy L. Clarke and William H. Worger. “*South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*.” (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016)

Case Study 2: *La Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ) in Québec, Canada

The FLQ was founded in the early 1960s as part of the separatist movement that aimed to establish the Canadian province of Québec as independent from Canada.<sup>69</sup> To that end, the FLQ conducted more than 160 violent attacks, killing eight people, between 1963 and 1970.<sup>70</sup> The FLQ is arguably most notorious for its perpetration of the event that has since been termed the ‘October Crisis’ of 1970: its kidnapping of provincial Deputy Premier Pierre Laporte and British diplomat James Cross. The Canadian government’s response to these kidnappings consisted of the invoking of the only peacetime usage of Canada’s War Measures Act, which provides military aid to the civil authorities and extends law enforcement’s powers far beyond their usual scope. Desmond Morton claims that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s decision to invoke the War Measures Act constituted a “brilliant success.”<sup>71</sup> To that end, Morton asserts that even though Trudeau’s actions faced significant political criticism, public opinion polls indicated widespread support for his decision.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Trudeau went on to use this public support-established success as justification to establish the “Priority One” of the Canadian Forces as domestic security.<sup>73</sup> This effectively illustrates Barry Buzan’s claim as to the “considerable leverage over domestic affairs which [is] obtain[ed] by invoking” the use of an “essentially contested concept” like ‘terrorism’ as a label for an action, event, or specific set of occurrences.<sup>74</sup> As such, the case represented by the ‘terrorism’ perpetrated by the FLQ falls closer to the “utility” extreme of the

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<sup>69</sup> Ronald D. Crelinsten. "The Internal Dynamics of the FLQ During the October Crisis of 1970." *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 4 (1987): 59-89.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid; Walter Reich and Walter Laqueur. *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*. (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998).

<sup>71</sup> Desmond Morton. *A Military History of Canada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid; Ronald D. Crelinsten. "The Internal Dynamics of the FLQ During the October Crisis of 1970." *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 4 (1987): 59-89.

<sup>73</sup> Ronald D. Crelinsten. "The Internal Dynamics of the FLQ During the October Crisis of 1970." *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 4 (1987): 59-89.

<sup>74</sup> Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Boulder, CO: ECPR Press, 2007).

“essential contested-ness” continuum because of the utilitarian context in which the application of the label ‘terrorism’ to the FLQ was imposed.

### Case Study 3: the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria

A proponent of Salafism (an extreme form of Sunni Islam), ISIS controlled territory in the Republic of Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic between 2014 and 2017.<sup>75</sup> ISIS was established with the objective of establishing a global Islamic caliphate: a single state led by a group of Islamic religious authorities under the overall leadership of the caliph - an individual proclaimed to be the rightful successor of Muhammad the prophet<sup>76</sup>. The infamy generated by its territorial conquests notwithstanding, ISIS gained international notoriety for its release of videos depicting brutal murders of some of the hostages that it held between 2014 and 2015. The first of the videos, depicting the beheading of American journalists, James Foley and Steven Sotloff, were released online in August 2014. In addition to Foley and Sotloff, ISIS also held an additional ten journalists and twelve international aid workers hostage. Eight of the journalists were released in exchange for ransom payments paid to ISIS by their governments, and five of the aid workers were beheaded on camera in a similar style to that used to execute Foley and Sotloff.<sup>77</sup> ISIS also immolated captured Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh in December 2014; a video depicting his demise was released online in January 2015.<sup>78</sup> ISIS does not make any distinction between civilians, non-combatants, and government and military officials in its perpetration of violence and other detrimental actions through which it aims to achieve its stated

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<sup>75</sup> Ben Piven. “Who, What and Where is ISIL? Explaining the Islamic State.” *Aljazeera America* (September 18, 2014); Cole Bunzel. “Introducing the ‘Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria.’” *Jihadica* (April 9, 2013); The Islamic State.” Government of Australia (2015). Taken from <http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/IslamicState.aspx>.

<sup>76</sup> “Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. (New York, NY: Regan Arts, 2015); Adam Withnall. “Iraq Crisis: ISIS declares its territories a new Islamic state with ‘restoration of caliphate’ in Middle East.” *The Independent* ( June 30, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Mahmoud Eid. *Exchanging Terrorism Oxygen for Media Airwaves: The Age of Terroredia*. (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2014).

<sup>78</sup> Frances Flannery. *Understanding Apocalyptic Terrorism: Countering the Radical Mindset*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); James Fromson and Steven Simon. “ISIS: The Dubious Paradise of Apocalypse Now.” *Survival*, Volume 57, Issue 3 (2015): 7-56.

objective.<sup>79</sup> As such, the case represented by the ‘terrorism’ perpetrated by ISIS falls close to the extreme of the “essential contested-ness” continuum that advocates “limiting the scope of conceptualizations of terrorism” because of its conformity with any and all of the tenets of proposed definitions ‘terrorism.’

### Conclusion

No one definition of ‘terrorism’ has been established within the scholarly literature and international policy either collectively or individually. As has been made evident, this lack of consensus amongst academics and policymakers stems from the diverging focal points around which each of their individual definitions of ‘terrorism’ was conceived. To that end, while certain scholars have used this to suggest that ‘terrorism’ constitutes one of W.B. Gallie’s “essentially contested concepts,” this paper argues that, while terrorism does, indeed, constitute an “essentially contested concept,” it does not do so on the basis of previously established ideas of this notion as a framework, or hypothesis. Rather, this paper argues that a term or phrase that constitutes an “essentially contested concept” can only be understood if the idea of the ‘clash’ around which its lack of definition is centered is specifically identified. This is because an understanding of any “essentially contested concept” can only occur if the “essential contested-ness” continuum is constructed on the basis of the ‘clash’, to provide for an understanding of the range of possible definitions as existing between two extremes. To that end, using the case studies of the terrorism perpetrated by the ANC, the FLQ, and ISIS, this paper argues that Gallie’s seven criteria for “essential contested-ness” misdirect his readers. The central defining tenet of an “essentially contested concept” is necessarily the intractable debate surrounding the framing of its definition.

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<sup>79</sup> Ariel I. Ahrām. “Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS.” *Survival*, Volume 57, Issue 3 (2015): 57-78; Ariel I. Ahrām and Ellen Lust. “The Decline and Fall of the Arab State.” *Survival* Volume 58, Issue 2 (2016): 7.

**Appendix**

**Table 1: Comparing Two Definitions of Terrorism**

	<b>INTERNATIONAL POLICY<sup>80</sup></b>	<b>SCHOLARLY LITERATURE<sup>81</sup></b>
<i>Means of Terrorism</i>	“any”	“violent action,” threats, force
<i>Mode of Terrorism</i>	“unlawfully and intentionally” causing harm, loss, and/or physical damage	turning the main target audience(s) into a target of terror/ demands/ attention and/or to generate propaganda
<i>Ends of Terrorism</i>	“intimidate[ing] a population/ compelling a government or an international organization” to take or refrain from taking action	intimidate/ coerce in a manner that furthers a political/ criminal/ specific “idiosyncratic” objective (or set of objectives)
<i>Target(s) of ‘Means’</i>	civilians/ non-combatants/ public or private property	“immediate human victims of violence” - target(s) generally chosen based on convenience and/or symbolic reasons
<i>Target Relevant to ‘Ends’</i>	population as a whole/ government/ international organization	not the target of the “means”

*(Comparison of the Definitions of ‘Terrorism’ that Most Represent Prevalent Views Held by the Scholarly Literature, and International Policy)*

<sup>80</sup> United Nations, “A More Secured World: Our Shared Responsibility,” *The Secretary General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change* (December 2004).  
<sup>81</sup> Alex Schmid, “Terrorism – The Definitional Problem,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, Volume 2, No. 36 (2004): 382.