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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the upsurge of interest in the phenomenon of terrorism after the attacks of September 11 2001, we still lack a rigorous theory about the nature of terrorist violence. There is much conceptual discussion on this issue, but very little fruition. Scholars try to avoid the muddle by providing definitions, but these definitions are based almost invariably on induction out of a few cases or on linguistic usage rather than on an analysis of the very concept of terrorism. We do not need yet more definitions, but a theory on violence that sheds light on why we tend to consider that some attacks or groups are terrorist in nature whereas others not.

Rigorous comparative research has been seriously hindered by the absence of a clear categorization of what terrorism is. Without a theory that delimits the phenomenon to be studied, it is impossible to have operational rules that allow the researcher to identify cases. Given the lack of consensus about what terrorism is, how are we to compare cases? And how are we to build large-n datasets? The existence of these problems explains, in my view, why studies on terrorism lag behind those on wars, civil wars, riots, or genocides.

The difficulty does not lie in the political overload of the term. It is true that the word "terrorism" has a derogatory use in political discourse; today no one admits to being a terrorist (this used to be different in the past). And there is the famous dictum "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". However, this is hardly unique of terrorism. No dictator accepts to be such. He is "the great leader", "*il duce*", "*el caudillo*", etcetera. Dictatorships disguise themselves as "salvation governments", "popular democracies", "military juntas", and what not. But all this has not prevented the academic analysis of dictatorships, and it should not prevent it in the case of terrorism either.

In this article I show that a theory on terrorism is possible. I argue that the occurrence of terrorist violence is driven by the absence of territorial control. Unlike guerrilla insurgencies that are able to liberate part of the territory of the state, in which they have de facto control and

become local rulers, terrorist insurgencies do not liberate territory (either because they cannot or because they do not want to) and act therefore under the severe constraints of underground groups. I show that the repertoire of violent tactics that is associated with terrorism corresponds precisely to the conditions imposed by the lack of territorial control.

This thesis makes sense of some empirical regularities. Due precisely to their underground condition, terrorist groups tend to have less recruits than guerrilla organizations, and they cause less fatalities. In this sense, it is worth noting that the conception of terrorism in terms of territory produces very similar results to the 1,000 casualty threshold that is used to define civil wars. The vast majority of terrorist groups cause less than 1,000 fatalities, and almost all guerrillas cause more than that. Of course, there are exceptions, but these also shed light on the meaning and scope of the rule. It is not by chance, for instance, that in the Western European context, the Provisional IRA is the only terrorist group that killed more than 1,000 people: it had a sanctuary in the Republic of Ireland, which played a similar role to that of a liberated territory, and held a great deal of control, but never full, in some Catholic strongholds in Northern Ireland.

In order to show that the argument is not purely terminological or conceptual, I examine in some depth two case studies that are problematical from an empirical point of view for the thesis I defend. These are the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Montoneros in Argentina, on the one hand, and the Palestinian insurgent groups in the aftermath of the Six-Day war, on the other. In the first case, we observe the transition from rural guerrillas to urban terrorism: these groups evolved to terrorism, but retained some features of guerrillas. In the second case, we face the harder instance: the Palestinian context is so complex that there are good reasons to hold both that the insurgent groups were guerrillas and that they were terrorist. They organized like a guerrilla, and they had something very close to liberated territories, but in Jordan or Lebanon, not in Israel: they were never able to seize Israeli territory and this pushed

them to engage in international terrorist attacks.

Section 2 shows why inductive or a-theoretical definitions do not work. Section 3 develops the argument about the crucial importance of territory for insurgencies, and the difference that territorial control makes. Section 4 extends the analysis to the possibility of other actors, such as guerrillas or states, committing terrorist attacks. Sections 5 and 6 contain the case studies. The paper ends in section 7 with a discussion on how to use the territoriality criterion in order to codify cases, so that large-n research on terrorism becomes possible.

## **DEFINITIONS THAT DO NOT WORK**

Perhaps due to its political implications, there has been some lexicographical fixation in the social sciences with regard to terrorism. Almost every author who writes on this issue feels compelled to provide a definition, very often in a dictionary style, as if a definition were to exorcise all value judgments. Schmid & Jongman (1988) surveyed the field and collected more than one hundred definitions. The number must have at least doubled since then.

The main problem with the vast majority of these definitions is that they are not based on a theory of political violence that accounts for its various forms. In fact, most definitions are too general, since they pick up certain features of terrorist violence that are hardly unique to this type of violence. Let us begin with two basic features that appear in most definitions: the distinction between the target of violence and the main target, and the aim of instilling fear in a population.

It is often said (for instance, Crenshaw 1995: 4; Enders & Sandler 2006: 3; Frey 2004: 7; Hoffman 1998: 44; Krueger 2007: 14; Schmid & Jongman 1988: 28) that terrorist violence assumes a distinction between the direct target of violence and the general or main target that contemplates the violence and understands what could happen if it does not comply with the perpetrators' demands. Thus, when ETA (*Euskadi ta Askatasuna*, Basque Homeland and Freedom) kills a policeman, the direct

target is indeed the person who is shot, but the main target is the state the terrorists fight against. In this sense, the terrorist attack is a "communicative act" (Crelinsten 1987), since violence carries a message intended for the main target. The message explains what might ensue if the main target does not comply. A corollary of this distinction is that the goal of the terrorists consists of instilling fear in the main target. People learn to fear the consequences of not complying with the perpetrators' demands. Hence the "terror" that terrorism brings about. As it is sometimes put, the point is to kill a few to terrorize the many.

There are some empirical and conceptual problems with this rendition of terrorism. Going from the less to the more important, it is worth mentioning that in some terrorist attacks the distinction between the direct and the main target is dubious. In cases of assassinations, for example, the distinction makes little sense. When *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will) killed Tsar Alexander II in 1881, who was really the main target of violence? In a sense, the assassination was an attempt to shock the masses as well as to increase the popularity of People's Will. Violence, in many cases of revolutionary terrorism, is intended to mobilize an apathetic population rather than trying to force the state to make concessions. Revolutionary terrorists have believed for a long time that by killing members of the state apparatus or the bourgeoisie they (i) set a path that the masses will follow, (ii) reveal the vulnerability of the system, and (iii) contribute to raising class consciousness.

This holds from the "propaganda by the deed" doctrine developed by the anarchists in the 1880s (Linse 1982; Clutterbuck 2004) to the wave of leftwing terrorism in many Western European countries in the 1970s (Sánchez-Cuenca 2009a). As the Red Brigades explained in a text on the strategy of violence, "urban guerilla plays a key role in the political deconstruction of the regime and the state. It hits directly the enemy and paves the way for the resistance movement. Around the guerrilla the resistance

movement is created and organized.”<sup>1</sup> In this strategic context, terrorists kill with the goal of mobilizing followers. It is not clear what role fear plays with regard to mobilization, nor whether the distinction between the two targets holds in this case.

Even if we assume, despite the previous caveat, that the distinction between the direct and the main target, as well as the purpose to instill fear, are features that apply to every instance of terrorism, the problem is that these two features are present in every form of coercive violence, terrorist or not. Coercive violence consists of imposing a cost on someone through violent means in order to force the person to act as the coercer wants. As Thomas Schelling puts it in his characteristic style, “there is a difference between taking what you want and making someone give it to you.” (Schelling 1966: 2) Taking what you want corresponds to military power; making someone give it to you corresponds to the power to hurt. Coercion works thanks to the power to hurt.<sup>2</sup>

Coercion plays a role in most violent conflicts, including guerrillas and wars. It would be wrong, for example, to consider that wars are determined only by military power. Recent theoretical work has highlighted the importance that bargaining and the power to hurt have in the context of military conflicts (Powell 2004; Slanchtev 2003; Wagner 2000). War is something more complex than sizing the territory and weapons of the enemy. Although a state may end up in total collapse as a consequence of a war conflict, war often occurs in a bargaining situation in which violence affects the bargaining power of the parties.

A dramatic illustration of the power to hurt in wars, that Schelling (1966) comments on, is that of the two atomic bombs. The aim was not the military destruction of the Japanese army. Rather, it

was a message, in the starkest possible form, to the Japanese government and society about the consequences of not surrendering. The attack, therefore, presupposed the distinction between the direct and the main target. And the atomic bombs were supposed to instill fear in the population.

Should we conclude then that the two atomic bombs, as well as many other similar episodes of coercive violence in war conflicts, are terrorist attacks? Some thinkers conclude so (Ryan 1991: 251; Walzer 2004: 130). In order to avoid unnecessary confusion, Walzer reserves the term “military terrorism” to distinguish these attacks from other terrorist ones. Of course, these thinkers have another, even more powerful, reason for considering that the atomic bombs, or the area bombings by the Allied powers in the Second World War, are terrorist attacks, namely that the victims were civilians or noncombatants.

By far, the most popular definition of terrorism, among social scientists and moral and political philosophers alike, refers to the condition of the victims. If victims are civilians, then we are in the presence of terrorism (for instance, Abrams 2006: 42; Goodwin 2006: 2028; Kamm 2008: 157; Kydd and Walter 2006: 52; McCormick 2003: 474). It is sometimes added that the civilians killed are “innocent”, or that they are selected randomly, but these nuances should not concern us at this point.

This is, indeed, one of the more deep-seated beliefs about terrorism. It stems, as far as I can see, from a lack of familiarity with the phenomenon under study. Most writers have in mind international terrorist attacks, in which many civilians are killed. These are the attacks that receive most media attention and that the authors refer to in their illustrations and examples: from the 1972 Munich Olympics attack by Black September to 9/11 by Al Qaeda.

As a matter of fact, many terrorist organizations, particularly domestic ones, target combatants (the military, police forces) in a systematic way (Sánchez-Cuenca and De la Calle 2009). Someone could thus sustain that these organizations are not in fact terrorist ones because they do not fit the definition that stipulates what terrorism is, but this answer does not work:

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<sup>1</sup> “Risoluzione della Direzione Strategica”, April 1975. Reproduced in Progetto Memoria (1996: 54).

<sup>2</sup> This distinction resurfaces in the more recent literature on political violence. Kalyvas (2006) talks about two overarching aims of violence, extermination and compliance, that roughly correspond to military power and the power to hurt respectively.

the same authors that define terrorism in terms of civilian targets do not hesitate to refer to the PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army), ETA, or the Red Brigades as terrorist groups even if these groups kill more combatants than noncombatants. The percentage of combatants killed by these three groups is, respectively, 60.2%, 65.0% and 60.4% (data from the DTV dataset, see below).

Table 1 shows evidence about the proportion of civilians killed by terrorist groups in 18 Western European countries in the period 1965-2005 according to the Domestic Terrorist Victims (DTV) dataset.<sup>3</sup> As can be seen, there is wide variation in the ideological orientation of the groups. Thus, whereas extreme-right, neo-nazi (xenophobic, racist attacks), and vigilante groups kill mainly noncombatants, confirming the definition, nationalist and extreme-left (revolutionary) groups kill more combatants (59.3% and 55.2% respectively). This is not only a European phenomenon. I have tracked all the killings of the Tupamaros in Uruguay and 78.8% of the victims were combatants. It would be simply odd to exclude the Tupamaros from the universe of terrorist groups. In the literature on terrorism, Tupamaros appear as a terrorist group beyond any reasonable doubt.

The mismatch between the definition of terrorism and widely held judgments about what groups are terrorist in nature suggests that there is something wrong with the definition.<sup>4</sup> The definition makes sense if we focus exclusively on international attacks, but as soon as we apply it to domestic terrorism, it is plainly obvious that terrorist groups cannot be identified by a pattern of target selection.

Moreover, it is crucial to bear in mind that the killing of civilians is by no means a prerogative of terrorist groups. Recent work on wars, guerrillas and genocides (Downes 2008; Kalyvas 2006; Valentino 2004) has

shown that civilians are systematically targeted. Downes (2008: 1) reports that noncombatants represent between 50% and 62% of all victims in war-related conflicts (either inter-state or civil wars). Kalyvas' theory on violence in guerrilla conflicts is particularly relevant here, since it is often assumed that guerrilla insurgencies exert violence in hit and run encounters with security forces. This, however, is a distorted view. Guerrillas, as they try to rule and impose order in the areas that they liberate from state control, kill civilians in an attempt to terrorize those who could defect and denounce the insurgents to state troops.<sup>5</sup>

The definition of terrorism as violence against civilians is simply untenable. On the one hand, it does not hold regarding some groups that are universally regarded as terrorist. On the other, it cannot distinguish between terrorist and non-terrorist violence against civilians.

Neither the coercive dimension of terrorist violence nor the status of the terrorist victims capture what is unique about terrorism. In order to provide a more convincing analysis of what terrorism is, we first need to understand better the kind of violent tactics that is used by terrorist groups and second to explain why terrorist groups cannot but use these tactics. The first part of the analysis refers to the action-sense of terrorism, that is, to the deeds that we consider unequivocally terrorist; the second part has to do with the actor-sense of terrorism, that is, with the nature of the actors who engage in terrorism. In what follows, I describe terrorist deeds and then try to derive them from the resources and constraints that terrorist groups have. In other words, I attempt to establish a link between the action- and the actor- sense. The distinction between the two levels of analysis (the action and actor ones) and the analysis of the link between the two removes much of the ambiguity that is endemic to terminological discussions on terrorism.

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<sup>3</sup> Available at [www.march.es/dtv](http://www.march.es/dtv).

<sup>4</sup> Abrams (2006) pushes this rule to the extreme: he considers that an insurgent group is a terrorist one if at least half plus one of its victims are civilians. According to this rule, the German Red Army Faction (RAF) is a terrorist group, but not so the Red Brigades.

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<sup>5</sup> See also Wickham-Crowley (1990).

**TABLE 1. Target Selection (Fatalities) and Types of Terrorism in Western Europe, 1965-2005**

	Nationalist	Extreme left	Extreme right	Vigilante	Neonazi
Non combatants	40.7%	44.8%	83.3%	87.4%	96.6%
Combatants	59.3%	55.2%	16.7%	12.6%	3.4%
Total fatalities	2,920	362	372	1,033	268

**TERRORIST GROUPS AND GUERRILLAS**

The technology that is typically used in terrorist attacks is that of firearms and bombs. In the DTV dataset, which covers Western European countries, 62.4% of all victims were shot; 24.0% died due to bomb explosions; 6.4% died due to car bombs; and the remaining 7.3% of victims were killed using other means.

The deeds that are observed in most terrorist campaigns are those compatible with these technological means. These include hostage taking and kidnapping, assassinations, plane hijackings, selective shootings, bank robberies, and the destruction of property and life through bombs in urban areas. This list does not aim to be exhaustive and below I show some important exceptions. But it is nevertheless revealing given what it leaves out, namely the kind of irregular warfare operations that take place in guerrilla conflicts. Guerrilla violence, in contrast to terrorist violence, involves some use of military power, as reflected by skirmishes, ambushes, the seizing of villages, raids, and even small scale battles.

Figure 1 represents an axis with full military power at one extreme and the pure power to hurt at the other. Terrorist violence occupies a region on the far right of the axis, close to the power of hurt extreme. Of course, there is some variation within terrorism and in some cases some military power can be discerned (see below). Yet, the bulk of violence corresponds to the power to hurt. At the opposite end we have state armies, which occupy the largest region, as they can combine full military power with some power to hurt. In the middle there is guerrilla. Guerrilla stretches across a fairly large area due to the fact that the military power of guerrillas may vary from quasi-regular armies, with heavy military equipment, to much lighter and less coordinated groups. From this perspective, what is truly characteristic of terrorism is that its violence stems only from the power to hurt, while in guerrilla the power to hurt is combined with some varying degree of military power.

**FIGURE 1. Different Types of Violent Actors**



Why do terrorist groups resort to the technology of coercive violence embodied in assassinations, hijackings, car bombs, or selective shootings? The answer, as some authors have pointed out (Hoffman 1998: 41), has to do with the absence of territorial control.<sup>6</sup> What unifies the insurgent groups that we regard terrorist is not the kind of victims they target, but rather the absence of any territorial control. Without a territory, the insurgents have to go underground, acting within the enemy's territory, mainly in an urban setting. This explains why terrorism is often referred to as "urban guerrilla" as opposed to "rural guerrilla", where the insurgents are able to seize territory. Clandestinity explains why terrorists, unlike guerrilleros, cannot wear uniforms, for they would be immediately identified and captured.

Terrorists do not have the opportunity to build an army with military power. Under the conditions of clandestinity, they cannot but resort to the technology of violence that we associate with terrorism. The kind of violence exerted by terrorist groups follows therefore from the constraints that secrecy imposes. The means they use are restricted to the power to hurt. Guerrillas, by contrast, liberate territory of the state's control, developing a base, normally in the jungle or in mountains. The logic of their violence consists of seizing an ever greater portion of the state's territory and to rule in it, creating a sort of proto-state. Guerrillas, thus, have to establish themselves as the new rulers in the liberated territory.

The challenge to the state posed by guerrillas is, in a way, more serious than that of terrorist groups. Whereas any kind of violence is a challenge to the monopoly on violence that the state has, the guerrillas also put into question the sovereignty of the state over its own territory. As Kalyvas

(1999: 259) has shown, a guerrilla creates a segmented monopoly of violence in its own liberated territory, that is, a territorial base in which only the guerrillas use violence. Sometimes, when the territory is under dispute and it is not clearly under the control of either the state or the insurgents, Kalyvas refers to an unstable situation that he labels "fragmented sovereignty", meaning that the control changes from one party to the other, sometimes for a brief span (the State controls the territory during the day, while the insurgents do so during the night). The situation created by terrorism is somewhat different. As territory is not segmented or even fragmented, in a terrorist conflict there are not different monopolies of violence each with their own territory fighting against each other; rather, what we observe is a duopoly, with two actors, the terrorist insurgents and the state, exerting violence within the same territory (Sánchez-Cuenca 2008).

Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of non-territorial violence is that of international terrorism, as epitomized by the frequent hijack of planes by Palestinian groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see below on the Palestinians). In this kind of international attacks, the terrorists act in complete isolation and the connection with a territory is completely severed. It is often the case, as I show later, that the decision to engage in international attacks is motivated by the difficulty to gain a liberated area.

The difference that territory makes has some observable consequences that, to a great extent, reinforce our judgments about what guerrilla and terrorist warfare is. Terrorist groups, being clandestine and mostly urban, tend to be much smaller in terms of recruits than guerrillas. They rarely have more than several hundred activists, whereas guerrillas may be formed by thousands of guerrilleros. A minimum estimation for the LTTE in Sri-Lanka is 3,000 (Hopgood 2005: 43); for the KNU (Karen National Union) of Myanmar, 4,000-5,000 (Tan 2007: 47); for the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), 18,000 (Chernick 2007: 56). These are all clear cases of guerrillas with liberated territory. As for terrorist groups, ETA has never had more than 500 members (Domínguez 1992: 39); the PIRA had about

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<sup>6</sup> Hoffman (1998: 41) makes the same point, which, in a sense, has always been floating around among terrorist experts. Thus, the distinction between rural and urban guerrilla really hinges upon the territorial issue. Whereas rural guerrilla has a territory of its own, urban guerrilla is by necessity underground. Although I claim no originality, I think that other authors have not applied this distinction in a systematic way, nor have they drawn from it all its implications.

900 activists, close to the 1,000 threshold (O’Leary 2005: 233)<sup>7</sup>; and the Red Brigades, around 425 members (Moss 1989: 65-7)<sup>8</sup>. An interesting exception, which I study more carefully in the next section, is the terrorist groups of Uruguay and Argentina: both the Tupamaros and the Montoneros had large organizations with several thousand recruits. In general, however, it seems obvious that a clandestine organization has less capacity to recruit people than another that counts on liberated territory.

It follows from this difference in size that guerrillas will be in general more lethal than terrorist groups. This has some implications for the conceptualization of violence. Civil wars are defined as domestic violent conflicts (in which the state is one of the parties) that bring about at least 1,000 killings. Here, however, I am drawing a distinction between insurgencies that have a territorial basis and those that do not. It turns out that the two criteria, the territorial and the lethal one, overlap to a great extent (Sánchez-Cuenca and De la Calle 2009). The vast majority of territorial conflicts produce more than 1,000 killings and are classified as civil wars. Most cases of non-territorial violence, however, produce less than 1,000 killings and are classified as terrorism. The Shining Path or the LTTE have been involved in civil wars: they both liberated territory from the state’s control in rural areas and they both produced thousands of killings. ETA or the Red Brigades were urban groups, without liberated territory, and they both killed less than 1,000 people. It seems reasonable to consider that the former are guerrillas, whereas the latter are terrorist groups. According to Lacina (2006), the median number of victims in civil wars is 10,500. Although it is not possible to provide a strictly comparable figure for terrorism for

lack of reliable data, the median value of fatalities by terrorist organizations in DTV, which is geographically bound to developed countries, is only three (the mean is 40.6). This is due to the existence of many small terrorist groups with very low lethality. Only one organization in the sample exceeds the 1,000 threshold, the PIRA with 1,646 fatalities.<sup>9</sup> Attacks such as those of 9/11, with almost 3,000 fatalities, are completely exceptional in the universe of terrorist conflicts.

The PIRA case is particularly interesting, for in the early seventies it was close to becoming a guerrilla. Republicans were able to create some urban enclaves in which security forces were not able to enter, the so-called “no-go areas” of Belfast and Derry. To regain these areas, the British government organized the Motorman operation in 1972, deploying thousands of troops that faced very little resistance precisely because of the PIRA’s lack of military power (Smith 1995: 110). Moreover, the PIRA played the role of rulers in Catholic strongholds, imitating the behavior of guerrillas in liberated territories. There were groups of PIRA men in charge public order: petty crime and other offenses were severely punished with kneecapping and beatings (Monaghan 2004). In the area of south Armagh, the PIRA had virtual control of the territory. Because of the risk of ambushes and landmines, the army had to use helicopters to transport troops (Harden 1999: 19). The use in this area of mortars and missiles by the PIRA indicates some military power resembling that of guerrillas. The power of the PIRA in south Armagh was due to (i) the absence of Protestants, (ii) the strong support for Republicanism among Catholics, and (iii) the border with the

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<sup>7</sup> Some authors refer in passing to more than 1,000 recruits in the early 1970s (see, e.g., Moloney 2002: 103), but they do not provide any source or estimation method for these figures.

<sup>8</sup> Other sources point to higher figures, close to 900 recruits (Progetto Memoria 1994: 60). But it must be stressed that both Moss (1989) and Progetto Memoria (1994) provide “flow” figures rather than “stock” ones.

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<sup>9</sup> There are also cases of rural guerrillas that are unable to reach the 1,000 threshold. For instance, the guerrilla that was formed by the losers of the Spanish civil war that acted between 1939 and 1952, known as *el maquis*, killed around 300 people. The maquis had a membership in the whole period of around 5,000-6,000 people (Serrano 2006: 429-33). If they were not able to kill more people it was because of the extreme repression of the Franco regime.

Republic of Ireland, the “sanctuary” for the PIRA.

The existence of a sanctuary is crucial for terrorist organizations. It provides a secure basis for logistics and plays therefore a very similar role to the liberated territory of the guerrillas. The difference lies in the fact that terrorists do not “rule” in their sanctuaries. It is just a safe haven for them. This suggests a continuum from pure terrorism to pure guerrilla, with terrorist groups enjoying a sanctuary in between. We should find that terrorist groups with a sanctuary (such as the PIRA in Ireland, ETA in the south of France, or Fatah in Jordan and Lebanon) are, everything else equal, bigger in size and more lethal than pure terrorist groups with no territory whatsoever, though not as much as guerrillas with their own liberated territories.

Just as some gradation is possible with regard to the control of territory, we can also observe different degrees of clandestinity. Terrorist groups may have a highly complex, multilayered structure in which only the armed core of the organization is fully clandestine, with concentric circles around this core covering logistic support and intelligence, and also social movements, associations, parties, and even firms that may develop their activities legally. Hamas, as is well known, is much more than an armed, secret group. Since its origins, it was also a social and political group that acted in the open in the occupied territories (Mishal and Sela 2000). ETA is surrounded by a social movement rooted in many organizations (a party, a union, a newspaper, youth, women, and environmental associations, and so forth) that for many years also acted in the open (Sánchez-Cuenca 2009b). A strange case is that of Italian leftwing terrorism in the 1970s. It was extremely fragmented, formed by a bunch of small groups and organizations, and there was no clear separation between radical protest and terrorist violence. Many activists engaged in full violence on a part-time basis, without altering their normal lives. Thus, the number of people in complete clandestinity was indeed low (Moss 1989: 55). Finally, it is worth noting that some armed groups may go through different

stages. The Montoneros were an underground group from 1969 to 1973; then, when the Argentinian democracy was restored, they became a mass political force acting in the open, even if the armed core still committed attacks; they decided to go underground again in September 1974, when the Peronist government severed its links with this movement (Gillespie 1982: 163).

Although there are cases that do not perfectly fit either of the two insurgent groups (terrorist and guerrillas), I believe that a case can be made for the existence of two kinds of insurgencies that differ from each other on a number of grounds. Table 2 summarizes the main distinguishing features that I have mentioned in this section. To a certain extent, they are ordered from the more to the less important. As I have argued, everything hinges upon the existence or not of liberated territory. Groups that do not liberate territory are underground, use violence as the power to hurt (to impose a cost on the enemy), in an urban setting, tend to have less than 1,000 recruits, tend to produce less than 1,000 fatalities, and wear no uniform or insignia. Groups that liberate territory, on the other hand, have some military power, operate mainly in the countryside, tend to have more than 1,000 recruits, tend to produce more than 1,000 fatalities, and may wear uniforms or insignia.

### **CAN GUERRILLAS AND STATES ENGAGE IN TERRORIST VIOLENCE?**

The distinction between terrorist groups and guerrillas is mainly related to the actor-sense of terrorism. Terrorist groups are those that do not control territory. But terrorism is also a particular type of violence based on the power to hurt. Once terrorism is defined in the action-sense, that is, as a type of violence, the question that needs to be addressed is whether other actors apart from terrorist groups themselves can carry out terrorist attacks. I examine in this section if states and guerrilla insurgencies can carry out terrorist attacks.

There has always been a heated debate on the possibility of states engaging in

**TABLE 2. Terrorist and Guerrilla Groups**

	Terrorist groups	Guerrillas
Territory	No territory: clandestinity	Liberated territory
Violence	Power to hurt	Military power
Main theater of operations	City	Countryside
Tactics	Hostage taking, plane hijackings, car bombs, assassinations, bank robberies, selective shootings	Ambushes, seizing villages, raids, small scale battles, repression of civilians in liberated areas
Recruits	<1,000	>1,000
Lethality	<1,000	>1,000
Uniform / insignia	No	Yes

terrorist violence.<sup>10</sup> Here it is necessary to distinguish three different issues: (i) whether state repression can be a form of terrorism; (ii) whether states can promote or sponsor terrorist groups; and (iii) whether the state can commit terrorist attacks. To put it briefly, my response is negative for (i) and positive for (ii) and (iii).

The reason why state repression is not terrorism is that the technology the state uses against its citizens is completely different to that of terrorist violence. In terror regimes (as the Stalinist Soviet Union or Argentina between 1976 and 1983) the state exerts violence in a number of ways: torture, executions, mass arrests, internment in concentration camps, mass disappearance, and others. The purpose of state terror is to end with any form of civil or armed opposition to the rulers. I see no analytical gain from merging terrorist violence and state repression. Even if the etymology of terrorism comes from the state terror of the French revolution, terrorism and state repression are two deeply distinct forms of violence. Of course, the moral philosopher may want to say that both are equally unacceptable. But if we leave aside moral issues and we focus on analysis, as the social sciences do, then it seems wiser to keep both phenomena separate, as they have very different

determinants. From an analytical point of view, the kind of violence the state uses, even in terror regimes, has nothing to do with the terrorist attacks of insurgent groups. Repression or state violence is a category in itself that merits separate attention.<sup>11</sup>

It is quite another thing to admit the possibility of the state promoting or helping terrorist groups such as the Triple A (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance).<sup>12</sup> The Triple A was a paramilitary group that acted in the 1970s against leftists. It was organized by a Minister of Perón, José López Rega (Gillespie 1982: 153-55). It had the support of the state apparatus, but it was not part of the security forces. The same holds, for instance, with regard to the Spanish GAL (Antiterrorist Liberation Groups), the death squads that acted in the early 1980s against members and supporters of ETA (Woodworth 2001). The Minister of Interior at the time ended up in jail for his role in the creation of these groups. The Triple A or the GAL are para-state groups involved in dirty wars against other insurgent groups. Their technology of violence was not that of the state mentioned above, but rather that of terrorist groups. Given that they were not part of the state, it

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Glover (1991), Ryan (1991), Schmid & Hongman (1988).

<sup>11</sup> For a review on state repression, see Davenport (2007).

<sup>12</sup> For a broader discussion, see Hoffman (1998: 185-196).

makes complete sense to regard these groups as terrorist ones (under the label of “state sponsored” terrorist groups).

Finally, the state itself may carry out attacks that cannot be described as anything but terrorist ones. For instance, there is evidence that the CIA and Israeli secret services have planted car bombs in Lebanon (Davis 2007: 70-1, 90-2). These are typical terrorist attacks regardless of the ultimate authorship, either an insurgent group or the state. If the state dares to get involved in this kind of operations, it is typically with special agents acting beyond national borders. The impossibility of acting in the open in another country creates conditions very similar to those of clandestinity.

The analysis can be extended to guerrilla groups. When they are subject to the constraints of secrecy that terrorist groups systematically face, their repertoire of violence corresponds to terrorism. This is typically the case when the guerrillas decide to attack in the cities, far away from their territorial base. Under these conditions, they execute attacks in the same manner as terrorist groups. They cannot wear uniforms, they have to conceal their identity and use the tactics that are compatible with the conditions of secrecy. Many examples are possible. The Shining Path exploded a car bomb in the bourgeois neighborhood of Miraflores in Lima on 16 July 1992, killing 25 and injuring around 200 people. The LTTE sent a suicide bomber to Colombo on 31 January 1996, devastating the Central Bank, killing 91 people, and injuring 1,400 more. In these two examples, the guerrillas go to the capital of the country and act like any other terrorist group, using the same methods. These are, therefore, terrorist acts carried out by a guerrilla group. Of course, this overlap in tactics between different kinds of insurgencies (territorial and non-territorial ones) creates some confusion, particularly if we are interested in identifying the determinants of each insurgency. The next two sections show this complexity to its full.

## THE TRANSITION FROM GUERRILLA TO TERRORISM: TUPAMAROS AND MONTONEROS

After the failed attempts to emulate the Cuban revolution in the 1960s in Latin America, rebels opted for urban guerrilla, abandoning Guevara’s doctrine on the creation of a revolutionary *foco* in the countryside (Beckett 2001: Ch. 7). In this transition from the rural to the urban model, the insurgents theorized about the importance of territory. This was most clearly seen in the emergence of the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Montoneros in Argentina. A cursory analysis of these two cases reveals the crucial importance that territory has for understanding the nature of insurgent violence. I do not want to imply that these were the first terrorist groups (older precedents include, among others, the European and Russian anarchists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the Zionist groups acting in Palestine before the creation of Israel). Yet, the Tupamaros and Montoneros are particularly revealing, and, besides, the Tupamaros had an enormous influence on other terrorist groups such as the Red Brigades, the Red Army Faction, or ETA.

The intellectual father of urban insurgency in Latin America was Abraham Guillén, a Spanish anarchist that escaped from prison in 1945 and moved first to Argentina and then to Uruguay. His *Strategy of the Urban Guerrilla* appeared in 1966, three years before Carlos Mariguella’s *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, a much more quoted work in the literature on terrorism but less interesting from a theoretical point of view. Guillén considers that

If 70 percent of a country’s population is urban, the demography and the economy must dictate the specific rules of the strategy of revolutionary combat. The center of operations should never be in the mountains or in the villages, but in the largest cities where the population suffices to form the army of the revolution. (Guillén 1973: 237)

Once the insurgency moves to the city, the aim is no longer “the conquest of space”

(250); “in the cities, the guerrillas agitate, fight and give cover to the masses, but cannot establish liberated zones” (281). The leaders of the Tupamaros were fully aware that Uruguay was basically an urban country (more than 80 per cent of the population lived in cities) with a basically flat terrain that discouraged the creation of a rural *foco*. Interestingly, the founder of the movement, Raul Sendic, came from the countryside and in 1963-4 tried to create a rural guerrilla that did not get beyond the stage of a nomadic group. It was only after this failure that in 1964 the Tupamaros opted for urban struggle (Buchert 1979: 111). In the so-called Tupamaros’ *Documento No.1*, written in 1967, it is explicitly stated that “there are not places in the country that make possible the creation of an enduring rural guerrilla *foco*.”<sup>13</sup> Sendic himself thought carefully about the consequences of concentrating all the activity in the cities. Drawing comparisons between urban and rural insurgency, he thought, for instance, that city sewers played the role of mountains in the hinterland, being places beyond the reach of the army (Blixen 2005: 302).

Rather than using violence to gain new space from the state, as most guerrillas do, violence was conceived by the Tupamaros as armed propaganda that would increase popular support. Despite this strategic shift, the Tupamaros still engaged in some actions that resembled guerrilla behavior. For instance, on 8 October 1969, they occupied for some hours Pando, a village of 20,000 inhabitants (Guerrero Martín 1972: 58-60). Seizing villages, as I pointed out above, is not part of the typical repertoire of terrorist groups. This deed was not intended, however, to liberate territory and establish a permanent basis, but rather as an act of propaganda to show the power of the insurgents. In fact, it had a lasting impact on the Montoneros in Argentina, who replicated it occupying on 1 July 1970 the

village of La Calera. Interestingly, the insurgents wore identifying Montonero armbands, trying to imitate the style of guerrilleros (Gillespie 1982: 95).

Argentina, like Uruguay, has a geography that does not favor rural insurgency and it was already in the 1960s an urban country, with more than 70 per cent of the population living in the cities. There were various attempts to create rural guerrillas from 1959 to 1968, but all failed miserably (Gillespie 1982: 76; Moyano 1995: 21-2). Several urban insurgencies appeared after the insurrection in May 1969 in the city of Córdoba (the so-called *Cordobazo*). The two most important ones were the Montoneros (the leftist fraction of the Peronist movement) and the Trotskyist ERP (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*, People’s Revolutionary Army).

In terms of recruits, both the Uruguayan and the Argentinian groups might qualify as guerrillas rather than terrorist groups, with more than 1,000 recruits in each case. Moyano (1995: 104) estimates at their peak 3,500 recruits for Montoneros and 1,500 for the ERP. As for the Tupamaros, Porzecanski (1973: 28) provides “flow” rather than “stock” estimations: taking into account that armed struggle was concentrated in the period 1969-73 and that in 1973 there were 4,000 Tupamaros in prison, we can safely assume that membership was over 1,000 people.

The fact that the recruit figures were so high may help to explain the certain instability we observe in the forms of violence, oscillating between guerrilla and terrorist tactics. I have mentioned already the seizing of villages in the early period, but these were mostly anecdotal; there were other more significant episodes. In Argentina, the political situation deteriorated quite dramatically after the traumatic breakdown of Perón with the Montoneros in May 1974. Peron died shortly afterwards, in July, and he was replaced by his widow, who presided an increasingly reactionary and repressive government. This is when the death squads sponsored by the government started to kill the radicals. The spiral of violence that followed ended with the military coup in March 1976. In this context of radicalization, between 1974-76, the

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<sup>13</sup> For a reproduction and highly detailed analysis of *Documento N° 1* by one of its authors, see Torres (2002). The main strategic documents of the Tupamaros are reproduced in <http://www.chasque.net/mlnweb/documentos/in-dicedocumhistoricos.htm> (last checked: July 2009).

Montoneros tried to create a real army with capacity for military operations that involved several hundred attackers (Moyano 1995: 57). Perhaps the most spectacular deed was the assault on a garrison in Formosa in October 1975. This was a large-scale guerrilla attack in which the Montoneros wore uniforms. This guerrilla period was brief and ended in failure. Gillespie (1982) attributes the failure to the isolation of the Montoneros from the masses, which was due, ultimately, to their underground condition: "The Montoneros could not, like rural guerrillas, establish 'liberated zones' within which the local population could be politically organized and militarily protected. Their chosen strategy inevitably involved the physical isolation of combatants" (203).

The ERP, in turn, tried to become a rural guerrilla in the mountains of Tucumán on September 1974. It liberated territory for a short time. One of the first actions was to "impart justice", executing in the village of Santa Lucía a taxi-driver and a policeman who were allegedly involved in the killing of a ERP member (Carnovale 2007: 21). These were typical guerrilla actions. The Argentinian army, however, quickly crushed the insurgents, proving that the country did not have the conditions for a rural guerrilla to emerge.

The experience of Uruguay and Argentina shows the nuances of the transition from rural to urban violence as well as the crucial importance that territory has in accounting for the nature of the ensuing violence. Terrorism emerged when insurgents became aware of the low chances of a successful rural guerrilla in flat countries with a high concentration of the population in urban centers. Despite some anomalies (a huge number of recruits, sporadic attempts to liberate territory and to build militias), an overall assessment of these groups in Uruguay and Argentina leads to the conclusion that their nature was essentially a terrorist one.

## **THE MOST DIFFICULT CASE: THE PALESTINIAN INSURGENCY**

The Palestinian insurgency after the Six Day war in 1967, when the Gaza strip and

the West Bank were occupied by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), is perhaps the most problematical case in terms of categorization. It is not only that the case in itself is complex due to the intervention of several countries in the conflict (Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria), but also because of the evolution of the organization and the tactics of the insurgency. Moreover, the insurgency was internally fragmented: Fatah was the dominant group, but there were many others, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) or the Popular Democratic Front (PDFLP). A general diagnosis becomes therefore more difficult.

For decades, the Palestinians hoped that the Arab armies would liberate Palestine in a confrontation with the IDF. The Arab defeat in 1967, however, ruined these expectations. The solution, from this moment on, should come from Palestinians themselves. The first reaction of Fatah was to induce a popular upsurge in the occupied territories through armed attacks against the IDF. Yet, the population was not ready for an insurrection and the IDF were able to crush the insurgents, partly due to a flat terrain which made it easy for the Israeli troops to patrol the area and to move quickly from one point to another (Beitler 2004: 42). Unable to liberate territory in Gaza or the West Bank, the insurgents had to go into exile; they remained outside of Israel until the eruption of the first Intifada in 1987.

It was therefore an insurgency without its own territory. Yet, Palestinians found something roughly equivalent to a liberated territory within Jordan. They established camps in the Jordan Valley and from 1968 to 1970 they were able to act and to organize like a guerrilla, attacking the West Bank border with mortars and rockets. Sayigh (1997: 181) estimates 3,000 recruits already in mid 1968.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Some accounts refer to the battle of Karameh in March 1968 to show that the Palestinians were a full guerrilla. However, as Terrill (2001) has shown, this was fundamentally a clash between the Israeli and the Jordan armies, with a marginal participation of Palestinians, no more than 300, who lacked heavy weapons and played a minor role in the battle.

The bases and camps in Jordan amounted to “a state-within-a-state”, with its own administration, hospitals, justice, and internal security (Hudson 1972: 67). This goes beyond what we usually understand by a “sanctuary”. The situation for the Jordanian government got out of control, to the point that in 1970 members of Fatah declared the establishment of the first “Arab Soviet” in the area (Morris 2001: 374). The king of Jordan, Hussein, fearing the survival of the state, reacted by launching a brutal military offensive against the Palestinians in September 1970, which became known as Black September. The insurgency was dismantled. For many years, Palestinians took refuge in South Lebanon. But just as in the case of Jordan, the insurgents were never able to seize any territory from Israel.

Palestinians had the numbers and the weapons to become a guerrilla. But several factors foiled their goal: first, an unfavorable terrain; second, the highly efficient counterinsurgent operations of the IDF; and third, the internal fragmentation in the Palestinian movement. Their capacity to penetrate Israel was consequently very limited.<sup>15</sup> Hence the low number of fatalities caused by the insurgency: 115 Israelis were killed in the three year period 1968-70 (Sayigh 1997: 209). According to Rubin (1994: 25), the number of Israelis killed for the whole period 1969-85 is 650. These figures are closer to that of terrorist groups than to guerrillas of a similar size.

What we have here is a hybrid form of insurgency, somewhere between a guerrilla and a terrorist group. Weapons and number of recruits correspond to guerrilla according to Table 2. The number of fatalities fits terrorism better. With regard to territory, the insurgency was not able to seize any Israeli territory, but it had more than a sanctuary in Jordan first and in Lebanon afterwards. The paradox here is that the liberated territory was, so to speak, outside the borders of Israel. The structure was therefore that of a guerrilla, but it never really acted as such due to the impossibility of penetrating within Israel.

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<sup>15</sup> The situation was different in Gaza, where the insurgents were able to exert control by night until 1970 (Sayigh 1997: 209-10).

The failed attempt to build a guerrilla was followed by a greater emphasis after Black September on international terrorist attacks. Many authors have pointed out that international terrorism was the response to the impossibility of establishing a proper guerrilla (Beitler 2004: 41; Morris 2001: 376; Rubin 1994: 37; Sayigh 1997: 210).

International terrorism was a cheap and spectacular way of putting the Palestinian question on the international agenda, but alienated many Palestinians and did not help to mobilize those living in the occupied territories. The first hijack of a plane occurred on 22 July 1968. It was executed by the PFLP. Many others followed in the next years (Demaris 1977: Ch.2). After the break with Jordan, Fatah jumped in and created a secret organization, Black September, specialized in international attacks. Black September became the most active international organization in the 1971-73 period. It was responsible for some of the most infamous attacks in the history of terrorism, such as the Munich Olympics massacre in 1972. Fatah, however, learned that the killing of soft targets was not productive for its interests. From 1974 onwards, it decided to go back to harassing the Israeli border, in this case from south Lebanon.

This quick review shows the complex relationship between insurgency and territory. Despite having weapons and recruits, the Palestinian insurgency was not able to act as a full guerrilla. Without a liberated territory in Israel, it had to limit itself to small scale attacks across the Israeli border that did not represent a serious threat to Israel. The insurgents resorted to international terrorist attacks to compensate for their weakness as a guerrilla.

In terms of Figure 1, the campaign of international attacks falls clearly in the far right extreme of the terrorist region, whereas the attacks on Israel from Jordan first and from Lebanon afterwards correspond to that noisy area where guerrilla and terrorism overlap.

There was no domestic terrorism in Israel, understood as clandestine groups acting within the state's territory, until the emergence of Hamas in the wake of the first Intifada. Particularly during the second Intifada, terrorism under the form of suicide

missions created a climate of terror in Israeli society that was only halted with the construction of the separation wall. This cycle of violence, starting in 1987 with the first Intifada, can be categorized in an easier way as a pure case of terrorism: underground groups acting in Israel and in the occupied territories. From the point of view of the conceptualization of terrorism, this cycle is of less interest, as it fits well the theory of violence I am endorsing in this article. Things, however, became blurred again when Hamas won elections in Gaza and, particularly, when Hamas violently expelled Fatah from Gaza and took full control over the strip. The armed branch of Hamas has since become a sort of militia. The conflict between Hamas and Fatah has degenerated into some sort of low-intensity civil war between Palestinians (Schanzer 2008).

## DISCUSSION

I have argued that the key factor in understanding various types of insurgent violence is the relationship between the insurgency and the territory. Violence without a territorial base corresponds to terrorism. Terrorist groups break the state's monopoly of violence, but they do not alter the sovereignty of the state over the territory within its borders. When insurgents, however, are able to seize territory, a different dynamic of violence emerges, in which the armed group (the guerrilla) is sovereign in its own area. The existence of territory under the control of the insurgency demands the fulfillment of state functions such as the imposition of order and rent extraction.

The importance of territorial control is obvious. It provides security, logistics, and the necessary infrastructure for the armed group. Moreover, it makes possible a close interaction between the armed group and the local population.

The distinction between territorial insurgencies (guerrillas) and non-territorial ones (terrorist groups) has some empirical implications. Even if these empirical implications are merely trends, so that some counterexamples are easily found, it is worth noting that guerrillas tend to have more recruits and to be more lethal than

terrorist groups. Likewise, guerrillas tend to be rural, whereas terrorist groups tend to be urban. It is possible to establish some tentative thresholds to distinguish insurgencies (e.g., 1,000 recruits, or 1,000 fatalities), but the truth of the matter is that the distinction is one of degree rather than of kind. The analysis of difficult cases, such as those that were reviewed in the last two sections, shows that there are mixed cases in which knowledge of details is necessary for making sound judgments. Although there may be some ambiguity regarding control of territory, this is, I have argued, the most relevant fact when deciding the nature of the insurgency, or at least more relevant than numbers of recruits or fatalities.

Why is it so important to draw this distinction between different types of insurgency in terms of territorial control? Given their differences, they may have different causal determinants and different dynamics. Suppose that guerrillas are disproportionately found in poor countries and terrorist groups in rich countries. If all insurgencies are put together and regressed with economic development, we may obtain a null effect of the independent variable, as we observe violent conflicts across all levels of development. The same holds with regard to political regime: if guerrillas occur more often in dictatorships and terrorist groups in democracies, the effect of the regime is cancelled if all insurgencies are analyzed as a single category.

One of the main reasons why comparative research on terrorism has lagged behind that of, for instance, civil wars, is that large-n research design has been impossible due to the lack of a clear operational rule to code the cases. Comparativists have thus focused only on international terrorism, which is a clearly delimited phenomenon and for which there exist several datasets. The problem, however, is that international terrorist attacks are not a representative sample of terrorist activity. Most terrorist groups act domestically, within national borders.

The existing definitions of terrorism are particularly useless as a guide to codify cases. They do not provide clues on how to identify terrorist groups. It should not come as a surprise that the largest dataset on

terrorism, the Global Terrorism Database 1970-1997, compiled by Gary LaFree and Laura Dogan based on the files of the Pinkerton agency, includes all kind of violent groups and all types of violence: from acts of piracy to the Rwandan genocide to guerrilla conflicts to truly terrorist attacks.

The problem is not restricted to datasets. States and supranational organizations establish lists of insurgencies that are considered terrorist. In the United States, the Department of State is required by Title 22 of the US Code to provide an annual list of foreign terrorist organizations.<sup>16</sup> The European Council in the European Union also issues a list of terrorist groups.<sup>17</sup> The criteria used for these classifications are notoriously ambiguous; not surprisingly, there are disagreements between these lists. The problem is still more general, as almost any contemporary insurgency may today carry the terrorist label for political reasons that are unrelated to any analytical or theoretical consideration about the nature of terrorism.

Apart from the theoretical value that the view I have presented here might have, it provides a reasonably clear criterion for the codification of cases. An insurgency is a terrorist one when it does not liberate territory, being a clandestine group. Thus, the FARC in Colombia is a guerrilla, whereas the Red Brigades in Italy is a terrorist group. In some cases, nevertheless, we find intermediate situations: groups that do not liberate territory but have a sanctuary beyond the borders of the state they fight against; or urban groups that occasionally liberate some area in the hinterland but its main activity is terrorist. Yet, as I have argued about the South American and Middle East cases, a detailed examination of the cases may help to make a reasoned decision.

The main drawback of this operational rule is that, by focusing on the actor-sense of the term, it leaves out the terrorist acts committed by guerrillas or states. Guerrillas

often resort to terrorist tactics when they act under the constraints of secrecy, as when they attack in the capital of the country exploding a bomb. Though less often, the state may also become involved in terrorist acts if its secret services act outside the country. All this corresponds to the action sense of terrorism, defined as the violence exerted under the conditions of clandestinity.

The actor-sense, therefore, is not exhaustive, but it covers most of what we consider relevant about terrorism. The main advantage of the actor-sense is that it makes possible large-n research by providing an operational rule for the codification of cases.

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> for the list issued in 2009 (last checked 1<sup>st</sup>/Oct/2009).

<sup>17</sup> *Official Journal of the European Union*, 27 Jan. 2009 L23/37-42.

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