

Attitudes Toward Political Violence: Legitimate vs. Illegitimate Use of Violence

Let me turn to an aspect that I alluded to very briefly before, but it's very important here. And that is the question of the legitimate and illegitimate use of violence. You know, we often say something like, well, a group is okay if they're nonviolent. And if they're resisting and they're nonviolent. But not if they use violence. Well, there would have never been an American Revolution or a number of other revolutions.

We also know historically distinguishing between resistance movements and terrorist movements often is like beauty in the eyes of the beholder. So, for example, Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, prominent Israeli resistance fighters in the early days of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were regarded in their time by some Western powers, and certainly by the Palestinians, as terrorist leaders. They went on to become, distinguished, recognized by many in the world as distinguished leaders. In fact, Menachem Begin received a Nobel Prize.

Nelson Mandela, for years, was seen as the leader of a terrorist group. And indeed for years could not, for example, even after he came out of prison, visit the United States because he had been on such a list. But then became accepted by the international community as a major leader, a leader to be admired and emulated.

And an important factor also to work in here is that authoritarian governments in the Arab world in the Middle East many of them have, in recent decades and certainly today, used the label terrorist for opposition movements-- in some countries, any and all opposition, secular or Islamic movements. And in others, for Islamic movements themselves. Even against Islamic movements which have been elected democratically in their country and/or their region but whom they don't like. They will simply label them as terrorists and put that label out there to the international community.