

WHAT IS TERRORISM?

In November [2004](#), a United Nations panel described terrorism as any act: *(1) "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants (2) with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act" (that is, to attain goals that are political or religious or ideological in nature)*

According to the more common [definition of terrorism](#)—typically used by states, academics, counter-terrorism experts and non-governmental organizations—a third characteristic is added to the United Nations' definition: *(3)"terrorists" are actors who don't belong to any recognized armed forces or who don't adhere to the [laws of war](#)* and who are, therefore, regarded as "rogue actors".*

Most official definitions outline the following key criteria for identifying an act of terrorism: **target, objective, motive, perpetrator, and legitimacy or legality of the act.**

*The **two parts** of the **laws of war**: Law concerning acceptable practices while engaged in war, like the [Geneva Conventions](#), is called *jus in bello*; while law concerning allowable justifications for armed force is called *jus ad bellum*.

