

Case Studies: Revolutionaries or Terrorists?

Instructions

In this activity, you will examine a series of cases studies. Using the standards of the international community, you are to decide if the case represents terrorism or some other form of political violence. For each case you should answer the following questions:

- 1) Does your group believe that the decision to use force was acceptable and justifiable?
- 2) Was how the force was used acceptable?
- 3) What is your view of the response of the state to the use of force?

Be prepared to explain the reasons for your position. If your group can not come to an agreement on your position, you should be prepared to offer different opinions and provide justification for each.

Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland has been the scene of political violence for many years. The region is currently a province of the United Kingdom, while the rest of the island of Ireland is a republic that gained its independence from Britain in 1921. Since that time, several unofficial military organizations, including the Irish Republican Army (IRA), have continued to fight for British withdrawal from Northern Ireland. Other "paramilitaries" loyal to the United Kingdom have fought back. Between 1966 and 1999, more than 3,600 people were killed and nearly 36,000 injured. Most of the victims were innocent civilians caught in bombings and other acts of violence in Ireland and England. The British government has sometimes responded with force. In January 1972, in an incident known as Bloody Sunday, British paratroopers fired on protestors, killing fourteen and injuring another thirteen. Many of the paramilitaries declared cease-fires in the late 1990s as a peace process took shape. In April 1998, a peace accord that became known as the Good Friday Agreement led many to hope for a peaceful resolution of the political differences. However, violence has continued to plague the region. In August 1998, an IRA splinter group claimed responsibility for bombing a shopping center in the town of Omagh that killed 28 and wounded hundreds.

- 1) Does your group believe that the paramilitaries' decision to use force was acceptable and justifiable? Are they terrorists or revolutionaries?
- 2) Was how the force was used acceptable?
- 3) What is your view of the response of the state to the paramilitaries' use of force?

Chechnya: In 1994, Chechen armed separatists launched a military-style campaign designed to drive Russia out of Chechnya, part of the Russian Federation. The Chechens claimed to be fighting for freedom from an oppressive regime that prevented them from practicing their religion, Islam, and that offered no hope for the future. The Russian military used its weapons against civilians, killing more than 10,000 and displacing 500,000 from their homes. A peace treaty was reached in 1997, but fighting resumed between Russian troops and Chechens in the fall of 1999. Russian President Putin defended Russian military action in Chechnya, claiming that Chechnya was being used as a springboard for international terrorism against Russia. In August 1999, Islamic rebels from Chechnya invaded the region of Dagestan in southern Russia. The Russian government claimed that foreign Islamic terrorists were fighting alongside the Chechens. In addition, the Russian government blamed the Chechen rebels for a series of September 1999 bombings of Moscow apartment buildings that killed several hundred Russians. These incidents provoked a strong military response from Moscow, including airstrikes against several Chechen towns and the capital of Grozny.

- 1) Does your group believe that the Chechens' decision to use force was acceptable and justifiable? Are they terrorists or revolutionaries?
- 2) Was how the force was used acceptable?
- 3) What is your view of the response of the state to the Chechens' use of force?

Chiapas: In the remote southern state of Chiapas, Mexico, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation began an armed rebellion against the Mexican government on January 1, 1994. The Zapatistas claimed to be fighting against poverty and injustice and for the rights of indigenous peoples. Led by a man referred to as Sub-Commander Marcos, hundreds of peasant soldiers, their faces covered by black ski masks or red bandanas, operated in the countryside. Although most Zapatistas carried weapons dating back to World War II, they occupied several key towns and attacked a regional military base. More than 100 people were killed in the uprising, including government soldiers, peasants, and government functionaries. The Zapatistas blew up telephone and electrical towers and detonated car bombs in Mexico City, injuring several people. The Mexican military responded with force, and international human rights groups accused the military of torturing villagers to get information about the rebels. Since 1995, the Zapatistas have been committed to negotiating with the Mexican government. Nonetheless, talks between the government and the Zapatistas have stalled. The conflict has pitted village against village, often spilling over into bloodshed. In 1997, for example, pro-government forces massacred 45 villagers for their support of the Zapatistas. At the same time, the Zapatistas rely on the Internet and cellular telephones to maintain a sophisticated communications network. Their Web site attracts thousands of visitors.

- 1) Does your group believe that the Zapatistas' decision to use force was acceptable and justifiable? Are they terrorists or revolutionaries?
- 2) Was how the force was used acceptable?
- 3) What is your view of the response of the state to the Zapatistas' use of force?

South Africa: When the South African government began its system of apartheid in 1948, the African National Congress, a political movement begun in the early 20th century, launched a campaign of non-violent resistance to the government's official system of racial segregation. However, after years of political struggle, the ANC had made no progress against the increasingly oppressive apartheid regime. In the early 1960s, the ANC decided that it would use violence to fight the white government, which denied black South Africans their most basic human rights, including access to education, the right to vote, and the right to live and travel where they wanted. Following the 1960 massacre of 69 black Africans by South African forces at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, the ANC embarked on a campaign of sabotage against the country's infrastructure and armed resistance against the South African government, including bombing several government buildings. The South African government continued to crack down on black South Africans as racially motivated violence plagued the country. In 1976, government forces killed more than 600 people in an uprising at the Soweto township.

- 1) Does your group believe that the ANC's decision to use force was acceptable and justifiable? Were they terrorists or revolutionaries?
- 2) Was how the force was used acceptable?
- 3) What is your view of the response of the state to the ANC's use of force?

The Weathermen Underground: In the late 1960s there was significant social and political unrest in the United States. Opposition mounted against the war in Vietnam, and there was growing frustration over the lack of progress on the issue of racism. Many protest groups developed, but one of the most radical was the Weathermen, whose objectives included not only an immediate end to the war in southeast Asia and to all racism, but to economic exploitation and sexism as well. Members of the Weathermen, most of whom were in their early twenties, believed change would come about only through armed revolution. In 1970 the Weathermen went underground. Over the next few years, they engaged in numerous activities, such as bombing government buildings (including the Pentagon) and various cooperate headquarters, causing damages in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. They also assisted convicted felons in jail breaks and participated in an armored car holdup. These activities resulted in the deaths of policemen, innocent bystanders, and the Weathermen themselves. The FBI closely monitored the activities of the Weathermen. Little by little the members were either captured or chose to give themselves up.

- 1) Does your group believe that the Weathermen's decision to use force was acceptable and justifiable? Were they terrorists or revolutionaries?
- 2) Was how the force was used acceptable?
- 3) What is your view of the response of the state to the Weathermen's use of force?

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