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MILITARY HISTORY GROUP



TERROR TACTICS IN WAR

National Army Museum

Boxer Rebellion 1899-1901

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
The Yihetuan (Boxers)	Yes. They targeted Chinese Christian converts and symbols of Western influence to purge foreign presence and spark a national uprising.	Killings of converts, attacks on missionaries, and destruction of churches, railways, and telegraph lines were used to intimidate communities. (32,000 Christian Chinese and 200 Western missionaries killed.)	To force foreigners to withdraw, halt conversions, and trigger a patriotic revival.	The violence backfired: it provoked foreign intervention, escalated the conflict, and led directly to the Eight-Nation Alliance invasion.
Qing Court Hardliners	Indirectly, yes. They encouraged or tolerated Boxer violence to harness anti-foreign sentiment and strengthen Qing authority.	They politically endorsed mob attacks and selectively protected anti-foreign groups.	To rally domestic support and deter foreign pressure.	The strategy backfired: foreign powers united against the Qing, imposed a punitive settlement, and weakened the dynasty's legitimacy.
Eight-Nation Alliance	Yes. They used harsh reprisals to crush resistance and impose order.	Executions, looting, and the burning of villages suspected of aiding Boxers were common.	To end the uprising quickly and deter future resistance.	The Alliance achieved rapid military success, but the terror tactics added to severe civilian suffering and deepened long-term anti-foreign nationalism.

Boer War 1899-1902

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
British Army	Yes. The British used scorched-earth destruction and mass civilian internment to break Boer guerrilla resistance and deny commandos food, shelter, and intelligence.	Systematic burning of farms, seizure of livestock, destruction of crops, and the internment of Boer women and children in concentration camps; African civilians were also confined in separate camps.	To isolate the commandos, collapse their support networks, and force a rapid end to guerrilla warfare.	Yes - They weakened Boer resistance and hastened the end of the war, but caused immense civilian suffering, high mortality in the camps (c. 39,000), and long-term bitterness toward British rule.
Boer Commandos	Partially. The Boers used guerrilla tactics, sabotage, and coercive pressure on local populations to sustain their campaign and disrupt British control.	Occasional intimidation of pro British African communities, forced requisitioning of supplies, and threats against collaborators; however, large scale terror against civilians was not a central strategy.	To maintain mobility, secure supplies, deter collaboration with the British, and prolong the guerrilla struggle.	No - They initially frustrated British operations and prolonged the war, but could not prevent the British from adapting, tightening control, and ultimately overwhelming the commandos.

Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905

Protagonists	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
Japan; Russia	No. Neither side employed systematic terror tactics as a matter of doctrine. Coercive actions did occur — such as harsh occupation measures, scorched-earth withdrawals, and indiscriminate anti-bandit operations — but these were driven by military necessity and security concerns rather than an intention to terrorise civilian populations. The war's character as a conventional interstate conflict limited the use of deliberate psychological coercion.	There were no organised terror campaigns aimed specifically at intimidating or breaking the will of civilian communities. Civilians suffered mainly from the collateral effects of siege warfare at Port Arthur, strict Japanese security measures in occupied Manchuria, and Russian scorched-earth practices during retreats. These actions caused hardship and fear but were not designed as population-targeting terror.	Because neither side pursued terror as a strategic tool, there was no articulated aim to influence civilian morale or political behaviour. Coercive actions were intended to secure supply lines, suppress irregular forces, deny resources to the enemy, or accelerate military objectives such as the fall of Port Arthur. Any terror experienced by civilians was incidental rather than intentional.	Deliberate terror tactics were not employed, The incidental coercive measures used by both sides achieved mixed military results — for example, scorched-earth actions slowed Japanese advances but harmed local populations, while Japanese occupation controls stabilised rear areas without producing broader psychological effects. Overall, civilian-directed terror played no significant role in shaping the war's outcome.

Italo-Turkish War 1911-1912

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
Italy	<p>Yes. Responding to the Sciara Sciat massacres, Italy responded with large-scale reprisals against civilians in the Mechiya oasis. Italy also used indiscriminate violence to subdue the local population during the occupation. These actions were driven by fear of irregular warfare, the desire to deter resistance, and Italy's frustration at unexpectedly strong local opposition.</p> <p><i>Modern estimates suggest that total Italian reprisals and executions across the war may have reached ~10,000.</i></p>	<p>Italian forces carried out deliberate massacres of civilians, most notably the killing of around 4,000 people in the Mechiya oasis over three days in retaliation for the Sciara Sciat attack. Italian troops also used widespread intimidation, property destruction, and indiscriminate violence to suppress the indigenous population.</p>	<p>Italian terror tactics were intended to break local resistance, intimidate the population into submission, and deter collaboration with Ottoman forces. The reprisals after Sciara Sciat were explicitly punitive, designed to demonstrate overwhelming Italian power and discourage further attacks.</p>	<p>Only partially. Italian reprisals created short-term shock but failed to pacify the Libyan interior, where resistance continued throughout the war and long after formal annexation. Terror tactics damaged Italy's international reputation and hardened local hostility.</p>
Ottoman Empire	<p>No. Ottoman-aligned forces massacred captured Italian soldiers at Sciara Sciat (Shar al-Shatt) - 290 massacred after surrender, but it was not done because they were ordered to, just for reasons of revenge, retaliation, fear, lack of discipline.</p>	<p>None. Ottoman-aligned irregulars targeted Italian prisoners with extreme brutality, but did not conduct systematic terror against civilians.</p>	<p>Ottoman-aligned forces used terror primarily as reprisal against Italian troops, not as a strategy to influence civilians.</p>	<p>Ottoman-aligned brutality against Italian prisoners provoked massive reprisals but did not alter the strategic balance.</p>

Overall, terror tactics did not deliver decisive political or military results for either side.

First Balkan War 1912-1913

The First Balkan War (1912–1913) was one of the first modern European wars where ethnic cleansing, massacres, and population intimidation were used consciously as tools of war.

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
<p>Balkan League (Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro)</p>	<p>Yes. Balkan League armies and associated irregulars used violence, expulsions, and intimidation to secure ethnically mixed territories and weaken Ottoman authority.</p>	<p>Balkan League forces carried out massacres, forced expulsions, village burnings, and systematic intimidation of Muslim communities, especially in Macedonia and Thrace. (120,000 Albanians killed by Serbian and Montenegrin forces.)</p>	<p>Balkan League states sought to drive out or terrorise Muslim populations, weaken Ottoman influence, and strengthen their own territorial claims by altering the ethnic balance.</p>	<p>Partially. Terror tactics enabled rapid consolidation of control in many contested regions and contributed to the mass displacement of Muslim populations, reshaping the demographic map in ways that favoured the Balkan League.</p>
<p>Ottoman Empire</p>	<p>Yes. Ottoman forces and irregulars also committed massacres and reprisals, often targeting Christian civilians suspected of supporting the Balkan armies.</p>	<p>Ottoman forces and irregulars committed reprisals, killings, and destruction in Christian villages during retreats or in areas where they feared collaboration.</p>	<p>Ottoman reprisals aimed to punish suspected collaborators, deter support for the Balkan armies, and maintain control during chaotic retreats.</p>	<p>No real impact on War’s outcome.</p>
	<p><i>The war’s ethnic complexity and competing national claims created strong incentives to use terror to reshape demographics and undermine rival claims to territory.</i></p>	<p><i>Paramilitary bands on all sides engaged in targeted killings, hostage-taking, and terrorising of local populations to assert control and influence ethnic composition.</i></p>	<p><i>The primary aim was demographic and political control. Terror was used to intimidate communities, prevent resistance, and ensure that contested regions would appear “national” in any post-war settlement.</i></p>	<p><i>In strategic terms, terror achieved short-term territorial goals but produced long-term instability The war also led directly to the Second Balkan War and, indirectly, to the tensions that triggered the First World War.</i></p>

Second Balkan War 1913

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
Bulgaria	Yes. Used to assert control in contested Macedonian areas and break Serbian/Greek influence.	Reprisals against villages seen as pro-Serbian or pro-Greek. Forced displacement and destruction of property during punitive sweeps.	Undermine rival claims to Macedonia by intimidating or removing their civilian base. Signal Bulgarian authority despite battlefield setbacks.	Short-term fear but no strategic gain. Ultimately counterproductive; Bulgaria lost most disputed territory.
Serbia	Yes. Mainly coercive administration and reprisals to consolidate control over Vardar Macedonia.	Arrests, beatings, and intimidation of pro-Bulgarian activists. Forced cultural assimilation (language, schooling). Reprisals against villages aiding Bulgarian bands.	Secure Serbian authority in Macedonia. Break Bulgarian nationalist networks.	Effective in establishing control. Long term ethnic resentment persisted.
Greece	Yes, though less systematically than Serbia. Used to secure Greek claims in southern Macedonia.	Reprisals against Bulgarian villages. Forced displacement and intimidation of pro-Bulgarian civilians. Destruction of property in contested zones.	Consolidate Greek control before peace negotiations. Undermine Bulgarian presence and claims.	Yes. Helped stabilise Greek control. Contributed to cycles of retaliation but achieved territorial aims.
Romania and Ottomans	<i>No.</i>			<i>This was a short war, with little time for large-scale civilian deaths</i>

Eastern Europe - Conflicts after WWI

The Russian Civil War (1917–1922) occurred alongside a series of overlapping conflicts across Eastern Europe—border wars, independence struggles, and ethnic clashes triggered by the collapse of empires. These conflicts produced significant civilian suffering. Although each conflict was small compared to WWI, the *combined* civilian toll was enormous. The conflicts included:

Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary (1918–1920): Hungary in clashes with Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Serbs–Croats–Slovenes.

Polish–Soviet War (1919–1921): mass displacement, pogroms, famine-related deaths.

Ukrainian–Soviet and Ukrainian–Polish conflicts: widespread atrocities by all sides.

Greco–Turkish War (1919–1922): large-scale civilian massacres and expulsions.

Armenian–Azerbaijani clashes: repeated massacres in Baku, Shusha, and elsewhere.

Baltic Wars of Independence: smaller in scale but still marked by reprisals and political killings.

While these were serious conflicts, there's no reliable data on civilian deaths, but must have been many, many thousands.

These conflicts were often **ethnicised**, **ideological**, and **directed at civilian populations** in ways that foreshadowed the 1930s and 1940s.

Russian Civil War 1917-1922

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
<p>Bolsheviks (Reds)</p>	<p>Yes — systematically, centrally directed, and ideologically justified. The Bolsheviks launched the Red Terror in 1918, a campaign of political repression, executions, and hostage-taking designed to eliminate opposition and secure control.</p>	<p>Mass executions of “class enemies,” clergy, rival socialists, and suspected counter-revolutionaries; hostage-taking and reprisals Arbitrary arrests and detention in concentration camps; confiscation of property and forced requisitioning. Violence by Cheka units, Red Guards, and sailors (e.g., the Yevpatoriya massacre)</p>	<p>Destroy political dissent and opposition to Bolshevik rule Intimidate populations into compliance Break the organisational capacity of White supporters Maintain control during a multi-front civil war</p>	<p>Short term: Highly effective in consolidating Bolshevik control Medium term: Enabled the creation of a centralised authoritarian state Long term: Established the template for later Soviet repression (e.g., 1930s purges)</p>
<p><i>Estimates for the Red Terror range from 50,000 to 600,000 deaths, and possibly over 1 million.</i></p>				
<p>White Armies (Anti-Bolshevik Forces)</p>	<p>Yes — though less centralised and less ideologically coherent than the Red Terror. White forces carried out what Bolsheviks labelled the White Terror, involving reprisals, pogroms, and political violence.</p>	<p>Executions of Bolshevik supporters; pogroms against Jewish communities (esp. in Ukraine); reprisals against peasants suspected of aiding Reds; forced requisitioning and punitive raids.</p>	<p>Break Bolshevik support networks Intimidate populations into supporting White authority Punish perceived collaborators</p>	<p>Short term: Created fear but failed to build stable governance Medium term: Alienated peasants and minorities Long term: Contributed to the Whites’ political and moral collapse</p>
<p><i>White Terror deaths are generally considered significantly lower than Red Terror totals, but still substantial, pogroms alone killed tens of thousands.</i></p>				

The Russian Civil War is one of the clearest cases where terror tactics were not just present but central to the conflict itself. Unlike the Balkan Wars, where terror was localised and unsystematic, the Russian Civil War saw state-organised, ideologically justified terror on both sides.

Rif War 1921-1926

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
Spain	Yes — following major military failure at Annual (1921), Spain used harsh counter-insurgency methods, because they could not defeat enemy in open battle, so targeted villages, markets and food stores.	Extensive and indiscriminate aerial bombing of villages and markets; use of chemical weapons (mustard gas); punitive raids on suspected pro-Rif communities; forced displacement in contested zones.	Break Rifian morale Punish communities supporting Abd el-Krim Force submission in areas Spain could not control on the ground	Militarily effective when combined with French intervention Politically damaging: contributed to Spain’s reputation for brutality in Morocco
France (joined 1924)	Yes — but more selectively than Spain. Terror Tactics arose as a reaction to Rif incursion into French Morocco(1925).	Bombing of villages suspected of harbouring Rif fighters; destruction of crops and food stores; forced relocations in contested valleys.	Deny Abd el-Krim local support Break the logistical base of the Rif Republic Force rapid collapse after the Rif incursion into French Morocco.	Highly effective when combined with Spain’s amphibious landing at Al Hoceima (1925) Broke Rif resistance within a year
<i>There are no figures of civilian deaths caused by Spanish/French action, but they have been described as ‘significant’.</i>				
Rif Republic (Abd el-Krim)	Limited and mostly military-focused. The Rif Republic relied on guerrilla warfare, ambushes, and rapid strikes — not systematic terror against civilians.	Occasional reprisals against tribes collaborating with Spain Seizure of supplies from hostile communities Enforcement of discipline within the Rif Confederation	Maintain unity among Rif tribes Prevent collaboration with Spain or France Sustain the guerrilla war effort	Whatever was achieved by reprisals, ultimately the Rif were overwhelmed by Franco-Spanish firepower and numbers

Although Britain used airpower for punitive policing in Iraq during the 1920s, Spain (and later France) in the Rif War were among the first to employ aerial bombing — including chemical agents — explicitly to break civilian morale and undermine support for a resistance movement.

Chaco War 1932-1935

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
Paraguay	No			
Bolivia	No			

The Chaco War was extraordinarily costly — tens of thousands of soldiers died from thirst, disease, encirclement, and combat — yet it produced no deliberate civilian atrocities. The terror in this war was internal: the environment, logistics, and operational failures inflicted the suffering, not policies directed at civilians.

Ethiopian-Italian War 1935-1936

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
Italy (Fascist regime under Mussolini)	Yes. Mussolini and the Italian high command planned from the outset to use overwhelming, demoralising violence — including chemical weapons — to ensure a rapid victory and avoid the embarrassment of the previous Italo-Ethiopian War and 1896 defeat at Adwa. Italian commanders were instructed to pursue a war of annihilation, not a limited colonial campaign.	Systematic use of mustard gas from aircraft; Aerial bombing of villages, markets, churches, and Red Cross hospitals; Mass reprisals (e.g., Addis Ababa massacre, 1937); Destruction of monasteries (e.g., Debre Libanos); Forced labour, deportations, and concentration camps Burning of villages suspected of aiding resistance	Break Ethiopian morale; Punish resistance; Demonstrate racial dominance; Force rapid submission The overall aim was to break Ethiopian resistance quickly by terrorising the population, not just defeating the army.	Yes, Italian terror tactics were militarily effective in achieving rapid conquest, but strategically self-defeating, diplomatically disastrous, and morally indefensible. They won the war but undermined Italy's legitimacy, stability, and long-term control, plus anticipated benefits never materialised.
Ethiopia (Imperial forces under Haile Selassie)	No. Ethiopia fought a conventional defensive war, supplemented by local guerrilla resistance after occupation.	Some reprisals against collaborators.	n/a	n/a

This war saw very high civilian casualties (100,000–300,000); widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure; and chemical attacks on non-combatants. Italy's campaign was the first large-scale, state-directed, openly strategic use of chemical weapons by a European power against civilians.

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
The Nationalists (Franco's forces)	Yes — systematically, deliberately, and from the very start. Nationalist terror was a pre-planned strategy to: eliminate political opponents; intimidate civilian population; prevent resistance in conquered zones; and reshape Spain ideologically. Leaders explicitly endorsed “exemplary terror” (<i>terror ejemplar</i>). General Mola famously ordered: “We must spread terror... eliminate without scruples or hesitation all who do not think as we do.”	Mass executions of suspected leftists, trade unionists, teachers, and officials (“White Terror”). Systematic massacres in newly captured towns. Aerial bombing of civilian centres, including Guernica. Repression of minorities (Basques, Catalans). Rape, torture, and disappearances as tools of intimidation. Concentration camps and forced labour.	Break morale in Republican zones. Prevent guerrilla resistance. Purge “undesirable” political and social groups. Demonstrate inevitability of Nationalist victory. Create a new, ideologically homogeneous Spain.	Militarily: Yes — terror helped secure rapid control of captured areas. Politically: Yes — it eliminated opposition and cemented Franco's dictatorship. Strategically: Yes — it prevented large-scale resistance behind the lines. Morally/legally: Catastrophic. The Nationalist terror was highly effective in achieving its intended goals, which is why it continued into the post-war dictatorship.

Nationalist-inflicted civilian deaths:

Executions during the war: ~75,000

Bombing deaths (mostly by German Condor Legion & Italian Aviazione Legionaria): ~10,000

Post-war executions (not specifically part of the war, but often cited): ~100,000

Total civilian deaths attributable to Nationalist terror during the war: ≈ 85,000 (75,000 executions + 10,000 bombing victims)

Nationalist terror was centrally directed and ideologically justified. Executions followed a deliberate strategy of “exemplary terror,” and aerial bombing of civilians was carried out by German and Italian forces operating under Nationalist command. Post-war repression dramatically increased the total number of victims, but these fall outside the 1936–39 window. The war was notable for major foreign intervention: Germany, Italy, and Portugal supported the Nationalists.

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
The Republicans (Left-wing coalition)	Yes — but not systematically or centrally directed. Republican terror was reactive, fragmented, and often driven by: breakdown of state authority; revolutionary fervour; revenge for atrocities; fear of a “fifth columnists”. It was not a unified strategy, and the Republican government often tried (and failed) to stop it.	Mass killings of clergy (over 6,000 priests, monks, and nuns). Executions of landowners, conservatives, and suspected Nationalist sympathisers (“Red Terror”). Burning of churches and religious buildings. Localised massacres by anarchist and communist militias. Revolutionary tribunals with summary executions. NB: Republican terror was not aimed at breaking civilian morale but at purging perceived enemies during a period of state collapse.	Remove perceived internal enemies. Prevent Nationalist uprisings behind the lines. Advance revolutionary goals (in some regions). Retaliate for Nationalist brutality. Unlike the Nationalists, the Republicans did not use terror as a strategic tool to win the war.	Militarily: No — they often undermined Republican unity. Politically: No — they alienated moderates and strengthened Nationalist propaganda. Strategically: Mixed — they did suppress some internal threats, but at the cost of cohesion and legitimacy. Republican terror was damaging to their own cause, unlike the Nationalist terror, which reinforced Franco’s position.

Total civilian deaths attributable to Republican terror during the war: ≈ 55,000 – by execution.

Republican terror was fragmented, locally driven, and not centrally planned. Most killings occurred in the chaotic early months, driven by fear of a “fifth column,” anti-clerical violence, and breakdown of state authority. The Republican government repeatedly attempted to restrain irregular militias.

The war was notable for major foreign intervention: The Soviet Union, Mexico, and the International Brigades (volunteers from around 50 countries) supported the Republicans.

Second Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945 (1)

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
<p>Japan</p>	<p>Yes — extensively. Japan’s military strategy incorporated deliberate terror as a tool of occupation, coercion, and psychological dominance. The Imperial Japanese Army used mass killings, sexual violence, aerial bombing of cities, and chemical weapons to break Chinese resistance and force rapid capitulation.</p>	<p>Nanjing Massacre (1937): Mass executions, rape, torture, and destruction of property. Bombing of Chongqing (1938–43): Prolonged strategic bombing of a non-military capital city to break morale. “Three Alls Policy” (Kill All, Burn All, Loot All): Scorched-earth operations in North China. Forced labour and enslavement: Including the use of “comfort women.” Chemical and biological warfare: Documented use of gas (e.g., Battle of Shanghai) and Unit 731’s experiments.</p>	<p>Break Chinese morale and force surrender. Depopulate and pacify occupied regions to secure supply lines. Punish resistance and deter guerrilla activity. Demonstrate Japanese dominance and accelerate political collapse of the Nationalist government.</p>	<p>Partially and temporarily, but strategically counterproductive. Terror enabled Japan to seize territory quickly in 1937–38. But atrocities strengthened Chinese resistance, unified the Nationalists and Communists, and ensured long-term popular hostility. Guerrilla warfare intensified, especially in the north. International opinion turned sharply against Japan, contributing to its diplomatic isolation.</p>

*The scale of civilian deaths — **12–22 million** — reflects the systematic nature of Japanese tactics.*

Second Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945 (2)

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
<p>Nationalist Government (Kuomintang)</p>	<p>Occasionally, yes — but usually as desperate measures rather than a strategic doctrine. Examples include scorched-earth retreats and harsh internal security measures.</p>	<p>Scorched-earth flooding of the Yellow River (1938): Intended to slow the Japanese advance; caused massive civilian casualties and displacement. Internal repression: Executions of suspected collaborators or Communist sympathisers.</p>	<p>Delay Japanese advances by destroying infrastructure. Maintain internal control and suppress dissent. Force population movements to deny resources to Japan.</p>	<p>Militarily mixed: the Yellow River flood slowed Japan but caused enormous civilian suffering and political backlash. Repressive measures often undermined Nationalist legitimacy, contributing to their post-war weakness.</p>
<p>Chinese Communist Forces</p>	<p>Not in the sense of mass terror against civilians. Communist strategy centred on guerrilla warfare, sabotage, and political mobilisation — not terror. Their operations aimed to disrupt Japanese logistics and win local support.</p>	<p>Coercive land reform and punishment of collaborators in some areas. Forced recruitment in certain periods. But these were generally limited and politically calibrated, not mass terror.</p>	<p>Consolidate control in liberated zones. Deter collaboration with Japan. Mobilise peasantry for guerrilla operations.</p>	<p>Highly effective in building a durable political base. Guerrilla tactics forced Japan to disperse troops thinly across vast areas, weakening Japanese operational strength. Communist restraint toward civilians (relative to Nationalists and vastly relative to Japan) increased their popularity.</p>

Chinese employed no specific terror tactics, though serious miscalculation of military aim of Yellow River flooding killed hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Of interest is US-sanctioned air support - Flying Tigers - for China.

Arab-Israeli War 1948-1949

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
Jewish / Israeli Forces (Haganah, Irgun, Lehi → IDF)	Yes — but selectively, and mainly by the Irgun and Lehi (pre-state paramilitaries), not the mainstream Haganah. Their aim was to break British control and influence Arab flight from contested areas.	Deir Yassin*: killing of over 100 villagers; widely publicised and caused panic. Psychological warfare broadcasts encouraging civilians to flee. Expulsions in certain areas. (* Nb it happened five weeks before the actual start of the war, but was a factor in the Arab decision to attack.)	Irgun/Lehi: Undermine British rule; Intimidate Arab communities; Accelerate Jewish territorial control before statehood. Haganah/IDF (where relevant): Secure strategic corridors; Reduce hostile populations in combat zones; Encourage or force flight to consolidate defensible borders.	Yes, where employed, e.g. Deir Yassin had a huge psychological impact, contributing to the Palestinian exodus, but were not the main reason behind Israeli success.
Palestinian Arab Forces (Local militias, Arab Liberation Army)	Yes - but relied on irregular warfare, which included tactics that strike at morale, mobility, and civilian confidence. They were not centrally coordinated but were widespread.	Attacks on Jewish buses, convoys and areas; Killings of isolated Jewish communities or travellers; Siege of Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter (leading to expulsion after surrender).	Undermine Jewish morale Block Jewish access to Jerusalem Prevent consolidation of Jewish settlements Signal resistance to partition	Partially - They disrupted Jewish supply lines early in the war, but lack of coordination, leadership fragmentation, and poor logistics meant they could not sustain pressure.
Arab States (Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon)	Generally no. Arab state armies fought as conventional forces. Their doctrine did not include terror against civilians.	Very limited. Some shelling of Jewish urban areas caused civilian casualties, but this was not deliberate terror.	n/a	n/a

Best estimates suggest roughly 12,000 Arab deaths and 5,700–6,000 Jewish deaths during the 1947–49 fighting, with civilians making up a significant share on both sides.

Korean War 1950-1953 (1)

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
NORTH KOREA (KPA)	Yes — extensively. North Korea used terror, as a tool of ideological control and intimidation, especially in the early months of the war, to: eliminate “class enemies” and collaborators; intimidate civilians into compliance; punish resistance; and support rapid occupation of the South.	Mass executions of political opponents, police, landlords, teachers; killings of prisoners during retreats; forced conscription of civilians; reprisals against villages suspected of aiding UN and South Korean forces; abductions of tens of thousands of South Koreans taken north.	Consolidate control over occupied areas Destroy anti-communist leadership Prevent collaboration with UN/South Korean forces Instil fear to maintain order during rapid advances and retreats	Short term: Yes — they suppressed resistance in occupied zones. Long term: Counterproductive — they hardened South Korean and UN resolve and contributed to mass civilian flight.
CHINA (PLA)	Partially. China did not use terror as a formal doctrine, but committed atrocities, especially against POWs and civilians suspected of aiding UN forces. Motivations: Ideological indoctrination; Punish “reactionaries”; Maintain discipline in occupied areas.	Executions of suspected collaborators; forced labour and impressment; harsh treatment of POWs, including coercive indoctrination These were not systematic terror campaigns, but they were deliberate abuses.	Maintain control over local populations Enforce ideological conformity Undermine UN morale through POW treatment	Limited. They maintained local control but did not significantly alter the strategic course of the war.

North Korean terror was deliberate, ideological, and often centrally directed. North Korean forces committed systematic massacres in 1950, especially during their advance and retreat. Best estimates indicate 100,000+ civilians killed by North Korean forces.

China’s violence was real, but not on the scale of North Korea’s. Perhaps their civilian deaths amount to tens of thousands.

Korean War 1950-1953 (2)

Protagonist	Were Terror Tactics employed and why?	Actions deliberately directed at civilian population	What was aim of use of Terror Tactics?	Were Terror Tactics effective?
SOUTH KOREA (ROK)	<p>Yes — but internally, not as a battlefield strategy. South Korea committed large-scale political massacres of suspected leftists, especially in 1950. Motivations: Fear of internal communist uprising; pre-emptive elimination of “fifth column” threats; breakdown of command and control during NK advance.</p>	<p>Bodo League Massacre (tens of thousands executed) Jeju Uprising suppression (pre-war but relevant context) Killings of suspected collaborators during retreats Reprisals against villages thought to support NK forces These were deliberate but not part of a terror doctrine aimed at the enemy — they were internal purges.</p> <p><i>Estimates indicate South Korea killed 60,000–200,000 civilians.</i></p>	<p>Eliminate suspected communist sympathisers Prevent internal collapse Maintain regime stability</p>	<p>Short term: They removed perceived threats. Long term: They caused deep trauma, delegitimised the ROK government, and remain politically sensitive today.</p>
UNITED NATIONS FORCES	<p>No — UN forces did not use terror as a strategy.</p>	<p>Various UN actions killed many civilians (e.g. bombing of North Korea*, use of napalm, confusion in distinguishing civilians from infiltrators), but were not intended as terror tactics. <i>*Hundreds of thousands.</i></p>	<p>The UN aim was military, not psychological terror against civilians.</p>	<p>Not applicable — UN forces did not use terror as a deliberate strategy.</p>

Overall civilian deaths in the Korean War: Most historians converge on: 2 to 3 million civilian deaths; roughly 70% of all war deaths were civilians.