

## Part II

# Ethics of Terrorism Or Can Terrorism Ever Be Permissible?

To most people, it is perfectly obvious that terrorism is immoral. Indeed, when looking at the definition of terrorism previously elaborated, there are many good reasons for sharing this view. Terrorism includes a variety of morally reprehensible actions, such as exploiting fear or horror, using violence – including lethal violence – or force against persons or property, intimidating and coercing. So, some people might ask why the morality of terrorism should be of interest at all, as it is so obviously wrong. This “dominant view” – as McPherson has it – is that “terrorism is necessarily and egregiously wrong.”<sup>1</sup> Unless they generally subscribe to pacifism, adherents to this view can easily be challenged. While many categorically reject terrorism, much more deadly forms of political violence – such as wars – have been and still are socially more or less accepted or even endorsed, even though they also entail violence against persons and property, intimidation and coercion, usually to a much larger degree than terrorist attacks. War – or military intervention – as a violent strategy to resolve a conflict is a legitimate means of international politics. At the same time, wars are and have always been much more fatal than terrorist attacks. The death toll of wars is dizzying: in World War II alone, an estimated 60 million people were killed – among them approximately 40 million civilians. Figures for fatalities as a result of terrorism vary greatly due to the terminological variability. But clearly, in contrast to war, non-state terrorism is far from having caused one million deaths in the last 100 years. What are considered to be the worst terrorist attacks in the recent past – the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon – resulted in close to 3,000 civilian deaths.<sup>2</sup> In short: plainly condemning (in particular, non-state) terrorism while at the same time accepting war as a legitimate means of politics is at the least inconsistent– if not hypocritical.