



Cowardice and Military Security: Some Heuristic Reflections

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Abstract

While cowardice is sanctioned by military law in most countries, the impact of cowardice on modern warfare and security politics is low. This might be the reason why cowardice—as notion, phenomenon, and topic—has widely been neglected in security studies. However, for quite some time, we have witnessed a revival of the word as an accusation and pejorative term that is frequently applied by Western government representatives to describe the enemy in armed conflicts. The expression of a “cowardly attack” has become quite common in political communication after attacks against Western forces in violent confrontations. Thereby, cowardice is transformed from a possible weakness of the own forces to a particular strength of the enemy. This article aims at presenting some reflections on the notion, meaning, and functional role of cowardice in situations of violent international conflict, as well as on the use of the term as a speech act in recent governmental security communication. A particular focus will be put on the normative implications of the revival of the governmental cowardice-rhetoric.

Keywords Cowardice · Heroism · Post-heroic society · Security · Terrorism · Speech act

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