



Terrorism: A Grim Challenge to Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

The term terrorism, its definition, its subject matter and its scope is the greatest challenge to Social Science. Our study is focused in sociological, legal and international perspective. So far there has been no universally acceptable definition. Therefore there is confusion as to who are the terrorists. Terrorists attempt to gain attention of the media, the public and the decision makers of modern states, be they individuals or organizations. They use violent means to achieve their objectives. They must be differentiated from the idealists who regard themselves as dedicated patriots or as the defender of the people's rights or religious instructions. Terrorism must also be differentiated from the acts of violence undertaken by the colonized people to advance the cause of independence of their country from their colonial powers. We have drawn examples from the PLO, the Hamas, the Kashmiri Resistance Movement, the struggle of the Iraqi and Afghani people to substantiate our arguments. We have also discussed some theories that cause or motivate terrorists to undertake violent activities. In the end we have also thrown some lights on the state sponsored terrorism.

1. INTRODUCTION

We are confronted with a dilemma. We will endeavor to seek answers to many intriguing questions. This is the greatest challenge that Social Sciences have ever faced.

Where does the subject matter of Terrorism belong to? Is it a political phenomenon or a legal question? Is it one of the topics that religion should address to or does it fall within the purview of Sociology?. To some of us it is the burning topic of International Relations. Which discipline has the right to claim its sole propriety? Is it the conglomeration of all or is it a multidisciplinary subject matter?

It seems it is not enough. It is not the end of our bewilderment. Every one is puzzled. Intellectuals, statesmen, policy makers and even the victims of terrorism are confused as to what constitute terrorism? What are the activities or acts that can be conveniently put in the classification of Terrorism? Above all the big question is who are the Terrorists?

* The material presented by the author does not necessarily portray the viewpoint of the editors and the management of the Institute of Business & Technology (BIZTEK) or SZABIST, Karachi.

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The International Relations dictionary defines Terrorism as, activities of state or non state actors who use techniques of violence in their efforts to attain political objectives (Jack c. Plano and Roy Olton , 1982). Terrorists attempt to gain attention of the media, the public and the decision makers of modern states, be they individuals or organizations. They must be differentiated from the idealists who regard themselves as dedicated patriots or as the defender of the people's rights or religious instructions. Terrorism must also be differentiated from the acts of violence undertaken by the colonized people to advance the cause of independence of their country from their colonial powers.

There is no universally acceptable definition of terrorism. In the face of definitional problem the question arises as to what characteristics, if any are relevant or essential to declare or brand an individual or a group as terrorist. More importantly the question is, can we really find any common characteristics. Political thinkers have been searching in vain common characteristics such as fundamentalism, extremism, religious fanaticism, social and economic frustration, altruism, egoistic behavior, anomic behavior or other definable disposition.

Still other thinkers regard terrorism as a psychological phenomenon. To them, terrorism is a form of state or non state violent action that seeks to achieve a political purpose. Terrorism unlike other kinds of violence is primarily psychological-that is, it attempts to draw international attention to a perceived injustice whether real or imagined (Jeffrey M. Elliot and Robert Reginald, 1989).

We are therefore proposing the following hypotheses:-

Hypothesis No. 1

That an understanding of the true meaning of the term terrorism is central in determining which social science it belongs to and what is its significance in that science.

Hypothesis No. 2

That state terrorism can not be divorced from individual or group terrorism as both of them disturb the peace of the society and make the resolution of any conflict difficult, if not impossible.

2. SUICID- THE CLASSICAL STUDIES

In his very famous book "Suicide" the French sociologist Emile Durkheim discusses kinds of suicide and their causes in human societies. Suicide is now considered as very effective terrorist act in which not only the perpetrator but other target becomes the victim. Naturally when the book was first published in 1897 neither Durkheim nor any body else in those days knew about suicide squad. The suicide squad as a means of terrorism is late twentieth century phenomenon in which the targeted victim is a different person along with the perpetrator. It is pertinent that we discuss the classification of suicide as propounded by Durkheim because some of the causes and circumstances of suicide have become techniques of terrorism in 21st century.

Durkheim discusses three classifications of suicide e.g. Egoistic suicide, Altruistic suicide and Anomic suicide. According to Durkheim, Egoistic suicide is characterized by a state of depression and apathy produced exaggerated individuation. The individual no longer cares to live because he no longer cares enough for the only medium which attaches him to reality, that is to say, society (Emile Durkheim). Emphasizing that homicide and egoistic suicide spring from the antagonistic causes, the author opines that "the less respect there is for individual person, the more exposed they are to violence while this violence at the same time appears less criminal....consequently it is impossible to develop one readily where the other flourishes (ibid).

The second is altruistic suicide. Altruistic suicide and homicide may get along very well together. In the words of Durkheim, when one is trained to think little of his own life he cannot have much regards of others.....for altruism must be extra ordinarily strong to impel to suicide even stronger than to give the impulse to homicide (ibid., P.324).

The third is anomic suicide. Anomy in fact begets a state of exasperation and irritated weariness which may turn against the person himself or another according to circumstances; in the first case we the suicide, in the second homicide. The causes determining the direction of such over excited forces probably depends on agent's moral constitution. According to its greater or less resistance, it will incline one way rather than the other. A man with low morality will kill other rather than himself (ibid).

3. TERRORISM IN THE NEW PHASE

An independent state of Afghanistan was the first target of war against terrorism. In an attempt to capture or arrest the persons who are allegedly involved or are active members of Alaqaida more and more states are being targeted for invasion or attacks in the so called war against terrorism. This policy is vague and does not stand the test of the time. There is no universally acceptable definition of terrorism. The United States is waging a war against a concept which has not been universally defined or accepted (Muhammad Akram Zaki, 2002). The United Nations, in spite of repeated efforts, has failed to adopt an acceptable definition. Even in the official documents of the United States no where an acceptable or universally agreed definition has been mentioned. In most of the documents various acts and activities have been termed as terrorism (Rohini Hensman, 2001).

In this context the following extract from Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics will be appropriate and reliable.

Terrorism, there is no acceptable definition among the governments or intellectual analysts; generally it is used, without reservation, for such activities perpetrated by pseudo political and military groups that cause death in order to achieve political objectives. However if these activities are undertaken to achieve a popular goal for example, the efforts of Marquise to destabilize the Vichy regime in France, then the use of the term terrorism is avoided and an other friendly term is used. In short, a person may be regarded as terrorist by some while others may regard him as freedom fighter (Mac Lien, 1996).

4. LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY TO DECLARE AND THE METHOD TO COMBAT TERRORISM

Who has the legitimate authority to launch war against terrorism? And what are the globally acceptable methods to combat terrorism? If acts of terrorism are perpetrated to combat terrorism then the human society and the world at large will be turned into a hell. Terrorists of today have often become patriotic leaders and national heroes of tomorrow. This fact makes it more difficult for national and international communities to combat them. Modern transport facility and easy access to weapons and explosive devices have encouraged the terrorists to use violence in the recent past and today.

It is impossible to agree that PLO or HAMMAS are terrorist organizations as is believed in the West or as is propagated by the Western media. On the other hand many governments also use various techniques of terrorism in seeking to achieve the political objectives. Converse is also true. Some states even the sole super power of today i.e. the United States has been the victim of terrorism. September 11, 2001 is the watershed in the history of the world. Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York had been raised to the ground by brazen acts of terrorism. In the words of President of Pakistan General Pervaiz Musharraf, the enormity of the event was palpable. The world's most powerful country had been attacked on its own soil with its own aircraft used as missiles. This was a great tragedy

and a great blow to the ego of a super power. America was sure to react violently like a wounded bear (Pervaiz Musharraf, 2006). Efforts have been made by the international community through the United Nations to condemn acts of terrorism. Up till now no universally accepted definition has been framed for the term "Terrorism."

For those facing the acts of terrorism, the grim problem is whether to adopt a policy of counter violence or appease the perpetrators of violence.

All and sundry cannot be allowed to kill human beings on the pretext that the victim was a terrorist. After the event of 9/11 assuming herself the role of the world police man the United States has indiscriminately launched military attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq and threatened to take similar action against Syria and Iran. Since that time the United States administration without any judicial approval has been declaring individuals and organizations at its whims as terrorists and imposing sanctions unilaterally and exerting pressure on its allies to do the same. Who can deny that it is not a global terrorism? It is terrorism, pure and simple.

An American scholar Noam Chomsky, during his tour of Pakistan and India in November 2001, repeatedly stated that Usama Bin Laden is called as terrorist but this is only an accusation. It has not been proved beyond reasonable doubt. But the action taken by President Bush is a proven terrorism. An Indian press correspondent Murly Dhar Redy writes, When Noam Chomsky stated that American President Bush is a greater terrorist than Usama Bin Laden because American President has no fool proof evidence against Usama Bin Laden while the indiscriminate killing of Afghan people by American forces is a clear proof against the United States President. The audience applauded his statement (Front Line, 2001).

There is no denial of the fact that the United States has been using the phenomenon of terrorism as a tool in the execution and achievement of her foreign policy objectives. The United States has now opened Pandora's Box for the purpose of realizing foreign policy objectives. It has now become lawful and legitimate for the states, more so with the powerful states to perpetrate a more heinous act of terrorism to counter terrorism. It could bring more havoc and destruction as it is being done in the Middle East and in the Indian occupied Kashmir (Medline Butting, 2001).

Most authentic picture of the dire consequences a state would have suffered that refuses to support the United States after 9/11 episode has been narrated by no less a person than the President of Pakistan General Pervaiz Musharraf in his memoir, "In the Line of Fire." Although the following quotation is a little bit lengthy but it is pertinent as it comes from the horse's mouth.

The next morning I was chairing an important meeting at the Governor's house when my military secretary told me that the United States Secretary of States, General Colin Powell was on the phone. I said I would call back later, but he insisted that I come out of the meeting and take the call. Powell was quite candid, "you are with us or against us." I took this as a blatant ultimatum. I told him that we were with the United States against terrorism having suffered from it for years (a reference of former Soviet KGB terrorist activities during Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Afghan fighting against Soviet Union) and would fight along with his country against it. The then U.S. Deputy Secretary of States Richard Armitage had threatened the Director General of Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence that if chose the terrorist, then we should be prepared to be bombed back to the stone age. This was shockingly a barefaced threat but it was obvious that the United States had decided to hit back and hit back hard (General Pervaiz Musharraf, 2006).

It has been four years since the U.S. and allied forces invaded Iraq in the name of liberation. After four years the situation in Iraq is so grim that it seems the country is on the verge

of collapse. Violence is the order of the day with hundred people being killed in car bomb explosion or suicide bombing on daily basis. In the reports published in the Western press, it is revealed that 650,000 Iraqis have died since the invasion in March 2003. Because of ever increasing violence people have begun to say that the people of Iraq are worse off than they were during Saddam's regime. Under the dictator only the dissidents of the government or those who were considered a threat to Saddam were at risk, but the general population felt safe. But now no body is safe. When in an interview with the BBC, U.N. out going Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan was asked to comment on the perception that Iraqis are worse off now than under Saddam. He said, I think they are right in the sense of average Iraqis life. If I were an average Iraqi, obviously I would make the same comparison (Rizwan Naqvi, 2007).

The present state of affairs in Iraq has its roots in the years of war and economic sanctions. Devastated by the Iran-Iraq war and the first Gulf War, Iraq was subjected to 13 years of crippling sanctions and ever increasing air attacks. It was thought that the situation in Iraq would improve after the toppling of Saddam's government. But sadly instead of improvement, things are getting worse. The truth is that the U.S. led coalition has so far been unsuccessful in maintaining peace and restoring order in the country and even after four years of invasion there is neither peace nor prosperity in Iraq (Ibid).

President of Pakistan, General Pervaiz Musharraf, and his counterpart, President of Afghanistan, Mr. Hamid Karzai, in their talks sponsored by Turkish leader identified extremism and terrorism as a threat and danger to the region and called for coordinated action to fight it. Amazingly they did not speak to the press, they did not welcome questions nor did they shake hands. It seems they were only carrying orders of the United States (Dawn, 2007).

In a report released by the U.S. State Department on 30 April, 2007 about 900 Pakistanis lost their lives in more than 650 terror attacks in 2006 with another 1500 people seriously injured. The State Department noted that Pakistan continued to pursue Al Qaida and its allies aggressively through nationwide police action and military operation in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The report acknowledged that Pakistan executed effective counter terrorism cooperation and captured and killed many terrorists during 2006-2007 (Ibid). President Musharraf's efforts in fighting against terrorism were lauded by the United States. White Deputy Press Secretary Dana Perino stated in press briefing that President Bush believed that General Pervaiz Musharraf was working very hard in order to defeat terrorism (Ibid, 2007).

The term Muslim terrorist is used to label Islam as terrorist Religion. .It is a misnomer. When Ira bombers struck, they were not labeled as Christian terrorists even though the struggle was between Catholic Ireland and Protestant Northern Ireland supported by Protestant England. Likewise when Timothy McVeigh blew up C.I.A. head quarters in Oklahoma City in 1995 killing 186 people, he was not labeled as Christian terrorist, though he was a Christian and a terrorist. In fact the Muslim terrorist label was attached to the activities of PLO who were a mixture of Muslims, Christian and Communists. The PLO is a nationalist and secular organization (Syed Hussain Shaheed Suharwardy, 2006).

In another case, Hamas victory in the elections for Palestinian Authority in 2005 shocked Israel, the West, and the United States. The West and the United States completely ignored the result, the mandate of the people, the democratic principles and refused to accept the verdict of the people because Hamas was labeled by them as terrorist organization.

5. THEORIES ON CAUSES OF TERRORISM

Failure to acknowledge and address the rationality of the terrorists is to deny their humanity and thereby to forfeit any possibility of universality of human rights. This is why it is

critically important to take serious consideration of the grievances articulated by the terrorists like various pronouncements and international media interviews given by Bin Laden before and after 9/11...Understanding the motivation of any terrorist is essential for a reasoned and sustainable response and should not be seen as condoning the crime or blaming the victim (Ibid., P.11).

President of Pakistan, General Pervaiz Musharraf, has also been emphasizing that in order to wipe out terrorism and win the war against it, it was necessary to address the root cause or causes that generate acts of terrorism. In this regard he has demanded from the West to play its part in resolving the issues of Palestine and Kashmir sooner than later. It seems all his pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

6. SOCIOLOGICAL

A sociological explanation focuses on the position of the perpetrators in the society. In this regard we have already discussed Durkheim ideas on suicide. This theory focuses more on individuals than on organizations or groups.

7. CONFLICT THEORY

This theory examines the relationship of the subjugated people with those in power or the relationship of the actors in power. We have discussed the Israel's policy against the PLO and the Hamas and India's policy towards the resistance movement in occupied Kashmir where state power is being continuously used to intimidate and coerce people to stop or call off their movement against Indian occupation can be cited an example of this theory. The current situation in Iraq can be best illustrated by this theory.

8. IDEOLOGICAL EXPLANATION

This theory focuses on the differences in Ideology. The Hamas movement is a purely ideological movement. Hamas wants to create an Islamic Palestinian state. The struggle of Hamas as all other struggles for the emancipation of colonialism and imperialism can be cited as examples of this cause. The resistance movements in the Indian occupied Kashmir can also be counted in this group.

The main purpose of these activities is to bring change in existing social order in the targeted territory or in the global order of the states. They seek structural compromise or a new order.

Terrorism is also the subject matter of International Law. That is why terrorism is universally condemned. States have entered into various agreements, memoranda, conventions and understandings, bilateral and multilateral declarations to condemn acts of terrorism and help each other in the war against terror.

In November 2004 a UN panel described terrorism," as any act intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act."

The League of Nations adopted a Convention in 1937 whereby terrorism was defined as all criminal acts directed against a state or intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of the particular persons or group of persons or the general public.

9. STATE SPONSORED TERRORISM

Some states have been accused of sponsoring terrorism either within their territorial limits

or in a foreign country. Terrorist acts on the part of the states include indiscriminate killing of the civilians, mass arrest of the innocent people, burning of houses and villages on the pretext of searching terrorists, house search without legal warrants, shoot at sight orders, torches in the cell, extra judicial killings, gang rape of the women and all other acts of such nature. Above all target killing is a very common method. There is a total and complete violation of human rights. Examples of such state terrorism are abundant in the occupied Palestinian territory by the Israeli forces and in the Indian occupied territory of Kashmir by the Indian forces. Figures and facts of such atrocities are easily available in documents and need not be quotes here for the sake of brevity.

Some states do provide funding for groups outside their territorial jurisdiction, considered by other states or adversary to be terrorists. But they rarely acknowledge them. For example Iran has been accused of funding Hezbollah in Lebanon. India has been persistently accusing Pakistan for perpetrating cross border terrorism.

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