

Ideologies of Terror

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Abstract: *Modern history is divided into two distinct periods separated by the incident that has reshaped the modern world: 9/11, and with it began a long and bloody war against Terrorism. This study was intended to analyze different aspects of the phenomenon of Terrorism, problems related to its definition, and the ideologies that gave birth to it. The current study is a qualitative research based on content analysis. A study of social, economic, religious, and political ideologies which work as determinants of Terrorism revealed that the current wave of Terrorism is based on religious doctrines, a politicized version of religious dogma and that Terrorism is used as a tool of social and political change, and is revolutionary. The terrorist groups have Utopian ideals, and they wish for a total transformation of society. Moreover, the study showed that supreme values, so ardently followed by terrorists, based on religious ideologies, are far removed from reality and usually immune to reason. This study has proved that reason, not violence, can create a free and prosperous society.*

Keywords: Terrorism, Ideologies of Terrorism, Supreme Values, Utopia, Religious Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, State and Non-State Terrorism.

Introduction

The 20th century saw the rise of religious Terrorism, which has a political aspect to it. It does not mean that Terrorism or political violence is a new phenomenon. History reveals that political violence, referred to as "terrorism," has always been used as a tool of political and social change. Clausewitz (1780-1831) described war as "political intercourse by other means."¹ Terrorism, we might say, is the continuation of ideological intercourse by other means. In present times, the times of relentless bloodshed and never-ending violence, one is set wondering just what is it that drives people to use violence on such a large scale, and apparently against innocent people or "non-combatants." The history of Terrorism, which is violence on a large scale, is as old as humanity itself. Violence is inherent in human nature. We need to explore the objectives that humans expect to gain through violence.

Terrorism, now an established term, has different connotations, different causes, affecting a significant fraction of the world population, in one way or the other. In recent years it has entered our lives and taken on such diverse forms that it has become an unavoidable field to be considered in any kind of analysis. When a large section of terrorism-oriented research is "effect" and "counter-effect" based, a need arises to address the philosophy behind the very thought that conceives the seeds of such menace. Analyzing Terrorism involves many difficulties, like defining it and differentiating it from other crimes, which involve mass killings and destruction of property, thus terrorizing people. This research is not concerned with statistical facts and figures, and details of the terrorist acts worldwide. It is about the thoughts, ideologies, and philosophy that drives people to commit terrorist acts and makes them so brutal. Terrorist violence generates political effects.

The goal of this research is to analyze the ideologies responsible for the development of terrorist groups. To accomplish this goal, the specific objectives for this research are:

- 1 There can be no single definition of Terrorism, and the terms "civilian" and "non-combatants" are relative and subjective.

- 2 There is a purposeless destructiveness specific only to humans. Certain social conditions lead to such behavior, and significant responsibility for this falls on the shoulders of religious and political leaders.

1. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard, trans. Peter Paret (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1984), 24.

3 There is always a politico-religious ideology behind almost all forms of Terrorism, and the purpose is always to gain total control of social and political setup.

4 Terrorists are not always anti-government revolutionaries but, sometimes, they work for a government. Such governments are not only the perpetrators of Terrorism, but they are also the beneficiaries.

Problems of Defining Terrorism

The cliché, "One man's terrorist is another man's hero or freedom fighter," makes Terrorism such a complex and nebulous term that there is no consensus on a single international definition. There has been a constant shift in the meaning of Terrorism because of the change in power and politics.² Every attempt to define Terrorism ends in the projection of our subjective views. We can tell when a terrorist attack takes place, but we are unable to describe it.³ This inability to reach an internationally agreed definition hampers all efforts of countering it. The word "terrorism" entered the English dictionary during the French Revolution and the "Reign of Terror."⁴ The history of Terrorism proves that it has a political character.⁵ It includes actions from revolutionary and popular uprising to the assassination of prominent political and public figures, from resistance movements to high jacking planes, kidnappings, and bombing public places. In the beginning, Terrorism was associated with non-state actors but not so anymore. The experience of the past few decades and unfolding of events have shown that state terrorism has been the most consistent kind of Terrorism, although it may not be as evident as non-state Terrorism.⁶ These states actively sponsor terrorist organizations, funding them and giving them military and operational support.

Much has been written on the topic of political violence and Terrorism. All research conducted on this topic has a few points in common. Firstly, Terrorism is an age-old phenomenon. Secondly, it has always been used to change a social or political system; thirdly, it is

2. Geoffrey R. Skoll, "Meanings of Terrorism," *International Journal For the Semiotics Of Law* 20 (2016): 107-127, DOI 10.1007/s11196-006-9038-5.

3. Jacqueline S. Hodgson and Victor Tadros, "The Impossibility of Defining Terrorism," *New Criminal Law Review* 16, no.3 (2013): 494-526, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nclr.2013.16.3.494>.

4. Charles Townshend, *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

5. Hodgson and Tadros, "The Impossibility of Defining Terrorism," 495-526.

6. Hodgson and Tadros, 495-526.

revolutionary; and lastly, foreign oppression, nationalism, and religion are the key factors. David Rapoport has traced modern Terrorism in his article, "The Four Waves of Modern Terror."⁷ His Four-Wave Theory of Terrorism is one of the most influential and discussed theories. Modern Terrorism began in Russia in the 1880s and within a generation spread in Western Europe, the Balkans, and Asia.⁸ This was the first wave of terror, and Rapoport calls it "The Anarchist Wave." This wave was completed in the 1920s. The second, or the "Anti-Colonial Wave," started in the 1920s and ended in the 1960s.⁹ The Third Wave started in the 1960s. It was the "New Left Wave," and it, too, lasted 40 years.¹⁰ The Fourth Wave that was initiated in 1979 can be called the "Religious Wave."¹¹

All the Four Waves had some factors in common. Nationalism dominated all but each shaped its nationalism differently.¹² The Fourth Wave is dominated by religious pressure. The end of a wave was gradual. As it receded, it left behind the residue of unresolved issues and sufficient energy to create successors in the form of ideology.¹³ As a result, the world has different terrorist organizations which continue the effects of the Waves. Religious Terrorism is not just restricted to Islam, other religions have their share too, but it has been dominated by Islamist ideology. The fourth wave has, so far, proved most destructive and indiscriminate and global.

What is it that makes Terrorism distinctively wrong and makes it more condemnable than war? Both have the effect of instilling fear in people and harming non-combatants, and both give "just" causes for violence. Terrorism is generally considered the weapon of the weak because it is simple, inexpensive, and highly effective.¹⁴ Whatever their reasons may be, there can be no justification whatsoever for harming

7. David C. Rapoport, "The four waves of modern terror: International dimensions and consequences," *ResearchGate*, (2013): 6-44, DOI:10.4324/9780203093467.

8. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Terror," 6-44.

9. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Terror," 6-44.

10. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Terror," 6-44.

11. Rapoport, 6-44.

12. Rapoport, 6-44.

13. Rapoport, 6-44.

14. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (July 1981): 379-399, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/421717>.

innocent people. Events of Terrorism have to be viewed in the context of culture and history, which in the words of Jürgen Habermas, are subject to systematic distortion.¹⁵ Different states have different definitions of Terrorism because they define it according to what suits them politically and when. For example, Nelson Mandela, who, until 2008, was on the terrorist watch list, and when it became suitable, his name was removed from the list. Before the demise of the Soviet Union, it was the communists who were the source of Terrorism, but after that, Terrorism itself became the adversary. Al-Qaida, ISIS, Taliban, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and anti-war groups within the U.S. are ever-shifting enemies. It is a war against the whole world.

The most common definition of Terrorism is "the deliberate use or the threat of using violence against non-combatants/civilians to attain political, ideological and religious goals."¹⁶In this definition, the word "civilian" is taken in the meaning of "unarmed" or "unprotected," but being unarmed does not necessarily mean that they are unable to affect terrorists in any way.¹⁷ If political interest is the aim, then the least a civilian could do is vote for a particular representation in the government and show their support for said government's policies. It makes them an instrument of the government, making them as much a legitimate target for the terrorists as a soldier or policeman enforcing the government's writ.¹⁸ After that, we have established that the term "civilian" is a relative term. Nowhere in this definition is it made clear that only non-state actors can significantly propagate Terrorism. Can we distinguish political violence meted out by states on their adversaries and the violence carried out by non-state actors? The answer is not very difficult to find.

Terrorism is not restricted to non-state actors alone. States involved in sponsoring Terrorism include authoritarian and democratic states, the former by repressing their population and the latter by directly or indirectly providing financial and strategic aid to militants. Intense inter-state hostility resulted in states providing refuge to foreign terrorists leaving all efforts to fight and eliminate Terrorism futile.¹⁹

15. Skoll, "Meanings of Terrorism," 107-127.

16. Robert E. Goodin, *What's Wrong With Terrorism?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 35.

17. Goodin, "What's Wrong With Terrorism?" 36.

18. Goodin, 38.

19. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Terror," 6-44.

Terrorism has transformed world politics in totally unanticipated ways. Very conveniently, state terrorism slips out of these definitions even though it is as common as other forms of Terrorism. Let us look at an official explanation- according to the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Terrorism is "the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, furtherance of political or social objectives." (28 C.F.R. Section 0.85)²⁰ A look at this definition, and one would see that this includes military and law enforcing personnel; it is a war. In a just war, military and state machinery are legitimate targets, leaving out the civilians. It is a subjective definition, and it may suit the United States but not the terrorists who claim to be at war with the U.S. The term "unlawful" is again relative and subjective. What is "lawful" differs widely from culture to culture and from time to time.

The Ideology of Terrorism

An important factor that links to the aggression found in the human species may be the territorial imperative. There is a drive in human to control territory. In his book *The Territorial Imperative*, Robert Ardrey calls Man a territorial animal, the only animal owning land and ready to resort to violence, lay down his life, or take someone else's life to protect his territory.²¹ A territorial imperative is as essential to modern man as it was to the ancients. Territorial disputes may be another reason for large-scale violence in the present world. The author links this territorial imperative to human biology, leading men to behave the same way when they feel their land threatened. One cause of Terrorism, which leads men to resort to violence, is the biological need for owning land. There are numerous examples of people defending their territory because the land is closely associated with their religious and social needs. Their land is the symbol of their identity and their honor and integrity. They guard it with their life.

Tangential to the more political reasons for Terrorism, it is difficult to determine why people resort to Terrorism. All these terrorist groups, everywhere, pose a challenge to the legitimacy of the existing social and political order. Ideology plays a vital role in the decisions of people who join terrorist groups. Ideology is the belief, values, principles, and objectives that define a group's political identity and

20. Goodin, 40.

21. Robert Ardrey, *The territorial Imperative: A Personal Enquiry into the Animal Origin of Property and Nations* (United States: Story Design L.T.D., 2014), 8.

aims. These ideologies may not always be well defined, but they provide a framework and motive for action.²² Ideology gives supreme moral values to live by, and it helps people assign meaning and purpose to their life.²³ They are prepared to kill and get killed to protect these values and achieve their objectives. The most critical, social, political, and religious, politicized religious ideology is the strongest and most binding, and ideologies play an important role in target selection. Much has been written on the issue of the relationship between religion and violence. On the face of it, all religions are intrinsically hostile to one another.

The ideology of a group may not be the ideology of the individuals. These individuals may hold different beliefs. The leaders of terrorist groups usually have a clear political objective and a specific ideology, but not so for their followers.²⁴ The illiterate Taliban fighters, generally, are not clear about the aims of their actions. Their leaders give them this vague idea that they are doing this for Allah and their religion. The knowledge of these men about Islam is limited to ritual prayers and fasting. Their trust in their leaders' borders on fanaticism, and they are under the illusion that the interpretation of religion given by their leaders is the only accurate interpretation. Group ideology is also crucial in determining their targets.²⁵ Everyone or everything that hinders their aims is a potential target and deserves to be destroyed. They have legitimate reasons for their actions. In terrorist ideology, the leader is above the rule of law. In all significant terrorist organizations, everyone who does not embrace their views is an enemy. The doctrines of these groups supersede the laws of a state and the divine laws, as interpreted by religious scholars. It is equivalent to saying that terrorist leaders are the ultimate authority on religion and divine law.

The terrorists have a totalitarian approach and a vision of absolute power.²⁶ They want to have complete control of all the political and social setup. They use every possible means, and religion is the best tool for exploiting the masses. Religious ideology itself is based on

22. C.J.M. Drake, "The Role of Ideology in Terrorist Target Selection," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10, no.2 (1998): 53-85, DOI 10.1080/09546559808427457.

23. Peter Bernholz, "Supreme Values as the Basis for Terror," *European Journal of Political Economy* 20, no.2 (2004): 317-33, Doi:10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2004.02.006.

24. Drake, "The Role of Ideology," 53-85.

25. Drake, 53-85.

26. Jeffrey Herf, "What is Old and What is New in Terrorism of Islamic Fundamentalism?" *Partisan Review* 69, no.1 (2002): 1-25.

political ideology. People cannot practice religion unless they have a political majority, so their religious ideology drives them to perform violent acts to strengthen their political power. Such terrorists usually belong to a minority or a majority who, sometimes without reason and sometimes without cause, feel that they have been wronged and deprived of their legal and social rights. They believe that their ideology is immune to refutation and criticism. Muslim fundamentalists despise modernity and the United States for being the symbol of modernity. They consider this modernity to be the cause of the downfall of the Muslim Empire. They fight against modernity and yet use modern technology to destroy it.²⁷

It has been fifteen years now that we became part of the anti-terrorist bandwagon. Two decades of anti-terrorism war experience tells us; no matter how much force we employ; Terrorism can never be ultimately defeated. What we have done so far is achieving some short-term objectives by pushing terrorists out of our boundaries, into Afghanistan, where they lay low, regroup and strike again. We have failed so far in weakening the ideological infrastructure of right-wing militancy. Terrorism is simply a manifestation of political violence with no independent ontological existence. This is another reason why its definition changes from time to time.

The rapid changes in the political and technological conditions worldwide, especially after the first Gulf War (1990-91), have provided fertile grounds for the growth of radical movements.²⁸ What makes things more complicated is the involvement of superpowers using terrorist groups

against their rival states and one another. No significant terrorist group can survive without state backing. What is now happening in Pakistan in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan? A new strain of warriors was prepared. The Afghan "Mujaheddin," armed to the teeth by the U.S., trained by Pakistan and funded by Saudi Arabia, fought the Soviets for ten years and finally drove them out of Afghanistan. But these war-hardened guerrilla fighters were unwilling to accept the Americans as their masters. Afghan Jihad did not only have Afghans; it also included Pakistanis, Arabs, and Central Asians. America and Saudi Arabia had fully supported Islamic Radicals fighting

27. Jeffrey Herf, "What is Old and What is New in Terrorism?" 1-25.

28. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God, The Global Rise of Religious Terrorism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 10.

in the war. It was supporting these radicals that caused the problem. They were against any type of foreign intervention in the Muslim countries. This condition was unacceptable to the Americans. America has an unmatched military might, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. The only way to fight this superpower was with guerrilla tactics and terrorist attacks, which proved amazingly effective if carried out with an element of surprise. 9/11 was a masterpiece of strategic surprise.

The wave of Islamism, also commonly called Islamic Fundamentalism, gradually gained strength after creating the state of Israel. Islamic radicalism may not be as significant a threat to the United States as it is to the Muslim world. America is the great "Satan" out of reach, so its local minions are more accessible, targeting the terrorists. A proof of this is the high casualty rate of Afghans and Iraqis in their respective countries than Americans whom the terrorists claim to be their true enemy. As Chomsky says, the U.S. always supported Islamic fundamentalist/ radicalism compared to secular nationalism. Americans used the radicals in the Soviet-Afghan war against the Russians. After 9/11, the U.S. created Afghan Mujahidin that became the "Frankenstein monster" when they took the form of Taliban and turned against the Americans. The victims became the aggressors when they hosted the mastermind behind 9/11, Osama bin Laden. No serious attempts were made for a table solution; an invasion served the U.S. objectives better. The charge of Afghanistan was not the only objective; it must have its mighty presence right in the heart of the Muslim world. The Americans had to have a justification for that. Every effort was made to build a connection between Al-Qaeda and Iraq. The U.S. invaded Iraq under the allegation of hiding weapons of mass destruction, which later proved baseless.

Terrorist leaders are funded by states interested in destabilizing countries that are part of the grand plan of the U.S. Terrorist leaders have all the money they want. Their young pawns usually come from poor and deprived social backgrounds and are primarily uneducated but filled with religious fervor. They are always ready to embrace martyrdom are prepared to kill and get killed if ordered by their leaders.²⁹ It is effortless to mold these youth and ingrain them with the ideology that they may not have anything in this world whatever they are doing for their religion. Still, a truly remarkable and carefree life awaits them in the hereafter.³⁰ For this, the young pawns

29. Juergensmeyer, "Terror in the Mind of God," 53.

30. Jeffrey Herf, "What is Old and What is New in Terrorism?" 1-25.

have to eliminate the enemies of Allah who may be their country fellows because they support the "kafirs".

One thing needs to be made clear: religion may be the apparent driving force, but politics drive religion to resort to these measures. Using their political ideology, they distort the teachings of Islam. An example is "jihad," where the terrorists ignore the spiritual aspect and only emphasize the physical struggle against sin. They reserve the right to judge. In the lexicon of Terrorism, indiscriminate killings and violence against governments who are non-Muslim or, as in the case of Pakistan, insufficiently Islamic, is a righteous deed, an act of honor. The extremist version of Islam is distorted and perverted, mistreating Islam as a politicized ideology. The terrorists seek a total and radical reordering of the world even if they resort to mass violence and unparalleled bloodshed.

The influence of Islamist groups on the interpretation of religion depends on what ordinary Muslims feel towards political violence.³¹ Opinions of people mold their beliefs, and these beliefs tend to become amplified in exceptional cases of radicalism. People with radical ideas are more likely to resort to violence than all those who share their thoughts, but their support is limited to sympathizing with the cause of the terrorists. The transnational Islamist groups, who believe in a borderless "Ummah," play a significant role in disseminating Islamist ideology.³² Western interference in Muslim states has primarily contributed to the radicalization of different Islamist groups. These groups believe in using Terrorism as a tool of fighting an enemy, much more significant in number and strength. U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan worked as a catalyst for the influence of the Islamist ideology in changing attitudes of ordinary Muslims towards violence and armed struggle.

Religion is a factor that has played an undeniable role in the major conflicts of the last century. People have a psychological tendency to demonize those who do not share their views. But it is not "religion per se but a manipulation of religion that supports violence."³³ People's

31. Clara Egger and Raul Magni-Berton, "The Role of Islamist Ideology in Shaping Muslims Believers'

Attitudes toward Terrorism: Evidence from Europe," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 44, no.7(2021): 581-604.

32. Egger and Magni-Berton, "The Role of Islamist Ideology," 581-604.

33. Clinton Bennet, *In Search of Solutions- The Problem of Religion and Conflict* (Oakville: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2008), 11.

mental state depends on their social context, which helps them develop a particular ideology, and in the light of this ideology, they interpret this world. Approval of Terrorism is often co-related with anti-Americanism. There are specific characteristics of terrorist mentality. They have this belief, sometimes well-grounded but often baseless, that their religion is in grave danger and responsible for safeguarding it and strengthening it. Not only that they have to eliminate the threat, but they must also fight the evil to the end. They believe they have to return to the original ways of their ancestors and completely isolate themselves from those who do not belong to their type and do not share their faith. Those who are not like them must be resisted since they are evil. The world has to be purified, and in this war against the forces of evil, all means they use are justified. For the good of religion, it is no sin to kill those who pose a threat and hold views different from theirs. So, do religion and religious texts sanction and justifies violence?

Conclusion

Terrorism turns the atmosphere of this world from prosperity and safety to one of never-ending fear and uncertainty. The Global War on Terror is proving as destructive as Terrorism itself. Despite the great many religious, social, political, and racial differences among the inhabitants of this world, they share a common past. We need to educate people and realize that there are more similarities among human beings than differences. We have every right to live our life according to our choices and priorities, but this should not limit our worldview and make us prejudiced. People need to accept change and differences of opinion. History has witnessed that the common interest of humanity, a common cause, united humanity has never been to the liking of political and religious leaders. A divided society provides politicians with a strong base for power. We must pinpoint these politically created differences and the ideologies that give birth to these, and only then will we be able to find a cure to the problem of Terrorism and live in relative peace. There is a further need to analyze Islamic religious texts and their different interpretations to find out why they give meaning to radical beliefs. This research further reveals that religion is a matter of opinion, and ideas cannot be measured on the criteria of logic. There is no end to this violence if we believe this world is divided into "us" versus "them."

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