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## Research Article

### MODERN TERRORISM: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL EFFECTS

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#### ABSTRACT

The paper undertook a critical analysis of the features and trends of modern international terrorism with a focus on its social and political effects. It highlighted the fact that modern terrorism which took its roots from European brand of terrorism has assumed a more violent and devastating dimension as typified by the destruction of the pentagon building and the World Trade Centre in the US on 11th September, 2001 by the Islamic fundamentalists led by Bin Laden. The struggle for independence in some parts of Africa took the form of terrorist actions in the form of Guerilla warfare. It was argued in the paper that the political and social effects of terrorism on people and society are a mixed bag of blessings and cause. Politically, terrorist movement targeted at dethroning a regime with a dominant ideology often leads to civil crisis and destruction of monumental proportion. The social benefits of terrorism as highlighted in the paper include the fact that terrorism creates a sense of oneness and solidarity among people of society. On the negative side of social effects, the analysis showed that terrorism undoubtedly causes displacement of people and discourages foreign investments. It was recommended that terrorist acts in any guise should be avoided, and that the US should desist from using her military might to deal with small countries that are branded terrorists by her.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The study of terrorism is both intriguing and emotionally laden. This is because by its very nature, terrorism as a phenomenon produces panic, hatred, and social disorder to some people or societies and then joy, and fulfillment to others. Thus terrorism is a mixed bag of blessings and misfortunes.

The paper focuses on the political and social effects of terrorism with a view to understanding its implications for democracy and world peace. At a time when terrorism and anti-terrorism are ravaging the international environment, it is not only expedient but also auspicious for a scholar of international relations to undertake a critical analysis of the impacts of this hydra-headed global phenomenon. Past studies of terrorism have tended to dwell mainly on its causes without considering the need to also highlight the far-reaching consequences that are associated with it. Thus, this paper is not only meant to inform, but equally important, to fill a research gap so long neglected by Political scientists and historians. It may also stimulate further research works on the subject matter.

The waves of violence in virtually all parts of the world today, particularly in the Middle East, are an eye opener to the fact that terrorism is not about to end, despite the efforts of the USA

and her allies to combat it. The danger is that the routinisation of terrorism and its devastating effects could produce a latent force that can trigger off a third world war. What all this implies is that there is only an uneasy peace in most regions of the world because any country or object or even individual could be the target of terrorist attack anytime. If the USA, a superpower, was taken unawares and humiliated by terrorists, one can imagine the fate of the less powerful countries that are more vulnerable to terrorist attacks

##### **Conceptual Issues**

Terrorism is more or less a social ambivalent due to the profligate definitions and interpretations that have been given to it by modern scholars. Sullivan (1986:5), for example, has defined terrorism as follows:

*Political terrorism may be said to occur when a group, whether holding governmental office or outside government, resolves to pursue a set of ideological objectives by methods which do not only subvert or ignore the requirements of domestic and international law, but which rely for their success primarily upon the threat or use of violence.*

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On the other hand, Townshend (1986:90) has defined terrorism as “the systematic use of violence by armed people to put unarmed people in fear, in the belief that this will deliver political results”.

This problem has arisen largely because of the interdisciplinary approach of terrorism in recent times. Basically, terrorism now features prominently in various fields of study, especially political theory, political science, and history with each operating from a different premise. The danger inherent in this trend is the vagueness of the phenomenon of terrorism and utter lack of consensus or agreement on its fundamental characteristics (Schmid, 1983:159).

For scholars of political theory, for example, the dominant interest lies in general assumptions or theories about man and society and the objective conditions that inspire terrorist activity generally (Sullivan, 1986: ix). They also relate these assumptions and theories to the moral and political values of society so as to determine whether or not there is moral justification for specific terrorist acts.

For political science, on the other hand, the primary concern is with the empirical conditions which determine the success or failure of terrorism and the likely implications for maintenance of international peace and security. The historian characteristically remains focused on cataloguing the continuity and sequence of episodes of terrorist activities worldwide (Lagueur, 1979:198).

However, despite the different perspectives from which scholars in different fields have approached terrorism, broad areas of agreement have emerged, fortunately, on how the study of terrorism should be structured and analyzed (Sullivan, 1986:ix).

The first area of agreement relates to the fact that terrorism in its modern form originated as a specifically European phenomenon. While it is true that violent actions, especially assassinations, have been common throughout the world, the modern form of terrorism emerging from Europe seems to be an offshoot of a new style of politics symbolized by the French revolution in 1789 that was not ideologically inspired (Palmer, 1965). In other words, the main feature of the new brand of terrorism is the absence of ideological character as a context within which to interpret episodes of terrorist acts. What this implies is that the intellectual roots of modern terrorism cut across conventional ideological divisions, with the result that terrorism cannot be understood by analyzing it in terms of the “left-right” dichotomy which is frequently used to interpret it (Horowitz, 1981:19-24).

The second area of agreement is about the fact that the recent studies of terrorism tend to focus almost exclusively on opposition or dissident groups to the neglect of governments or regimes that rely on the threat of, or actual use of coercion, or terror to remain in power. The regimes of Hitler of Germany, Idi Amin of Uganda, Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Republic were evidently characterized by reign of terror marked by an orgy of violent repression and assassinations (Lord, 1982:8).

The emphasis on opposition groups rather than on regimes is quite understandable in view of the striking upsurge in the use of violence by nationalist and separatist groups such as the Irish

Republican Army (IRA), and the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa to acquire power. But not to make adequate reference to or characterize regimes that rely on violent repression of citizens as terrorists has been recognized by all scholars as an omission and a research gap that needs to be filled.

Thirdly, there is an agreement on the need to consider the implications for terrorist activities of the impacts of the pervasive Western ideological politics on the non-European world. To a large extent, terrorist activities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are now organized in the manner of the European fashion and underpinned by Western nationalist and Marxist ideas. In Algeria and Angola, for example, terrorist activities by the nationalist fighters against foreign domination were followed up by the introduction of the Marxist ideology.

Thus, the European style and ideological orientations have been more or less superimposed on indigenous traditions in non European world even in the way violence is organized. However, the struggle for freedom and sovereignty by a movement such as the Palestine Liberation Organization, (PLO), may be inspired by ideas which are purely Western, but its violence can be interpreted within the context of native Islamic fundamentalism.

### ***The Effects of Terrorism***

The subject of the effects of terrorism is so complex and so multifaceted that it is not possible to sketch out and discuss exhaustively in one single paper like this one. However, determined attempt is made here to isolate and discuss the intermingling of the political and social effects of the routinisation of terrorism in the modern world. Paradoxically, terrorism that is regarded by rulers and statesmen as a threat to established democratic values and processes is known to have paved way for numerous desirable and beneficial changes both at national and international levels.

### ***Political Effects***

On the political scene, terrorism can contribute to change in four areas: the overall distribution of political power; government policies, especially as they affect civil liberties; the political behavior of citizens; and the prospects for the continuation of violence (Crenshaw, 1984:1).

### ***Distribution of Political Power***

Terrorism may bring about radical changes in power relations within a state, involving major shifts in who governs and under what rules. In essence, terrorism can lead to the replacement of an unwanted regime with an obsolete ideology by another government composed of patriotic elites. For example, the social revolutions in China in 1911 and Russia in 1917 destroyed the conservative monarchical systems in the countries and replaced them with a government composed of patriotic leaders, relying on the socialist ideology. Generally, the struggle for independence in colonial territories including Africa has always been carried out with terrorists’ attacks combined with guerrilla warfare and mass mobilization against the colonial masters.

Secondly, terrorism has been critical in the transfers of power from one regime to another within a country. As the examples of Uruguay, Argentina, and Turkey indicate, terrorism has been

instrumental in the overthrow of civilian governments that were incapable of halting violence and civil violence in order to restore normalcy and order in their societies. And almost as a rule, revolutions are often preceded by terrorism as in Russia, Iran, and Nicaragua.

Thirdly, terrorism creates conditions that provoke the intervention of an outside power. In the Northern Ireland, for example, IRA terrorism instigated the British imposition of indirect rule in 1972. Palestinian terrorism against Israel led to Israeli retaliation against Lebanon and the Palestinian enclaves that sought sanctuary there. The alleged sponsorship of terrorism by both Iran and Libya has earned both countries the enmity of the United States. This may provoke terrorism and violence throughout the world for an indefinite period. For example, the destruction of the Pentagon building and the World Trade Centre in USA On 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001 apparently by the Islamic fundamentalists spearheaded by Bin Laden of Saudi Arabia was a reaction to the alleged US support for Israel against the Palestines. This has led to retaliation on a large scale by the US government. "Violence", they say, "begets violence".

### **Social Effects of Terrorism**

The social effects of terrorism are manifest mainly in attitudes of trust in social cohesion and integration. This point reinforces the view that the outcomes of terrorism are not always negative. Experiences have shown that terrorism sometimes creates or maintains social solidarity (Coser, 1956). It is interesting to note that even in the face of ever-present menace of terrorism, the social order of most afflicted societies remain resilient and strong. Essentially, terrorism creates a sense of oneness in a people; it serves as a tonic in a people to challenge a common enemy. The people adjust to conditions that from an outsider's point of view are intolerable. In this way, terrorism becomes more a fact of life than a continual source of shock.

As Crenshaw (1984:22) argues, one noticeable effect of terrorism is the sharpening of awareness between in-group and the out-group. As he put it:

*Terrorism results in the reinforcement of group boundaries, increased cohesion within each community the widening of the gap between groups. Terrorism seems to reinforce tendencies to stereotype the out-group as the enemy.*

However, the negative effects of terrorism are obvious. In societies where there is turbulence of terrorism, the people live under conditions of uncertainty, danger, fear, suspicion, and hatred. In Northern Ireland, for example, the culture of violence tends to damage political socialization since lack of communication and trust inhibits political compromise and accommodation. Worse still, continued terrorism leads to high level of emigration as in the case of Palestine and Lebanon.

Moreover, terrorism results in a decrease in social interchanges, scares tourists, and discourages foreign investments. Where there is continued terrorism, decisions in matters of houses, schools, shopping and travel are dictated by security considerations. The situation is comparable to the State of nature described by Thomas Hobbes as "solitary, nasty brutish, and short". It is marked by the loss of privacy, freedom, and spontaneity. The foundation of democracy is threatened as the

state's ability to maintain order is gradually weakened. Apter (1965: 10) has painted a grim picture of the situation:

*The success of terrorism thus needs to be measured by the impotency of government, but also in the degree that people withdraw from society, retreat from civility, and avoid public space, to live instead with alarm systems, dogs, and guns, all instruments of a society where every man is for himself a hermetic society a society without trust or obligation-a condition under which cell life prospers.*

### **The Effectiveness of Terrorism**

The effectiveness of terrorism is of crucial importance in the realization of the goals of the terrorist group. If the goals are not achieved, whether in the short-term or in the long run, the aim of terrorism is defeated. The goals of terrorism vary from place to place depending on the contentious issues at stake. Generally, the goals of terrorism vary from full blown revolution to pave way for the introduction of a new ideology, national self determination, preservation or restoration of the status quo, to profound political and economic reforms.

In terms of the numerical strength and military capability, the terrorist organization is weak when compared to any government army. Therefore government cannot be challenged 'face to face' militarily on the level of physical force. Terrorist organization rely mainly on guerilla warfare to destabilize government and to discredit its legitimacy in the eyes of the populace (Nardlaw, 1982:55-7). Thus, the resources potentially available to serious terrorist groups, those with long-run ideological ambitions to change the political order, lie largely in public perception of their intention (Chomskv, 1985:15). In the final analysis, the prospects of a terrorist organization depends primarily on its size, organization, leadership, intensity of commitment, techniques of commitment, techniques of violence, and goal.

The degree of effectiveness and success of a terrorist organization, particularly at the domestic level, could also be determined by such things as the press, political culture, social structure of society, and governmental response to terrorism and violence.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Terrorism has over the years increased both in geographical spread and intensity, thereby constituting a menace to world peace. At the domestic level, terrorism has rendered many people homeless, created widespread insecurity and hatred like the case of North-east of Nigeria where Boko Haram has been unleashing heymen on the people.

At the international level, it has led to configuration of forces and alliances with one group of countries pitted against another in warfare. The fear of insecurity has compelled some countries to amass weapons of mass destruction for self defence. The US and her allies have vowed to deal with North Korea, Libya, Iraq, Sudan for allegedly developing biological weapons in violation of the 1972 UN Treaty on the use of weapons in warfare. The invasion of Afghanistan by the US and her allies as a way of combating terrorism, and also their threat to attack Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, and Yemen for allegedly harbouring terrorists portend serious danger to world peace and security. All this poses a challenge to the United Nations Organization

(UNO) to take remedial measures against terrorism and wide spread crises.

We recommend that, one, the political and social effects of terrorism are to say the least, not palatable and should therefore not be resorted to in any circumstance. Terrorism in whatever guise and for whatever goal is an uncivilized phenomenon, it is antithetical to democratic processes and values such as free and fair election, peaceful change of government, and the sanctity of the fundamental human rights and liberties as well as the rule of law (Wilkinson, 1977:70).

Two, the US and her allies should renegade on their plan to embark on systematic invasion of the so-called terrorist countries with excessive use of physical force so that they themselves may not turn out to be terrorists.

Third, the proposed aggression would be an over kill for the offences of the small countries, and it can provoke condemnation and hostile reactions from the international community, thereby threatening the precarious world peace and order.

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