Research Article

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism, a multifaceted and pervasive global phenomenon, has garnered extensive scholarly attention, political discourse, and public concern. This review article offers a comprehensive critical analysis of terrorism, delving into its historical roots, evolving definitions, and the complex web of factors that drive individuals and groups toward acts of terror. It explores the diverse typologies of terrorism, from political extremism to religious fundamentalism, and examines the consequences and impacts of terrorism on individuals, communities, nations, and international relations. Through an interdisciplinary lens, this review assesses the effectiveness of counter-terrorism strategies and the ethical dilemmas they pose. By synthesizing the latest research, this critical analysis on terrorism aims to enhance our understanding of this complex issue and contribute to the ongoing dialogue on peace, security, and resilience in the modern world.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is a complex and ever changing phenomenon. Focusing events, as defined by Birkland "is an event that is sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the potentially greater future harms". Terrorist attacks fall under focusing events [1,2]. There is no universal definition of terrorism but there exists a customary rule with three key elements to associate with terrorism: (i) perpetration of a criminal act or threatening such an act (ii) the intent to spread fear among the population or indirectly coerce a national or international authority to take some action or refrain from taking it (iii) when an act involves transnational element [3].

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD), biggest and widest utilized database defined terrorism as: the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation [4].

Alex Schmid expanded the definition of terrorism by characterizing acts of terrorism as equivalents of war crimes [5]. Boaz Ganor proposed a concise definition of terrorism i.e. "the deliberate use of violence against civilians in order to attain political, ideological and religious aims" [6]. Schmid and Jongman collected over 200 definitions, because every author felt compelled to define terrorism [7]. However divided on other aspects, most definitions of terrorism agree that terrorism and political violence are inseparable. It is the tactic of static repression [8].

Although terrorism is a world-wide phenomenon, there are important regional differences. In commonality it is a primary threat to security and ranks high on political agenda. There is no generally accepted definition because: (i) contested concept (ii) delegitimization and criminalization (iii) many different types (iv) constant evolution and alteration to the existing meanings [9]. It is also subjected to false juxtaposition of freedom fighters and terrorists. Governments strategically use the term 'terrorism' to condemn specific forms of political violence and advance political agenda. Terrorism is neither an automatic reaction nor a purely calculated strategy, but the goal of every terrorist is to terrorize induce fear and anxiety in a target audience. It is generally a form of coercive violence.

Terrorism has two senses: *actor* and *action*. These senses are ambiguous because non terrorist actors adopt terrorist actions and terrorist actors adopt non-terrorist actions [10]. Hate crimes are the closest cousins to terrorism. The targets are selected because of their group's identity and bear little to negligible relation to economic conditions. Eg: Lynching of African-Americans or violence against Turks in Germany [11].

Two common forms of terrorism that help better understanding of the phenomenon are racial and pyro terrorism. Racial terrorism is violence perpetrated by organized groups against racial minorities in pursuit of white and Aryan supremacist agendas. It is basically leaderless resistance [12]. Pyro terrorism is the use of incendiary attacks to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment of the society to advance political and social objectives. Political or psychological aspect of the induced fire differentiates pyro terrorism from arson [13].

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Terrorism is deeply associated with fear and threat model of coercion [14]. Terrorist activity is more prevalent in democracies than in dictatorships. The main motivation lies in the intergroup dynamics of democracy where various ideologies compete for limited political influence and lack of opportunities for expression of political grievances [15]. It is a non-linear relationship. Of the 2021 groups that existed globally from 1970-2007, one-fourth emerged from authoritarian governments [16]. It is comparatively less in dictatorship countries because attacks are costly instruments and drain groups by causing group-member casualties.

Reactions to terrorist events are of 2 extreme kinds:

I. Challenges the social foundations of liberal democracy by increasing anti-immigrant opinions and stimulating political polarization.
II. Support for social foundations of liberal democracy by strengthening social cohesion, societal integration and trust dynamics [17].

According to the "European Union - Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports" of EUROPOL, the deaths due to terrorist attacks have been enumerated below.

YEAR	DEATHS
2015	151
2016	142
2017	68
2018	13
2019	10
2020	12

Table 1: Death toll in years 2015-2020 [18-22]

This data showed that in 2022, the probability that an individual becomes a victim of a terrorist attack is very low [23]. Nonspecific threats like repeated airport, airplane security breaches or confiscated computers depict future biological and nuclear terrorism plots. This has heightened state of alertness and feeling of helplessness in the public [24].

However, total deaths from 2000-2019 was estimated to be 3,15,000. There is no "one size fit all" explanation for terrorist activities and its causes. It is important to evaluate its own political, historical and cultural context [25].

DISCUSSION

Agency refers to any object or facility -for example: weapons or war materials. Agents are whoever engages in coercion. Effects refer to visual representations of the physical consequences of inflicting violence [26]. These three parameters demarcate the intensity of an terrorist attack. The situation of salience of terrorism is convergence in European Union as a whole and divergence in a national level [1].

History and Waves of Terrorism

David Rapoport was the first one to illustrate the four waves of terrorism [27,28]:

I. Anarchist Wave (1880s) -It was mainly dominated by Russian troop, Sergei Wechaev and is popularly called the catechism of a revolutionary. It was the Golden Age of Assassination (1890). Famous personalities like Elizabeth; Umberto and McKinley were targets of terrorist attacks in the anarchist wave.

II. Anti-colonial Wave (1920s) -This wave was driven by the struggle for self-determination. This was when terrorists were juxtaposed with freedom fighters and they employed guerilla tactics that were hit-and-run in nature. IRA (Irish Republican Army), FLN (Front de Liberation Nationale) and Zionist militant group were the few famous terrorist organizations that emerged in the anti-colonial wave.

III. New left Wave (1960s) -It was a combination of radicalism and nationalism. International war got a new face with tactics like hostage holdings and plane hijackings. Palestine Liberalization Organization (PLO) was an important terrorist group. Vietnam world war and the Olympic games case in Munrich (1972) are significant events in the New Left Wave.

IV. Religious Wave (1979) -The USP of this wave is suicide attacks. Religion stands as a strong foundation of the fourth wave and it transcends into the state bond. The Islamic revolution in Iran and occupancy of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union are important dates to be noted in this wave. LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), Aum skin rikyo (Sarin nerve gas attack) and Al-Qaeda are the popular events of the religious wave.

Sanchez and Cuenca argued that there are just 2 waves of terrorism: first was the international terrorism in the 1970s and second wave triggered by 9/11 and Jihadist terrorism [7, 29]. From the Caliphates through the fall of Ottoman empire and again through the world wars to our present all historical dates are connected [30].

History demonstrates vengeance to be the principle motivation for terrorism. The best example would be Anarchist terrorism in France in the 1890s [31]. The change is rapid, less uniform and more multifaceted. Armed conflicts are another powerful source of transnational terrorism. Rise of Al Qaeda is a new form of armed conflict that led to the global civil war [32].

Jihadism and 9/11

Taliban and Al Qaeda's hate of the west, misguide into thinking that these threats are localized and specific to a certain culture or region. But the attacks on Philippines, Thailand, Europe and other parts of the world depicts that Jihadism is just as modern as the society we live in [30]. They claim a war against western civilization and democracy.

9/11 commission report reputed it to be a shock and not surprise. The gaps between the academia and policy makers and changes in the terrorists modus operandi (MO) were reasons for the failure in predicting the magnitude of 9/11 attacks [33]. After 9/11 some Americans displayed high levels of ethno-centrism and less support of Arab and Muslims. This led to increased security checks, surveillance and anti-Islamic hate crime incidents [17].

Pyro terrorism concept has been popularized from 9/11 attacks. Instead of carrying explosives to the target, terrorists use catalyst to cause the target to release its own destructive energy. This was the primary source of generating heat from the fire that softened the steel columns of the building and resulted in the total collapse [34].

Lone actor/ Lone wolf strategy is an existing significant problem post 9/11 [35]. Lone actors are responsible for 40% of terrorist attacks and are often considered less threatening [4].

For the longest time, ITERATE (International Terrorism: Attributes of terrorist events) compiled by Edward Mickolous was the only existing dataset. In 1970, GTD (Global Terrorism Database) was developed [7].

Suicide Terrorism

It is the act of sacrificing one's effort to harm, damage or destroy members of an outgroup for political and social objectives. Al though the adaptive functions has been extensively studied by research scholars, the existing of secular terrorist organizations like LTTE contradict the altruism claims [36]. Suicidal ideation constitute the significant minority of cases. No society or religion has monopoly over it and has its history from ancient times. Eg: Zealots (Jewish sect) practiced suicide terrorism in Judea (occupied by Rome). It is not necessary for suicide terrorism to be associated with rational thinking, strategy and logic [37].

Factors affecting Terrorism

Terrorism is a response to long standing feelings of indignity and frustration and not response to low market opportunities. So poverty, education and terrorism have a complicated and weak link. Taylor (1998) concludes from his survey that neither social background nor educational opportunities are seen to be particularly associated with terrorism. This statement can be can be supported by Israeli-Jewish terrorists and other incidents of Hezbollah. Terrorist organizations may prefer highly educated individuals even for homicide suicide attacks, because of trust and commitment issues w.r.t operations and execution of the suicide bombing [11].

An identifiable pattern of attributes and behavior in terrorism - prone individuals would result from a combination of cognitive processes; defensive needs; socialization and interaction in a specific situation [31]. Illegal activities, members of the organization and abuse of non-profit organizations can be few sources of funding for terrorist groups. There is a clear similarity between terrorist financing and money laundering because in both cases, efforts are made to hide the funds from the scrutiny of state authorities [38].

Role of media

Press freedom positively pushed terrorism by imparting fear and panic through disturbing visuals and content. Without media, terrorism would be obsolete [15]. Journalists often associate Islam with terrorism, this often fosters Islamophobia. Incident and perpetrator characteristics influence the portrayal of political violence as terrorism [4]. One reason for greater media focus on Islamist terrorism is that more attacks were earned out by Islamist actors during the period of analysis and boom of media [35]. Extensive media coverage and repeated exposure to commoners via TV channels can be traumatizing to the public [24].

Research and Study on Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Academic disciplines that contribute to terrorism studies are: political science; sociology; history; social psychology; criminology; conflict studies and international relations [6]. The 9/11 attack created internationally diverse set of scholars and high volume of research because of 3 primary reasons: (i) increased interest on the topic (ii) new data and emergence of journals specific to terrorism and (iii) increased government funding for terrorism research [29].

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research technique in analyzing interviews with terrorists. It aims to draw information about the terrorist's understanding of violence as a utility [39]. West German psychiatrist who conducted a pretrial examination of 4 members of RAF and concluded that they were intelligent, humorous and showed no symptoms of psychosis or neurosis. Unbiased examination of conscious attitudes might be more revealing than a study of subconscious predispositions or personalities [31]. Terrorists and individuals participating in terrorist organizations are not mentally ill but ordinary and unremarkable [36]. Literature on terrorism paid more attention to the association between geography and terrorism [16].

Effects of Terrorism on Contemporary World (Author perspective)

Terrorism causes loss of innocent lives through acts of violence, bombings, shootings and other modes of attack. It causes profound grief and trauma for victims and associated family members. The survivors of the terrorist attack often suffer physical injuries accompanied with the psychological trauma that remains with them. The cost of security measures to prevent terrorism is substantial and exerts financial strain as business, tourism and trade are disrupted. Along with erosion of civil liberties, the national security and global relations of the country are threatened. For example, the muslims in the United States of America were ill-treated after the 9/11 attack. The stereotype and stigma are still prevalent. It is a classic phenomenon of cultural and religious tensions. It is important to understand that the effects of terrorism are complex and multifaceted and they vary depending on factors such as modus operandi, resilience of the affected community, response of government and the reception by the international community.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Good communication is the key to any successful government action. It provides an interpretation to build an understanding to reality. The public also strongly desire for transparency as they often get fed by the media beast [40]. Governments should avoid internal turmoil by allowing representation of a diverse set of interests [16]. New ways are to be sought by the government to disrupt the intergroup dynamics that cause terrorist organizations to escalate their activities [15].

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is necessary to focus on changing societal conditions that can provide permissive or inhibitive environment for terrorism. Latest technology and innovative methodologies have to be incorporated in the study to understand in how many aspects it can be exploited. There is a need for stronger global representation of people in research. The MO of future terrorist attacks is predicted to be CBRN (Chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear) [33]. Nonpartisan analysis of key issues in terrorism and counter terrorism is significant in future studies [5]. Disagreements about the nature of terrorism have prevented the formation of a general consensus. Research should be done to analyze public perceptions to terrorism [8]. It is necessary to compile a database on terrorists alone and not database based on events or incidents [37].

A common conclusion brought by authors is that globally, terrorism will continue to exist in the future and terrorism is not static and is likely to undergo metamorphosis in the near future. Technology will be a mitigating tool rather than a long term

solution. High levels of terrorism are going to be with us for a very long time.

ABBREVIATIONS

GTD -Global Terrorism Database
ITERATE - International Terrorism: Attributes of terrorist events
IRA - Irish Republican Army
FLN - Front de Liberation Nationale
PLO -Palestine Liberalization Organization
USP -Unique selling proposition
MO -Modus operandi
CBRN -Chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear

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