



American Journal of Social Studies (AJSS)

Volume 1, Issue 1

Terrorism, Security and the Threat of Counterterrorism

Nafiu Ahmed

Department of Terrorism, International Crime and Global Security,
Coventry University, UK
Email:ahmedn40@uni.coventry.ac.uk

Abstract

Terrorism has become one of the top issues in the 21st century. In the wake of unrest in the middle east, terrorism has risen worldwide causing massive deaths of many innocent citizens. The constant acts of terrorists has been used to justify counterterrorism measures being carried out. The issue of terrorism has affected people both nationally and internationally as exemplified by the 9/11 attack in America. However, the danger caused by terrorism is far less compared to other events. Counterterrorism has not helped the situation but rather worsen it in some cases. Basal security is affected by both terrorists activities and the constant reminders of the dangers posed by terrorists. Radical counterterrorism has not helped the state of terrorism in many countries. Counterterrorism rhetoric should be done away with to help keep people safe. The present research discusses terrorism and the threat posed by terrorism compare to other events. It also analyses counterterrorism and its impact.

Key words: Terrorism, counter-terrorism, counterterrorism rhetoric, security and threat.

Introduction

Over the recent past, the threat and dangers posed by terrorism have forced countries to enact tough laws to counter terrorism. In so doing, they have bestowed more power to police, who can now question and detain any parties believed to be involved with terrorism. Torture is the term that has often come up as a consequent of the means through which national intelligence goes about dealing with terrorism. Take for instance the United States, which has been accused of using torture against terrorism suspects in Guantanamo Bay (Nacos, 2016). These torture techniques include forced medication, mock execution, sleep deprivation, solitary confinement and sensory bombardment among many others.

The threat of terrorism in the past has been used to justify detentions and inhumane treatment of suspects by use of torture. Additionally, extra-judicial killing cases have been reported numerous times especially in Africa where police have used brute force to deal with terrorism. Kenya has been forced to address public outcry protesting the rate at which youth are being murdered by the police on suspicion of being affiliated with the notorious Al Shabaab terrorist group (Anderson and Jacob, 2015).

Two interrelated assumptions have come to the fore arguing that basic civil and human rights must be sacrificed to fight the threat of terrorism. The first assumption argues that terrorism poses far much danger compared to other threats, which include political instability, floods, and drought among many others (Price, 2012). Secondly, it is assumed that undermining civil rights are the most effective way of dealing with terrorism. However, these are assumptions far-fetched, and greatly unchallenged.

The objective of this article will be to look deep into the two assumptions mentioned above. We will carefully examine the reasons why terrorism is considered to be a greater threat compared to others, and whether that is the case or the threat itself has been exaggerated. It is

herein argued that terrorism offers absolutely no justification for the enacting of legislation that rouses suspicion when it comes to valuing democracy and basic civil rights. We will further look into how the fear of terrorism has led to anxiety and fear, as well as posed a far greater threat rather than terrorism itself. The main objective of the paper will however be how terrorism poses a threat at both the national and international stage in terms of security.

Terrorism, Security, and Counter-Terrorism

Terrorism has been defined differently by scholars over the past few years. While there is no standard definition of terrorism, The United States Department of Defense defines it as, “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are political, religious, or ideological” (Mockaitis, 2003). From this definition, three key elements stand out; violence, fear, and intimidation. These three have the common impact of bringing terror to the victims. The FBI adds to the many definitions and defines terrorism as, the unlawful use of violence and force against property or persons to coerce or intimidate the civilian population, a government, or any party that is affiliated to political or social objectives (Best and Nocos, 2016).

Ideally, terrorism is a criminal act that influences an audience beyond the immediate victim. This has been perfectly illustrated by how countries go into a national day or period of mourning to honor victims of terrorism. Although the nation is not the immediate victim, it sympathizes with those directly affected as a show of solidarity. Terrorists often adopt a strategy of committing acts of violence so as to get the attention of the government, as well as the general public (Nacos, 2016). Past events have proved that the main agenda of terrorist acts is to instill fear and show a kind of might of the perpetrators. For instance, in the 1972 Munich Olympics, the Black September Organization killed 11 Israelis. Whereas the 11 were the direct

victims, the terrorist group chose that particular day and event so as to demonstrate their might to the greater public who were keenly following the games in Munich (Reeve, 2011)

Whereas the history of modern terrorism began with the French Revolution, it has considerably evolved and bore much more types of terrorism. In this article, we explore five major types of terrorism. They are discussed below;

- State terrorism – This is the use of power by the top most power in a country, the government, to exert control over its population. In past cases, countries experiencing state terrorism are often ruled by dictators. Take the example of Saddam Hussein, who used violence and reigned terror on the Kurds. The 1973 French Revolution is also an excellent example of state terrorism (Gal-Or, 2015).
- Right wing terrorism – It is a type of terrorism that aims to combat liberal governments and preserve traditional social orders. Commonly characterized by militias and gangs, the groups are also affiliated to a particular race that aims to marginalize a particular minority state.
- Left wing terrorism – As opposed to right-wing terrorism, left wing terrorist groups to aim to do away with the established system to do away with class distinction. A good example of this would be the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front in Turkey.
- Religious terrorism – This is terrorism that is motivated by religious ideologies and beliefs. More often than not, this is encouraged by religious teachings that glorify self-sacrifice as a means of being at peace with God when one dies. The world has fallen victim as a whole to this kind of terrorism, with the infamous Al Qaeda group claiming thousands and thousands of lives all over the world. The 9/11 attacks in the United States of America remains one of the most infamous and atrocious acts ever committed by this infamous group (Rumsey, 2014).

- Pathological terrorism – Unlike all the above types of terrorism, this is motivated by sadistic agendas of the terrorists who derive joy from the acts of hurting others. This is commonly seen in school shootings and serial killings. A perfect example would be the Dunbar High School shooting in Chicago, Illinois on January 9th, 2009 (Rumsey, 2014). This occurred after attendees were coming from attending a basketball match in the school mentioned above when a truck pulled over, and someone shot at the crowd wounding five people.

David Baldwin points out in “The Concept of Security” that security definition must meet numerous conditions (Volten and Tashev, 2007). For instance, the kinds of threats, security should be defined about the values concerned, the actor whose values are to be secured, the degree of security, the means for coping with such threats, the relevant period and the costs of doing. Baldwin pointed out that the definition of security can only be interpreted negatively (Volten and Tashev, 2007). This is because it translates to the lacking of or absence of any dangers to key human values such as life, health, and property. Insecurity, therefore, is a state whereby a person’s life is threatened. There are areas that are more secure compared to others.

A war prone country, for instance, would be deemed insecure because ongoing wars risk human life. Owing to this, terrorism is not the sole threat to security, and therefore should not be used to justify atrocious acts that undermine human values. Insecurity can, therefore, be caused by factors such as, floods, earthquakes, and wild animals, which all come under natural disasters. Diseases are also proving to be a major threat to human life, especially now that the spread of HIV has even grown further. Not only that but also Malaria, which continues to claim more lives especially in Africa. More importantly, though, there are numerous ways of countering the threats, as opposed to the use of forced detention and extra-judicial killings. For instance, in the case of HIV, able and willing non-organization groups can create awareness to the most stricken areas about the benefits that come with responsible living.

It is only through empowerment and knowledge that people can come to terms with the ideal lifestyles that they should lead so as to negate the threat of being vulnerable to such diseases. The government should also be more responsible in offering its citizens the necessary security by creating a good relationship with the people. Owing to this, leaders who go extreme in exerting their authority should be found and extradited for the failure of upholding the constitution and safeguarding its people. The issue of terrorism goes far and deep, and as a result, a careful analysis and examination of the nature of the problem should be done so as to ascertain the cause.

Terrorism has a direct impediment to the enjoyment of human rights. Due to this, states are obliged to take counter-terrorism to wane out the threat posed by terrorism. Measures adopted by States to counter terrorism impacts on the functioning of society and human rights just like terrorism does. States have not only a right but a duty to take effective counter-terrorism measures because terrorism has serious impacts on most of the fundamental right of a human being. This includes the protection of human rights and the effective counter-terrorism measures which are mutually strengthening. It acts in areas such as countering financial support for the terrorists, improving cross-border information-sharing by authorities or law enforcers and reduction of the risk that terrorists might procure mass destruction weapons. Conversely, it includes establishing a monitoring body, the Counter-Terrorism Committee, to supervise the implementation of these measures.

After the 9/11 attacks, the Security Council acted swiftly, and their main focus was to ensure the adopted strategies strengthened the international legal framework, as well as make sure the international approaches to terrorism receive sizeable considerations. That is, as per the embraced regional approaches, the development process has focused on ensuring the African Union, the European Union, the Europe Council, and the League of Arab States have managed to make considerable progression in different aspects (Keane and Hamilton, 2011).

More so, the development process has also included organizations such as Security Corporation, Co-operation in Europe, the Islamic Conference Organization, the American States Organization, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation among other corporations

Moreover, as per the United States situation, there has been the creation of substantial security as well as counter-terrorism policies that foster the adoption of Security Council resolutions 1373, on global levels (Reeve, 2011). This includes promoting inter-agency coordination and exchange of counterterrorism information at the international, regional, and national level. More so, much of the witnessed impacts have been apparent in the enjoyment of human rights. Fundamentally, a critical evaluation of most nations and their approach to meet counter-terrorism activities shows that most of these countries are hasty in embracing legislative and practical measures, which have adversely affected their functions in the sense that this approach leads to the deterioration of civil liberties and the human's fundamental rights.

The Threat of Terrorism

Terrorism is quite a threat to the human life, and it requires the right addressing for a safe community. Based on the associated adverse outcomes, people dread terrorist activities because there is no surety of what can happen next. The outcome of such an occurrence leads to amplified panic and despair due to the uncertainty of the next attack. For instance, Australian Antiterrorism Legislation, explain that it is evidently clear that threat to the region is diminutive (Price, 2012). The supposition is made on the notion of Christopher Michaelson's assessment of Australian situation shows that the county's low terrorism threat attributes to the fact that it is a low-profile target nation because it has little influence in the Arabic countries (Baldino, 2013). As a result, the risk of attack from sects such as Al Qaeda is reasonably low compared to the terrorist activities executed by the groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah.

Despite the fact that there have not been any terrorist attacks in Australia, the nation is renowned for radical counterterrorism measures. The evidence to this occurrence is clear with the fact that the nation permits the detention of individuals who are suspected to have any link with terrorist activities, irrespective of the fact that they are not terrorists. Primarily, the world's climax of counterterrorism activities is clear with the 9/11 attacks being marked as the universe's most detrimental attacks. The adverse impact associated with this attack is that it affected the world's most powerful state, both in the military and economic concept (Baldino, 2013). These are some example of the threat of terrorism at the international stage. Terrorism not only affects particular countries but can also spread to other neighboring nations.

The 9/11 is a good example of an international threat of terrorism as well as a national issue. It gave the perception that every nation is susceptible to terrorist attacks and no sizeable measures can render a given nation as being immune to these attacks. In the case of the Americans, the magnitude of this attack attributes to the fact that, if grouped regarding its scale, the hit left approximately 3000 people dead and 6000 individuals injured (Pilecki, 2015). For individuals in support of the counterterrorism policies, the argument is that the 9/11 attacks are a clear portrayal of the fact that global terror requires sizeable opposing measures. Following the 9/11, the world experienced increased multilateral cooperation, which is clear with the formulation of international security assistance against the war in Afghanistan. The most notable multilateral impact of the 9/11 is the United States' approach to seeking UN intervention to help in fighting Al-Qaeda, Afghanistan, and the Taliban because they breached the international laws (Reeve, 2011) Evidently, the United States approach to the overall concept was the securing of support from various nations, and this is the one noteworthy concept that led to NATO making significant contributions that rendered it to be the principal actor that fostered the coalition of nations that supported military actions.

Global terrorism may be viewed as being intensively dangerous with an overall consideration of its impact on globalization as well as the simplicity of its execution. The security checks, therefore, are seen to be ineffective and offensive strategies that target the ethnic minorities because they stand greater chances of being checked compared to the whites. As such, this makes the terrorism containment easy, and also makes it cumbersome for potential terrorists to find their way in the country or target area.

The increased terrorism aspect is evident with the fact that there is the growing possibility of the pertinent terrorist networks being in a position where they can acquire weapons of mass destruction; specifically, the nuclear weapons are the greatest threat. Such an occurrence is apparent with the fact that renowned terrorist leaders make it known to their followers that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is a religious calling. The sentiment has significantly influenced the fanatic followers, which has led to the recently reported cases of theft/ loss of chemical compounds that are believed to have been used in Pakistani nuclear attacks. The following events led to the 2006 MI5 sensitization that Al-Qaeda planned on attacking some of the U.K cities (Volten and Tashev, 2007). As of the present situation, none of these speculated attacks have taken place, but people tend to believe that it is a matter of time, and this increases fear. Similarly, the Syrian rebels are said to be using chemical weapons, and additional to this fact is that they have allied with the Al-Qaeda sect, which increases potential future security threats (Warrick, 2013).

The recent terror attacks have provoked a response from superpower countries; specifically, America. The resulting situation saw an increased growing tension and conflicts among the different civilizations and culture. This is opposite if the contemporary political approach which aims to foster peace among the different countries. Conversely, despite the prevailing situation, there is enough evidence to make counter arguments that terrorism is not

a global threat. Evidently, the made supposition is clear with the notion that terrorism is a series of sporadic attacks that varies depending on the attacks and the concerned; more so, it is different from the concerted and systematic destructions that are the outcomes of mass warfare between countries.

The indubitable fact is that terrorism cannot be used to overthrow the government, which makes it different from inter-state war. For example, in World War II, the witnessed impacts did cost Britain 45,000 deaths and wounded 139,000 individuals (Buono de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007). Despite terrorism being of a lesser magnitude than WWII, the fear is instigated by the fact that the employed tactics surpass any interstate wars. Terrorism cannot be therefore ignored even though statistics show a low mortality rate as a result of terrorism. The evidence to such an approach is clear with the notion that between 2001 and 2011, there is a record of terrorist attacks and 85 percent of these hits account for deaths (Jordan 10).

Global terrorism is quite dangerous bearing the concept that it also involves potential use of nuclear weapons. Indubitably, terrorism is a global peril because its increased dangers attribute to the potential nuclear attacks. The amplified threat is made substantial with the associated control difficulties. Conversely, the perception that terrorism is a major global threat is overstated since the peril is seen to be an outcome of exaggeration and manipulation, which is apparent with the adopted war on terror that made the entire situation viewed from a different perspective. A radical approach to the entire process, like in the case of Chomsky, gives the illustration that nations such as America overstate the terrorism impacts as a move to create a collective enemy that may lead to global collaboration, which may result into a global hegemony concept. As a result, the threat is undeniably exaggerated and manipulated as a strategy to increase the war prominence (Bacevich, 2013).

The Threat of Counterterrorism

Counterterrorism incorporates specific strategies which happen to be military tactics as well as practices that are used by the government in making sure it helps them combat terrorism activities. The current counterterrorism measures put in place by many countries pose threat in many ways. The “new” justification that has been put in place by the different parties or entities is the same measures that have been used for years now. However, as much as these measures have been designed to tackle the issue of terrorism, there is also a *prima facie* reason for people to be suspicious about the threat of terrorism as a means of justifying radical changes in the society. These radical changes impact the civil liberties and legal protections for the people. Historically, terrorism threat has been used to justify some of the acts which undermine the legal rights of people (Bacevich, 2013). For instance, the right to counsel and right to privacy has been violated on the grounds of protecting the citizens. The threat of terrorism has been used to justify such issues like even executions, use of torture and secret trials. In South America, dictatorship such as the one belonging to the late Fidel Castro used the notion of internal and external terrorism to justify the harsh measures for its people and the use of torture or killing of some individuals (Cuzán, 1999). Most current governments, especially in the Middle East and third world countries, still use such means to justify the government wrong doing especially against its people (Cuzán, 1999).

One of the main threats of counterterrorism to a country is the act of revenge by the terrorists themselves. The 9/11 which happened in the United States is thought as an act of revenge by the terrorists against the United States. Prior to the bombings, the United States had engaged the terrorists in the Middle East. Instead of some of the counterterrorism measures helping to regulate the act itself, it led to even more suffering to the people. Apart from the American people suffering, the people in Iraq also suffered as a result of the way between the two sides. Counterterrorism not only affects one part of the group but both sides. The actions of the United States of America after the 9/11 bombings led to the terrorists bombing the US

embassy in both Tanzania and Kenya; two countries in East Africa (Pilecki, 2015). The bombings led to the death of many individuals. It can, therefore, be identified that as much as counterterrorism is a sign of the seriousness acts against terrorism, it also led to other unforeseen problem for the country and its people as well.

Counterterrorism poses a threat to the democratic principles of people or rather, the right to privacy and fair trial. The counterterrorism legislation passed combined with the likelihood of torture or detention threatens the livelihood or the well-being of an innocent victim (Pilecki, 2015). In a case where there is terror alert, there are many people that are always considered as the masterminds behind the act. Counterterrorism measures do not consider the innocence of such victims. First, it threatens the security of the state itself by engaging the masses into thinking the victim are guilty. In so doing, it not only sentences a person to indefinite detention but also infringe on the right to a fair trial before the judges. In such a case, counterterrorism strategies pose a great amount of risk to civilians. A good example is Kenya and Tanzania who suffered as a result of counterterrorism activity by the United States. The terrorists decided to bomb the U.S embassy as an act of retaliation but it only led to more deaths of the people.

Counterterrorism measures also pose a threat to the country or a certain region by magnifying the extent of the issue. This is achieved through the fear and anxiety stirred among the people. This can be done by the use of propaganda such as using media outlets and social media forums. In turn, it creates a toxic environment or society. Mistrust develops among the people as exemplified by the situation during the 60s and 70s cold war between the USSR and the United States (Soutou, 2014).The human reaction is unpredictable and more than often the panic response is enhancing or rather fostered by the counterterrorism rhetoric. The threat of counterterrorism can hardly be quantified due to the nature of the players involved. This includes the government, the people, and the terrorists themselves. Any counterterrorism

measure leads to a reaction from the different parties either individually or at once. The results are always disastrous rather than helping the already escalating issue.

Conclusion

The threat of terrorism worldwide is real and possesses a great danger to many individuals worldwide. Counterterrorism rhetoric points its fingers to radical measures which are needed to protect the nation or individuals from the threat. The assumption from many research shows that terrorism poses a greater danger compared to other events. The case has been exaggerated by media outlets and other independent research. This research ascertains that the danger posed by terrorism to both the state and the people is far less compared to other events. Terrorism, therefore, is not sufficient to justify the radical approach to the issue especially towards the civil liberties of people. Conversely, the threat of basal security is not only caused by the terrorist's groups but also facilitated by the constant reminders and public statements of the dangers posed by these terrorists or acts of terrorism. It can be identified that the radical counterterrorism adopted by most western countries has led to a greater threat of life of the citizens and their well-being. It is, therefore, seen that as much as counterterrorism is designed to help curb the issue of terrorism, it, however, worsens the situation rather than helping it. Counterterrorism rhetoric should not be let to pose a great danger to the people but rather be done away and help heal the wounds caused by the acts of terrorism.

References

- Anderson, D. and Jacob M. (2015). "Kenya at war: Al-Shabaab and its enemies in Eastern Africa." *African Affairs*.
- Baldino, D. (2013). *Spooked: The Truth About Intelligence in Australia*. University of New South Wales Press.
- Best, S. and Nocella, A. (2004). "Defining terrorism." *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal*. Vol. 2. Issue 1. pp.1-18.
- Mesquita, E. and Dickson, E. (2007). The Propaganda of the Deed: Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Mobilization. *American Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 51. Issue 2. pp. 364-381.
- Cuzán, A. (1999). "Fidel Castro: A Machiavellian Prince?." *The Endowment for Cuban-American Studies*.
- Gal-Or, N. (2015). *International Cooperation to Suppress Terrorism (RLE: Terrorism & Insurgency)*. Routledge.
- Jordan, J. (2014). "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark: Why Terrorist Groups Survive Decapitation Strikes." *International Security*. Vol. 38. Issue 4. pp. 7-38.
- Kean, T. and Hamilton, L. (2011). *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. New York, N.Y: W.W. Norton.
- Mockaitis, T. (2003). Winning Hearts and Minds in the 'War on Terrorism'. *Small wars and insurgencies*. vol. 14. Issue 1. pp. 21-38.
- Nacos, B. (2016). *Mass-mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pilecki, A. (2015). The Moral Dimensions of the Terrorist Category Construction in Presidential Rhetoric and Their Use in Legitimizing Counterterrorism Policy. *Qualitative Psychology*.
- Price, B. (2012). Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism. *International Security*, vol. 36. Issue 4. pp. 9-46.
- Reeve, S. (2011). *One Day in September: The Full Story of the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and the Israeli Revenge Operation "Wrath of God": with a New Epilogue*. Skyhorse Publishing Inc.
- Rumsey, J. (2014). *Aid and International Norms: The Effects of Human Rights and Counterterrorism Regimes on US Foreign Assistance Pre-and Post-9/11*. Diss. Kent State University.
- Soutou, G. (2014). "Cold War History between Revision and New Insights, and their Consequences for Military History." *International Bibliography of Military History*, vol. 34. Issue 1. pp. 13-26.
- Volten, P. and Tashev, B. (2007). *Establishing Security and Stability in the Wider Black Sea Area: International Politics and the New and Emerging Democracies*. Washington, DC: IOS Press in cooperation with NATO Public Diplomacy Division.
- Warrick, J. (2013). "More than 1,400 Killed in Syrian Chemical Weapons Attack, US says." *Washington Post*, August 30.