

Reviewing the Problematique of Terrorism

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Abstract:

Terrorism may be termed as acts of violence, ranging from verbal abuse to sadomasochism—a fundamental tendency that associates pleasure with the affliction of pain, culminating in various forms of depression, implying intense fear, horror, panic and fright to which the victims may be subjected to. From domestic violence to those evils committed in the wider social context are also called acts of terrorism. The current day scientific and technological advancements have transformed this phenomenon into an uncontrollable monster for the entire humanity. The stark reality is that it is the technologically developed countries that are to be credited for developing chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, which they now find are easily accessed or can be stolen to be used by others. This is exactly the reason why it has dawned upon the major countries to “realize” that it is best to destroy the extremist outfits, who are fighting around the globe in the numerous theaters of ongoing wars within various societies. The major power brokers of the world fear that the human mind has itself become so “weaponised” by the social context in which it lives that the lethal and destructive potentials are available to the terrorist for their tactical and strategic ends in the same manner as are available to the powerful countries. Pakistan is one such country where diverse priorities of ruling elite and the masses, state repression, foreign conspiracies, Afghanistan problem, organized insurgencies, ethno-lingual and sectarian contradictions have grown into an increasing brutalization in the environment. In a chartered territory of terrorism like Pakistan where extremism is the norm of the day, there is a call for the need for new strategies and meaningful practical steps for a peaceful resolution of conflicts through accommodation of aggrieved groups and social justice for all. This study on the phenomenon of terrorism attempts to frame blueprints of action to curb this menace arising out to the views expressed by a deeply concerned public opinion.

Motivations of Terrorism

There are certain prerequisites of terrorism to be met for its interpretation, such:

(i) The necessity to perceive a systematic use of terror tactics before individual acts

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within the series that can be accurately labeled as terroristic; (ii) terrorism may be used by both the insurgents and the incumbent regimes; (iii) the potential use of fatal violence for political ends is to be present; (iv) and the inducement of fear in the community beyond the target is intended. In this perspective, political terrorism is the unlawful use or threat of use of violence by an individual or a group, whether acting for or in opposition to established authority, when such action is designed to create extreme anxiety or fear-inducing effects in a target group larger than the immediate victims, with the purpose of coercing that group into acceding to the political demands of the perpetrators. The very definition of terrorism denotes that the perpetrators of the act must have intended to terrorize as the consequence of the use of abnormal lethal force, to be considered terrorism (Suhrah, 2003).

As far as motivations of terrorism are concerned, acts of terrorism are incomprehensible if we only look at their political motivations and effects and ignore their other bases. As the present-day terrorism has many faces, its objectives are multi-faceted and operations are multi-pronged. The personal, socio-cultural, religious, and economic motivations are equally significant while undertaking paradoxical formulations of terrorism. Terrorism is an attempt to acquire or maintain power or control by intimidation, by instilling a fear of destruction or helplessness in the objects of the terrorism. Terrorists usually operate in groups and under the banner of a cause. The group and its cause usually is highly idealized and an air of absolute conviction is held about the truth or rightness of the group's aims. The terrorist unit tends to develop out of a situation of deprivation, poverty, minority status, disenfranchisement and prejudice. Furthermore, terrorists have the impression, rightly or not, that they cannot achieve their goals by legal means; in other words, they feel that they lack access to a responsive social system (Maxwell, 1999).

Terrorist groups are usually politically motivated groups which use violence as a matter of policy to pressurize a government or their rival faction on certain issues. Although most terrorist groups — especially in Europe — have not, in fact, successfully achieved their political ends, in Asia, Africa and Latin America, many former “terrorist” or “freedom fighter” groups which began as opponents of the colonial regimes by using guerrilla tactics or sabotage methods, became the post-colonial governments. For instance, a successful war of terror defeated the Smith regime in Rhodesia where Robert Mugabe, a “blamed” terrorist leader, came to power. Fiedal Castro, Moamar Qaddafi, Yasir Arafat, Soekarno, Bomudin, Imam Khomeni, Alinde and Mustafa Kamal Pasha are such examples whose nationalist, socialist and religious movements coupled with acts of violence against the imperialists, paved a way for people's rule in their respective countries. Besides, a few terrorist groups had been engaged in a struggle for changes in the internal political systems (Alvin and Heidi, 1998). In this category may be placed the Italian Red Brigades, the German Meinhoff gang and Uruguay Tupamaros — all of which had used assassinations and bombings to attempt a radical change in the social order.

Terrorist groups are usually led by a charismatic figure who personifies the plight of the group and its unswerving certainty that it is right. This leader appears to opponents and outsiders to be a “merciless monster” behaving in a bizarre manner, but to members of the group he can do no wrong. It is worth noting that terrorists crave publicity through exposure in the press and on electronic media. Similarly, terrorists favor distinctive uniforms, catchy slogans and various other conspicuous paraphernalia. This publicity tends to enhance the self-image of the group and the self-esteem of the individual members (Robert, 1999).

A glance at some recent events would suffice to show that it is difficult to interpret terrorism in totality, which comprises many variable factors to which new ones are added. As an illustration, in the present-day world of computer-related control and command systems in operation in civil and defence or security activities, infoterrorism or cyber warfare is the new vocabulary describing how the world of terrorism has itself evolved (Haroon, 1996). It has been seen in the recent past as to how terrorists totally paralysed the systemic functioning of the technologically advanced countries through a series of computer virus attacks or through commands engineered into their own computer control systems through the internet. The dimension of its uncontrollable facets, beyond any possible human monitoring, was proven to be vast, time and again. The startling results of this new type of terrorism have forced the “Super Powers” or “Major Countries” to rethink and re-conceptualise in devising appropriate safeguards for highly classified defence matters. Undoubtedly, these latest developments in the field of subversion and sabotage have made a hash of the traditional security systems.

Global Terrorism

There is a general impression that terrorism is on the rise and rampant worldwide as it has never been before. At present no society is safe from its severe impacts. Global terrorism ranges from individuals, groups having international networks to the states and this poses a challenge to the collective and individual security of people round the world. The reach of its destructive capacity has increased. It has caused disruption in all sectors of international life and has become a major problem for all governments. The possibility of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction through the innovations of modern technology has made terrorist activities more easier than it has ever been in human history. Moreover, political, religious, sectarian, ethnic, group and state violence has brought the globe on a very critical juncture creating a climate of fear and suspicion. Today, the indiscriminate masked murders, bomb blasts, hi-jacking, hostage taking, use of poisonous gases (bio-terrorism), bombardment, heavy shelling or firing on innocent people, looting for political purpose, kidnapping and deliberate destruction of various means of communications, are common day happenings all over the world showing the intensity of global terrorism (Laquer, 1999).

It is pertinent to note that statistics of victims in the last sixty years period, in the ethno-linguistic, sectarian and religio-political cleansing and state genocide in different parts of the world have denoted that approximately over a hundred million people have

died violent deaths (David, 2002). What it is costing the American and her allied war machines to obstruct, what it terms are the atrocities perpetrated by the extremism of Saddam and Taliban regimes, has yet to be disclosed. In either case what was gruesome for the world to witness was the manner of humans killing humans. Some of these blood-curdling, horrific scenes had been captured by daring television crews. Questions arise here as to “which of two events had the greater moral justifications to take place? Did one form of violence end another, or did it have the basis for a subsequent one to take place?”

Since the decades of the 70s, there is worldwide acceptance that the phenomenon of terrorism has emerged as a major international problem. In the cold war period, the better equipped industrialized nations responded by setting up various organizations to study various aspects of the causes and consequences of terrorism. They tried to devise some manner of control and preventive measures to eliminate this phenomena but badly failed, for their own strategic plans could have been disturbed (Rajmi, 1990). However, with the decline of the Soviet Union, greater public awareness within European countries and in the USA led to the rise of open debates and related literature on terrorism which ultimately promoted self-criticism. Leading newspapers, periodicals, magazines and journals, today deal specifically with the issues of terrorism, all forms of violence, governance and public opinion. Courses have been introduced in the curricula of many Western Universities to encourage inter-disciplinary research, which are integrated into the policy making efforts of their governments. Yet, these countries have not been able to come to grips with the problem of terrorism with its ever-widening dimensions. The events of 9/11 and 7/7 are examples of such inability of the major countries whose claims of being foolproof systems proved to be a horrible nightmare.

There is no denying the fact that state terrorism has always harboured anti-state terrorism. On the other hand, foreign interventions and occupations on independent countries has generated reactionary political orientations and extremist expressions, particularly religion has been co-opted in these occupied countries to reinforce the sentiments of resistance groups (Veena, 1998). In this regard, Afghanistan and Iraq present an interesting microcosm of the larger scenario on mainland Asia. In both the countries, American-led allied forces are facing the burnt of religion-based activism in the form of bomb blasts, shootings, kidnappings and missile attacks on helicopters and other war machines. Dozens of militant organizations in total collaboration with the world's most dreaded organization, Al-Qaeda are regularly producing pamphlets, magazines, video compact discs (Vcds) and audio tapes and circulating among general public calling for Jihad against foreign occupation troops in these countries. Therefore, the level of resistance is increasing day by day as well as in the number of killing of foreign occupation troops (Rahat, 1999). This vulnerability is expected to result in the opening up of opportunities for reactionary forces in other parts of the world, thereby increasing the chances of terrorism. Such developments are indeed serious because in case of any proficient terrorist group's access to weapons of mass destruction will either result in a broad-scale unconventional war or increase the risk of such a war. The

major countries of the world, therefore, need to abstain from adopting only violent strategies in the “war against terrorism”.

Terrorism and Pakistan

Pakistan like other countries of the world as well as in the region has faced the spectre of terrorism as a central and very dangerous political phenomenon, which has been a threat to its governance as much as to its social system. Pakistan has faced the varied onslaughts of terrorism since the inception of the country (Malcolm, 2004). It has happened for a variety of reasons — perpetrated by tyrannical and oppressive dictatorial governments, groups of insurgents, oppressive cultural norms and traditions, ideological confrontations, religious differences, the native versus the settler, urban against the rural interests and majority versus the minority. Furthermore, socio-economic factors such as poverty, hunger, backwardness, unemployment, illness and political victimization created inhuman conditions and gave rise to the need to break the shackles of extreme want through extreme actions. The basic differences in motive and function make it possible to speak of particular brands of terrorism, which are political, religious, ethnic, sectarian, ideological, language-based, rooted in cultural differences and so on, all using coercive intimidation to achieve some specific objectives. All of these can be found in all the urban, rural and tribal areas of Pakistan. Armed resistance put up by Baloch and Pukhtoon communities are making it more complex day by day.

As in other countries of the world, “Urban terrorism” has haunted the country’s metropolitan cities, as a destabilizing force for its structures of governance (Christopher, 2003). Human trafficking as bonded labour and prostitution remains wide-spread and terrorist organizations use these networks for their under-cover assignments. Pakistan, like elsewhere, has also become the stage for dreadful demonstrations as international state-sponsored terrorism competes with transnational Islamic extremism portraying this sorry saga. Although Pakistani governments, past and the present, have claimed to be “democratic” and “unbiased”, nevertheless, these regimes have routinely ignored constitutional limits on their power and deprive the masses particularly peripheries of the basic rights and freedoms. In such a scenario governance is marked by strong executives, weak legislatures, controlled judiciaries and a few civil and economic liberties in practice. Centralization of authority thus produces grim results as victims react by adopting all illegal and unconstitutional means (Dibesh, 2004).

As a matter of fact, the causative factors of terrorism on the Pakistan scene have their roots in the socio-economic inequalities and politically manipulative processes. There has been a sharp rise in inter-personal crimes in local affairs protected by politicians, bureaucrats and other high ranking officials. Kidnapping for ransom, car lifting, illegal occupations of property and political assassinations have become organized crimes carried out by vested interests or as political vendetta (Jessica, 2003). The heavy corruption of personage in high places and among those entrusted with the reins of governance has eroded the moral authority of the state. Nor does the political leadership play a positive exemplary role, with its members known to be loan defaulters,

tax evaders or those engaged in stashing money abroad and other forms of misuse of their privileges and positions of power. While their own misdoings have led to loss of their prestige and credibility among the public, they in turn have resorted to a systemic increase in terrorist activities in running the affairs of the state and the management of power.

Hence, it is not surprising that the aggrieved or the victimized recognize that nothing except violence can help them from social or political oppression. Moreover, terrorist organizations, state and non-state sponsored alike, rely heavily on hundred of thousands of medically sick people who hold extremely strong religious and political beliefs, by which they tend to rationalize and legitimate their delusional thoughts (Rasheed, 2003). These thoughts originate in personal, physical or psychological factors and gradually become a motivation for terrorism. The recent acts of terrorism in Pakistan, which combined utter ruthlessness and self-sacrificial dedication with a fanatic belief in the justification of destructive acts, have raised the question of whether any amicable option or violence and counter-violence measures are appropriate, effective and realistic (Michael, 2004). The terrorist's motto is "Destroy in order to Save". Could it be countered with an equally simplistic and terrorist response, "In order to save, destroy the destroyers"? The state ought to know that remediable injustice, the basic motivation for terrorism, has multiplied in modern times because both the awareness of injustice and a belief in the availability of remedies have increased enormously. The successive waves of terrorism are logical local expressions coupled with foreign conspirational master plans taking the benefit of mismanagement and failures of our state in providing social justice to the downtrodden masses.

Conclusion

Terrorism has become a handy catch-all word to disguise a multiplicity of deeds and motivations of individuals and groups. Modern day terrorism is more direct and frightening, encompassing the personal and political grievances against the state or particular community. From serial killers to messianic terrorist groups, all are subjects of modern terrorism and their agenda is waging wars of terror, chaos and turmoil. Therefore, in curbing terrorism or taking anti-terrorism measures, countries of the world including Pakistan need to draw up such concrete plans which should lead to enduring peace and stability. It would be of interest to take the following suggestions into consideration.

The countries of various regions of the world should setup a joint or central authority to speedup information exchange while maintaining confidentiality regarding unlawful activities. By strengthening internal cooperation among governments involved in counter-terrorism, a practical training of staff to prevent all forms of terrorist actions including the use of radio active, chemical, biological and toxic substances should be arranged urgently. To take measures to counter financing of terrorist groups directly or indirectly and to consider regulatory measures to stop movement of funds suspected of being indented for terrorist organizations, will further improve the anti-terrorism

campaign. Also adopting effective domestic laws on the manufacture, trade and transport of firearms and explosives to prevent their use by terrorists will help the government to tackle this uncontrollable menace.

In the end, to combat terrorism effectively, the powerful countries will have to revise their global strategies by ending the tendency of expansionism and every country, whether small or big will have to evolve a responsive socio-political system which guarantees basic rights of all, the down trodden communities in particular.

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