



Terrorism and Its Related Psycho-Social Factors: An Integrated Review Paper

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to build a thorough understanding and causes of terrorism. It discusses probable psychological and sociological factors for terrorist activities. Paper elaborates the presence of psychopathologies and cultural influences that harbor mindsets of terrorist individuals. It also highlights the relationship between religion and violence, and elaborates the impact of media and its role for terrorism. The identification of psycho-social factors linked with terrorism and violence serve as a way to better understand the phenomenon. This is likely to promote peace, harmony and love in Pakistani society.

Keywords: terrorism, religion, media, psychological, social factors.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has become a major issue of present century that rattled whole society. It has badly affected the psyche of common man from mezzo to macro levels. In Pakistan, during past few decades terrorism became a serious concern for every individual. Research alluded that during past five years there is an upsurge of violent activities in Pakistani society which included explosions, terrorist attacks, explosions and break of other safety measures inflicted massive damages (Khalily, Fooley , Hussain & Bano, 2011). During past four years there has been 6072 fatalities which occurred due to terrorist activities (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2012), such havoc rate of killings are continuing to gain its momentum till date. These external stressful situations of country inoculated insecurities among Pakistani population. These factors provided a backdrop for present study and created a need to carry out present investigation about the issue in hand in our Pakistani society. Though the issue of terrorism has been focal interest for political leaders, sociologists, philosophers and other research scholars current inquiry aspires to explore personal and societal dimensions for terrorist actions.

Present paper aims to unravel individual mindsets, its precursors and causes which predispose individuals to take part in terrorist activities. It describes the factors which propel individuals to involve in criminal activities. This leads to describe the role of religion for terrorist acts and the power of media for the terrorist acts. Paper also discusses counter terrorist measures to shield against violence. This not only enhances sociopolitical and economic conditions of country but also contributes to adopt and devise preventive measures to ameliorate terrorism in our country. This would likely aids to serve as an initial effort to understand the psychological and sociological factors linked

with problem of terrorism. Also present effort in our Pakistani culture served as an initial guide for mental health professionals, researchers and concerned individuals to carry out related exploration in future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Different authors, social scientists and political leaders saw terrorism with their own unique lenses. Agreeable and acceptable definition is necessary to articulate the phenomenon of terrorism. Experts from Terrorism Research Center described terrorism in different ways. They perceived terrorism as the use or threatened use of force designed to bring about political change or an intimidation with some purpose in which terror is meant to cause others to do things they would otherwise not do. Similarly, P. Igor (2004) expounded the idea of terrorism as the usage of violence by terrorists which directed against persons or property for the sake of meeting political objectives.

Interestingly, according to an early classification system, Hacker (1976) divided terrorists into three categories – crusaders, criminals, and crazies. The ‘crusaders’ are the most ideologically driven of terrorists, motivated by their devotion to their cause, whether Islamic jihad or neo-Nazism. They served as the focal points of the group, adhere to group rules and plan strategies against enemies. ‘Criminals’ are the violent individuals in search of an excuse to express their antisocial impulses through acceptable and noble cause. They are typically the least ideologically committed to the group, may easily change venues under the influence of new and better opportunities to practice their aggressive instincts. ‘Crazies’ suffer from mental disorder. They are rootless, anomic, and disgruntled. They can easily attract to the anchoring philosophical conviction of many extremist groups and, if their psychopathology can be channeled for the group’s purposes, they may play useful roles within the terrorist organizational structure.

Typology of terrorism is controversial and somewhat complicated. T. J. Badey (1998) defined that terrorism involves aggression against non-combatants and the terrorist action in itself is not expected by its perpetrator to accomplish a political goal but instead to influence a target audience and change that audience's behavior in a way that will serve the interests of the terrorist.

Terrorism is a purposeful human political activity that aimed to create climate of fear. It also is the force of violence by individuals or groups that is directed toward innocent people to instill fear in order to change political or social positions (Hoffman, 1984). The issue raised moral unacceptability for whatever discourse and reasons as the deliberate attack on civilians is unacceptable under any circumstance; terrorism is not an excusable act for any circumstance (Caleb, 2005).

Transparent inquiry of terrorist behavior falls into two categories i.e. top down approach that search terrorism in political, social and economic circumstances, and bottom up approaches that explore the characteristics of individuals and groups that turn to terrorism (Wieviorka, 1993).

Terrorist activities encircled around intrinsic and extrinsic factors, Ferracuti and Bruno (1981) expounded these facets as :(1) ambivalence toward authority, (2) defective insight, (3) adherence to convention, (4) emotional detachment from the consequences of their actions, (5) sexual role uncertainties, (6) magical thinking, (7) destructiveness, (8) low education, and (9) adherence to violent subculture norms.

Economic disparities, political injustice and class discrimination provide fertile options for terrorism. It is an observable fact that rebellions bring into an action when people cannot bear the miseries inflicted on them. Research alluded that there is strong sociological linkage between terrorism and poverty; violence against colonial oppression liberates not only the body but also the self-identity (Fanon, 1965).

Practice of terrorism is diverse, analysis of the term assess wide variety of issues ranged from kidnapping of individuals to indiscriminate bombings in order to furnish political aims. The phenomenon demands fuller diagnosis that ascends from basal to ceiling levels of issue rather than pejorative labeling.

RATIONALE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

We all are living in constant fear of terrorist activities. This instills uncertainty about our own lives and lives of our beloved ones. This

ambiguity creates unrest in society and influences upon foundations of any country. In such cultural milieu it becomes an overdue concern to address and resolve probable exhaustive factors behind terrorist activities.

Routine strikes, bloodsheds, bomb blasts, ethnic rivalries, target killings periodically impinge upon senses of every individuals. Most of us hold hybrid opinions about terrorist activities. Some views often colored by subjective opinions and biases. The present study intends to scientifically evaluate and analyze probable factors behind terrorist acts.

In real senses, we all want shields against violence; hence, in present setup, counter terrorist measures not only enhance sociopolitical and economic conditions of country but also cast positive impact upon lives of common man to reduce fear and doubts related to uncertainty of lives and social conditions.

The present effort aids towards a better understanding of the phenomenon, eradication of preconceived notions, and reduction of crime rates from society. These cumulatively promote peace and harmony in society.

METHOD

Qualitative methodology was adopted for present paper. It includes analytical reviews of papers from periodical journals, magazines, conference proceedings, books and dissertations.

OBJECTIVES

Paper intends to answer some of probable issues revolve around terrorism.

1. To discuss the pathological mindsets of terrorist individuals for engaging in terrorist acts.
2. To identify social and cultural forces for terrorist activities.
3. To identify the role of religion in terrorism and violent activities.
4. To identify the role of media in terrorism and violent activities.

PROCEDURE

Numbers of primary researches were reviewed. Information was obtained from research articles, reviews on seminars, various articles from print and electronic media. Opinions about subject matter from people from different socioeconomic, educational and political strata were incorporated. Author's common observation also aided towards understanding and analysis of phenomenon.

ANALYSIS

Pathological Mindsets of Terrorist

Terrorism, the most feared and catastrophic concept which evidently has shaken foundations of every society, is seen as a major issue of the present century. We can find traces of terrorism and violence since before the dawn of history (Merari & Friedland, 1985). Complete understanding of terrorism demands thorough investigations of intersecting dynamics and diverse inter-disciplinary perspective beyond horizons of parochial regimes.

Terrorism excites human passions, and an imagination that weakens or impairs one's logical interpretations mostly leads to responses that are reactive and enraged, instead of being proactive and analytical (Zulaika & Douglass, 1996). In fact, terrorists are actually like containers into which one can project one's unconscious hostility. Terrorism is a very sensitive topic; to set precise and permanent rules for terrorism is a difficult task. Terrorism is signified by suddenness, drama and infuriation; we can assume that it is like a huge shark attack which inflicts shocking impacts on society.

It is a common observation that the general public perceives terrorists as mentally insane, attention seekers and alienated individuals. Certain researches too confirmed that terrorists possess deviated mindsets, like they are incapable of forming meaningful interpersonal relationships on a reciprocal level and are anhedonics.

Terrorists' interpersonal world is occupied by merely three sorts of people i.e. hero, enemy, and people encountered in daily life (Fried,

1982). Other researchers resonated terrorists as those who signified as suffering from interpersonal, parental difficulties in their childhood and adolescence periods (Ferracuti, 1982). This is further confirmed by Walter Laquer (1972), claiming terrorists as “fanatics”, and fanaticism frequently makes cruelty and sadism, whereas the other side of the coin showed some other facts. Heskins (1984) contended that although terrorists are extremely alienated from society alienation does not signify insanity. McCauley & Segal, (1987) showed that terrorist groups does not reveal any psychopathology which is further strengthened by Crenshaw (1981) stating that outstanding characteristic of terrorists is their ‘normality’, whereas another research perceived terrorists as people who are capable to empathize with their victims and find it psychologically stressful to lead a terrorist life style. Copper (1976) named violent individuals as ‘kind hearted terrorist’. In the lines of these scientific findings we can assume that some people with particular personality traits and tendencies are drawn disproportionately towards terrorist careers (Post, 1990).

Social and Cultural Forces for Terrorist Activities

As debate accelerates beyond focus on categorically labeling of psychopaths and normals for terrorists, one can sense that certain preconditions nurture seeds of terrorism and violence. In Pakistan, certain cultures possess peculiar and stereotypical values that celebrate martyrdom, revenge and hatred against other ethnic tribes and local segregations which consequently result into never ending bloodsheds and violent atrocities. In other words, we can say that violence stemmed from those individuals who are bred to hate from generation to generation of ethnic animosity in their blood which transmitted from father to son (Post, 1998).

Moreover, Pakistani culture is stricken by rapid modernization; social changes are so rampant which fosters feelings of uncertainty, powerlessness and frustration among public on broader scale. This globalization tends to outcast certain fragments of social classes threatening to brutally snatch away basic rights and expression of identities, deprivation from participation in economic and political opportunities from oppressed classes in some areas of Pakistan. Such

atmosphere provides fertile ground which opens to gateways of terrors, risks and persecutions. The oppressed groups search alternative channels through which they can express themselves; hence, violence becomes one of the most tempting option for these outcast individuals.

Paul Wilkinson (1977) predicted that disharmony often result into socio political revolutions which accompany ethnic conflicts, ideological conflicts, religious conflicts, political inequalities, modernization stressors, governmental weakness, ineptness; and these lead a nation towards erosion of confidence in a regime.

Dipak K. Gupta (2004) elaborated that political violence takes place when leaders give voice by formulating well defined social constructed identities which paint in vivid colored images of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This could be better explained by the fact that increasing differences between warfare of HAVEs and HAVE NOTs evoke a new era of political violence. As advocated by Robert Gurr (1970) poverty, oppression and inequalities are causes of terrorism; social deprivations are referred to as relative rather than absolute ones.

It is a common observation that it’s a human tendency that inability to achieve what is felt to be justified triggers feelings of frustration; this is ultimately witnessed in the shape of frequent collective violent actions. We can say that heterogeneity and inequalities empowers terrorism and provides possibility of achieving high potential impact with limited means.

In real sense terrorism is a product of rational political choice. Hence, it would be erroneous and an over simplified approach to explain terrorism by a single cause. Terrorism encompasses overarching and multiple components that include psychological, economical, sociological facets. All these facets contribute to ignite violence and terrorist activities.

We also have witnessed that modern globalization has penetrated its roots in most societies; rapid changes have given birth to new needs and anxieties which tend to alter ‘social character’ of societies. This is demarcated by isolation and harsh threats among the people of modern society.

Role of Religion

Another factor to be noted is the role of religion for terrorism. Religion proves to be a sole sparkling hope to overcome emotional insecurities, terrors and risks which dominated a man's life residing in global age. As a result, people actively accept religions and quasi religious ideologies in order to mitigate tensions. This is further validated by Baunam (2004), in response to unconscious denial of wider emotional ties; there is a growing tendency to become more dependent upon external social, cultural frameworks like fundamentalist version of Islam served as immunity against personal isolation and rejection. In other words, social conditions become deeply embedded into human psyche. This propelled people to move from politicized culture to privatized one so they can seek personal solutions to social problems (Lemert & Elliot, 2006).

It is also observed that when traditional norms and social patterns crumble or are made to believe irrelevant, some new radical ideologies based upon religion or perhaps nostalgia for revival of glorious past enchants certain minds. Since a few decades 'Jihad' has become the most feared concept of Islam and Muslims renowned as extremists. This may be due to undue western propagandas, their strong hate and prejudices towards Muslims; this fear is due to covert fear by western individuals for Muslim unity.

Also religious rhetoric and symbols are extensively utilized by warring parties throughout the world; religious based violence have been encountered in almost every popular religion and nearly all sacred books contain some concepts that can be used by people to justify violence. We can say that killing in the name of God has become a divine force for many conflicts all over the world (Larson, 2004).

Here, it an important noted misconception that warrants clarification that "JIHAD" has been mistakenly perceived and interpreted by most people across the world – war against evil is just one meaning of this term. In broader term "JIHAD" refers to an inner struggle against temptations of wrong doings in order to achieve harmony, integration and way to get close to God. Despite western propaganda for Muslims as terrorists and fanatics, it is unwise to overlook the fact that Muslims

all over world are facing political, cultural, economic and religious discriminations. Such conditions breeds poverty, famine, illiteracy and delayed infrastructures due to which terrorist activities seems to be one of the probable option to unite all Muslims into one state and dominate this world.

Moreover, Pakistani society is drifting from collective cultures to individualized cultural patterns; religions become less institutionalized; so, decision making becomes a choice to individuals. Politicization of religion caused individuals to use peculiar forms of logic to fan violence in order to fulfill what they feel misinterpreted violence as God's will. To avoid such fashioned practices there is a dire need to create demarcations of religion as a metaphysical and ethical sacred system from politicized religion as an anti-system revolt shown in religious garb and legitimated by religious language (Tibi, 2008).

Religion contributes in enhancement of peace and integration; religious actors can add their positive roles in prevention of violence and terrorism. Politicization of religions could be ceased through inoculation of unique set of moral values and believes. Moreover, conflict management strategies could also improve across nations by intervention of religions.

Religious liberties and full rights of religious expressions are likely to decrease unrest and instabilities; inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogues dilute threats and ideological competitions. In real sense, religious actors can provide a neutral space for negotiation as they are respected for values they represent and can enjoy credibility, trust, and posses an inherent capacity to mobilize peace process in order to heal and reconcile (Thomas, 2005).

Here we arrive at a point to claim that interpretive apparatus of religion, be it Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism or Islam, is very important in order to find proper and cautious connection between religion and violence. It would be a banal thought that certain religion is violent by considering isolated texts from holy books without considering its full context.

Present analysis suggests that terrorists' acts are individual acts which result from aforementioned diverse factors rather than endorsed by institutionalized traditional religious doctrines and communities. Terrorists are politically conscious individuals who might join a grass root movement rather than a religious fanatic (Pa, 2003).

Role of Media

The power of media cannot be ignored in this connection as it mirrors terrorists' motives and actions nourished in their identities and images. Needless to claim the fact that media publicity is like 'oxygen' for terrorist survival (Muller, Spaaij, & Ruitenberg, 2003, p. 5) whatever media adopts terminology for terrorist activities swiftly becomes primary definitions of social reality. Media not only broadcast information, it intentionally or unintentionally exhibits approvals or disapprovals for particular incidents; it fosters a climate of public support, apathy or anger (Hermann & Hermann, 1998).

One of the most interesting facts is that terrorist groups possess three distinct purposes to interact with media i.e. attention, recognition and legitimacy respectively (Alexander, Carlton, & Wilkinson, 1979). Considering this fact without media coverage impact of violent acts goes waste and becomes narrowly confined to immediate victims of attack rather than reaching a wide range of target audience at whom terrorist violence is actually aimed for.

The present millennium of speed and competition has created difficult times for media to maintain separate identity in presence of clusters of competing channels where all possess appetite to grab bloody images, emotional sound bites and death tools. B. L. Nacos (2006) alluded to this fact that heavy news consumers are more plagued by fear of terrorism than those who did not follow news closely. Considering this notion media coverage of terrorist incidents helps terrorists to frighten public; this brings terrorists' goals closer. On the other hand Brian M. Jenkins (1981) argued that media attention does not lead to an environment need by terrorists; rather, excessive publicity through news media but not propaganda is what terrorists usually want.

Here, the author's aim is not to say that media should stop providing coverage to terrorist activities because if media do not report incidents, rumors may spread; lack of public awareness because of ignorance from current political happenings spreads ambiguity and far more fear due of misinformation than responsible journalists do by truthfully reporting terrorist events. In real practices media cannot refuse to broadcast what actually the news is; all they can do is report incidents responsively and cautiously.

Here, we arrive at a point where we can safely claim that media could play a crucial role in order to achieve and devise fruitful counter terrorist strategies once media understands the fact that terrorists are mainly lures to attract media exposure they could pay utmost care to act with self restraint manner in order to not become part of terrorist machinery.

It is a high time for media professionals to adhere to highest professionals and ethical standards in times of crisis, remain attentive to other people's sensitivities and their probable feelings of uncertainties and fears so they can disseminate accurate, timely and comprehensive information to public; however such practice could only be possible by a temporary curtailment or suspension of certain liberties; in other ways censorship proves to be one of the most important factor (Hocking, 1992).

It is also a well known observed phenomenon that media converge tend to create panic among terrorists; so, in some situations they react impulsively and can kill more people. That's why self regulation becomes one of the good option to counterattack terrorism by which media professionals establish rules for their coverage rather than waiting for some governmental or law enforcing agency to impose censorship on media.

Terrorism has metamorphosed over time so have their motives and causes (Laqueur, 2003). Needless to infer that new terrorism is thought to differ from the old in terms of goals, methods and organization (Hoffman, 1998). The issue of terrorism demands flexible and intelligent approaches to adopt counter terrorist measures.

As previously stated that terrorists commit crime for political reasons, political system has better means to capture and eliminate root causes of terrorism; likewise, certain psychosocial and other factors also possess relevance – reducing support for terrorist groups on local and international level can influence terrorist recruitment pool. It has been proven that terrorism and violence are embedded within a variety of immediate and long term reciprocal relationships for which various actors like government, media, politicians and public are involved. In fact a larger world picture saturated with historical, cultural, and political conditions (Taylor & Horgan, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The present paper untwined the several dynamics of terrorism. It revealed terrorism as a complex issue that involved heterogeneity of temperaments, ideologies, diverse thought processes and distinguished cognitive capabilities. It raised issue for pathological mindsets of terrorist individuals for engaging in terrorist acts. It highlighted terrorists labeled as psychotics however mentally ill and psychotics are not capable to plan and execute plans as terrorists do. However, certain individuals with peculiar antisocial mindsets and personality traits are attracted towards violence. Closer analyses of factors for terrorist activities are necessary to be considered. The common problems associated with terrorist individuals included hidden rages against authority, disturbed family lives, poverty, and deprivation from basic needs. These factors propel even normal individuals to involve in criminal activities. Considering broader spectrum it is hard to draw a sharp line to demarcate terrorists as insane and abnormal.

Another aim of the study was to identify social and cultural forces for terrorist activities. It was diagnosed that social forces in terms of inequalities behind terrorist acts, unequal employment, religious and educational opportunities foster frustration and manifested in terms of violent acts. There is interplay between social injustice and personality predisposition for violent acts. We can say that there is a shared balance between nature and nurture for violence.

The study also raised sensitive issues of the role of religion in violent acts. It was deduced that no religion is inherently violent; rather,

some hypocrites and political leaders use it to furnish their worldly greed.

Media also aids to augment and sustain images of terrorist activities. In such scenario, responsibility lies squarely upon the shoulders of media personnel and government to spread unbiased information in order to get rid of yellow journalism.

In a nutshell, the paper transpired that the nucleus of terrorism comprise of diverse political, social and economic conditions. Terrorist threats are different for different situations. What is relevant today might not be tomorrow. Counter terrorism strategies demand vigilant eyes over all forces including media, individual psyche of terrorists, political, socio economic, and religious factors. So, in long run, we hopefully would be able to achieve integrity, love, tolerance and peace across all over world.

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