

TO THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION OF “TERRORISM”

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This article is aimed to develop a brief understanding of the definitional aspects associated with terrorism. It can be articulated that a fundamental cornerstone for any investigation, necessitates defining of the concept, so that proper light can be shed on the theoretical and practical ramifications associated with the concept. It has already been seen from the investigation conducted so far that terrorism is a multidimensional terminology that is subject to divergent interpretations that make quantification as well as development of universal legal frameworks to tackle it an arduous task.

After the horrendous attacks of 9/11 and the associated destruction and loss of human life, it can be argued that the world has become more cautious and aware about the evil menace of terrorism and its effects.

Definitions of Terrorism

To being with, it may be articulated that developing a precise definition of the term “terrorism” is problematic as the terminology is multidimensional and cannot be precisely quantified owing to divergent subject interpretations associated with the same. The problem of defining terrorism is further compounded due to two main reasons attributed to this terminology.

Firstly it is argued that terrorism cannot be used to refer to one single activity as it generally can be visualized as a broad umbrella terms that encapsulates various forms of violence and hatred against humanity. The art of making relevant distinction between all those activities that warrant violence would essentially depend upon the investigation of relevant perspectives as to who is making the judgment on and about terrorism. This act of subjective interpretation therefore makes terrorism a highly contentious term that is susceptible to rhetoric and personal, social and political agendas.

Second problem that seems to manifest in relation to terrorism is that there can be no straightjacket classification of an entity as a terrorist for the simple reason that one man’s terrorist might be considered as another man’s hero. This problem of definitional ambiguity in visualizing terrorism and terrorists as devils brings to the forefront the problem of pinpointing who is a terrorist. Can person’s who are genuinely fighting with a just cause for liberating their

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motherland from clutches of tyranny and oppression be classified as terrorists?

In spite of the maze of definitional ambiguities associated with terrorism it would be useful at this stage to outline certain generic definitions of terrorism so that a brief understanding is made of the different subjective interpretations associated with the paradigm of terrorism.

According to the generic definition as forwarded by Oxford Dictionary, terrorism is defined as a system of terror and violence, as violent policy frameworks that are intended to strike terror in those that are against it. In a similar vein from the perspective of Webster's English dictionary terrorism can be defined as the systematic and calculated use of terror and violence to intimidate and subjugate as a political weapon or as a policy.

It is clear from the aforementioned generic perusal of definitions associated with terrorism that only general facets of terrorism are covered and such general analysis does not shed detailed light into the content, nature, scope or overall intent of terrorism or terrorists. It may be noted that such ambiguity and conceptual opaqueness regarding defining terrorism is also evident from the perspective of international government agencies or organizations that are supposed to be dealing with terrorism on a day to day basis.

According to Herman, it is articulated that the ambiguity in defining terrorism is also resonated in both the definitions forwarded by FBI as well as United States Department of Defence. It is stated that while FBI terrorism is defined as the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property, to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives'. US Department of Defence, (DOD) defines terrorism as the calculated use of unlawful violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of political, religious or ideological goals². Clearly the FBI definition is relatively narrower in relation to scope and jurisdiction associated with terrorism whereas the United States Department of Defence classification is much broader taken into its ambit objectives of terrorism which may have connotations such as political, religious or ideological, thus providing a broader expanse of the subjective umbrella term called terrorism.

Apart from the confusion related to terrorism at the systemic or departmental level, it might be noted that part of the conceptual ambiguity associated with terrorism also arises from the word terrorism's etymological roots. It is argued that the etymology of the word terrorism derives from the French word "terrorism" and was allegedly coined by Edmund Burke to

² Herman S., "The USA Patriot Act and the U.S. Department of Justice: Losing Our Balances." Jurist, 2001, pp. 23-56.

describe the *Reign of Terror* in France during the 1790s that occurred under rule of the Jacobins and Robespierre. From the perspective of even Robespierre at the time of the French revolution terrorism seemed to have greater resonance in perpetration of force and violence used by the state against its civilian. In this regard therefore, terrorism or violence perpetrated by civilians against the oppressive French regime could be seen as a positive force for change in society, reaffirming and consolidating the modern, democratic French Republic. Thus, ironically the coinage of the term of terrorism was not pejorative in any sense rather meant to convey remarkable revolutionary changes through the usage of violence and threat against the state per se. Modern usage of the term terrorism has resulted in its application to non state actors because it is assumed that these non state actors do not control any monopoly for conducting acts of violence and so terrorism has slowly adopted its more pejorative face.

Having analyzed the etymological roots of the word terrorism and how it has come to represent a pejorative term in common parlance, let us now briefly analyze some of the common definitions that have been ascribed to terrorism from individual perspectives that has further fuelled the debate of lack of transparency and clarity in quantifying terrorism and terrorist activities.

According to Brian Jenkins, terrorism is defined as "...the use or threatened use of force designed to bring about political change."³ James M. Poland specifies terrorism as violence against non-combatants by defining it as "...the premeditated, deliberate, systematic murder, mayhem, and threatening of the innocent to create fear and intimidation in order to gain a political or tactical advantage, usually to influence an audience."⁴

Schmid tries to bring some sort of semblance to the ongoing debate associated with quantification and appropriate definition of terrorism by arguing that terrorism can be seen as a "method of combat in which random or symbolic victims become targets of violence. The purpose of terrorism therefore seems to be either to immobilize the target of terror in order to produce disorientation and/or compliance or to mobilize secondary targets of demand or targets of attention"⁵.

From the aforementioned analysis of terrorism it can be generically inferred

³ Jenkins, B., International terrorism. (Publication #MR-989-AF). Santa Monica: RAND. 2005, pp. 12-40.

⁴ Poland, J., Understanding Terrorism: Groups, Strategies, and Responses. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall., 1988, pp. 33-39.

⁵ Schmid, Jongman, Political Terrorism: A New Guide To Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, And Literature. Amsterdam: North Holland, Transaction Books., 1983. PP.67-89.

that the debate for quantifying terrorism is an endless one, it is fraught with myriad problems of account of subjective interpretations. From the investigative analysis so far, it becomes quite evident that though there are a plethora of different definitions put forth for defining terrorism, the potency of definitions and their universal practicality or applicability is severely limited. According to Ibrahim, it can be argued with some degree of certainty that none of the definitions conjured up about terrorism or terrorists per se can be treated as viable for universal adoption or application⁶. Rather most of the definitions forwarded by global community does not sufficiently address critical issues such as explicit intent of terrorists, methods that constitute terrorism, calibration of magnitude of violence in terrorism, differences between government or resistance terrorism, legitimacy of terrorism and its linkage with crime or its justification with acts of war.

Conceptual maze surrounding terrorism:

So far from the investigation it can be deduced that terrorism is a highly loaded term that is extremely subjective and open to divergent interpretations. The divergences associated with terrorism especially in relation to its content, nature and scope of terrorism have exacerbated manifold the challenges associated with defining terrorism as a paradigm per se. Therefore, from the the perusal of the aforementioned dictionary derivatives of terrorism, it can be clearly gauged that terrorism as a paradigm begs definition as the present derivatives only relate to a superficial knowledge about terrorism and its intent.

While from the etymological perspective, argument can be posited that terrorism derives from the French word "terrorism". This is coined during the French revolution and the time of perpetration of Jacobean terror. Nevertheless, in common parlance the meaning of terrorism seems to be the recent usage of violent activities by terrorist organizations that want to further their personal, political and economic agendas on notions of ideological and religious frameworks.

Another area for definitional ambiguity associated with terrorism is that in general terrorism refers only to acts of violence and hatred by groups of civil society members and constituents rather than acts of terror and vendetta that are perpetrated by powerful states. This creates complication in conceptually defining terrorism, because while on hand terrorism is supposed to be spread by individual elements or groups, on the other hand state sponsored acts of terror go unnoticed and are not categorized under the general rubric of terrorism. For if this dichotomy was revealed then emphatically it could be

⁶ Ibrahim, I., "On Guerilla War and Terrorism." *Orbis*. 2003, pp.12-40.

states that even democratic countries like United States of America could be accused of global terrorism, given the mass rhetorical campaign unleashed by this superpower that has cost millions of innocent lives being totally devastated in Afghanistan Iraq and Palestine. Moreover, states like Israel that have been reprimanded by Global community a great number of times for its erratic and disproportional usage of violence, would also be heading the list of terror operatives and terrorism abettors.

Secondly, the definitional ambiguities associated with terrorism are amplified because of the overt focus of definitions on the political dimension of terrorism. What needs to be noted is that terrorism is a multidimensional paradigm and relegating its investigation or focus only on political dimensions does not do justice. According to Nguven, it can be strongly argued that along with the political dimensions of terrorism appropriate focus must also be levelled on its social, economic or religious dimensions for making any valid and tenable interpretation from espoused definitions of terrorism⁷.

Thirdly, the divergent interpretations and definitions associated with terrorism also generally look over the need for specifying that terrorism as a genre utilizes violence that needs to be directed against targeting of civilians or non-combatants. This can in some ways clear the unnecessary conceptual hubris that envelopes terrorism as State actors get away with impunity from being named as terrorists or terror operatives, because the usage of violence is considered to be a monopoly right of the state even if it does so against innocent civilians and non combatants. The convenient expression of collateral damage is often used to masquerade the acts of global war and terror perpetrated by modern day superpowers such as United States in Iraq, Vietnam and Afghanistan and China in Tibet and Taiwan.

Fourthly, weakness of terrorism definitions get further amplified because of the lack of clear distinction created between intent and motives of terrorists. According to Fahudi, the most important plank for creating the relevant divergence between different definitions associated with terrorism is to clearly quantify the distinction between intent and motives of terrorists and terror operators⁸. It has been argued that while the motive refers to the reason underlying for an individual or a group to engage in a particular act, the intent focuses on the specific selection of conscious objectives or purposes that necessitates adoptions of specific strategies and frameworks by terrorists and terror organizations. In context of even state powers, it can be argued that while

⁷ Nguven, P, *Myriad Challenges of Terrorist; A new era of global warfare*, Preston Publications, 2005. pp.14-18

⁸ Fahudi, M., *Terrorism: A new awakening*, Pregmanon Publications,1998, pp.12-30.

the motive of global war on terror was to retaliate against terror operatives. Hiding in Afghanistan the intent seemed to be far more intricate of providing a leveraging tool by which United States could engage in unjustified wars in the oil rich Middle East nations so that its hunger for oil can be satiated.

Moreover, it can be argued that definitions of terrorism are complicated further because of their failure in developing a specific blue print for identification of who the terrorist is. Unfortunately, in categorization of terrorism since perspective and point of view becomes important, terrorism as a paradigm emerges as a double-edged sword that can be used by and against any individual nation or state that is engaging in acts of violence on pretext of political, social or economic parameters. Therefore, the line distinguishing between terrorism and freedom fighters becomes even more obscure.

Furthermore, it has been argued that while utilization of violence seems to be a common necessary axiom for terrorism and terrorism, all forms of violent activities cannot be grouped or categorized as terrorist activities. In this context according to Razak, it is argued that terrorism and radical activists or even guerrilla fighters cannot be classified under the same rubric. While terrorism focuses on creating psychological erosion, guerrilla fighters and radical activists focus on mainly physical attrition of the enemy⁹.

Similarly, while guerrilla fighters aim for control of territory, limit their focus of war to country in strife and have some sort of international legality and acceptance of their justness in fighting. Terrorists on the other hand, do not seek to control territory, and engage in often symbolic targets where victim is only a means to wider political, sociological or economic gains and have no recognition of international legality.

These areas do help to highlight the distinction between freedom fighters, martyrs and terrorist individuals or states.

Given the aforementioned conceptual challenges, it can be inferred that it is not surprising therefore in understanding why a single universalistic definition of terrorism cannot be created.

Analysis of Terrorism Trends:

Having analyzed conceptual and definitional maze surrounding terrorism, it would pertinent at this stage to broadly analyze the generic trends associated with terrorism so that a broad historical and contextual background can be created.

Analysis of trends of terrorism over the different cycles of modern period can be considered pertinent for our present investigation because it would help

⁹ Razack, S., Geopolitics, culture clash, and gender after September 11 // Social Justice Review, 32(4), 2005, pp. 15-17.

highlight the so called trajectory adopted by paradigm of terrorism and how it has shaped and evolved over the recent times.

However, what needs to be noted at the outset is that terrorism has shown a significant multitude of variations both in the context of statistical figures provided as well as in the context of its content, nature and scope that has evolved over the years. Nevertheless, its basic premise of usage of violence and inflicting harm to non-combatants and civilians has held steady throughout the different genres associated with terrorism and terrorism activities. Of course the strategies used, ideological frameworks utilized and modus-operandi adopted has continuously changed and evolved.

Prior to embarking on the analysis of terrorism trends it needs to be noted that terrorism by itself is a new paradigm and has continued to exist in some form or the other under different garbs of nomenclature from the very earliest of times that human civilization was created.

However, with the increase of global awareness today, and to some extent due to the hype created by Global war on terror, terrorism as a phenomenon and a paradigm has assumed a pedestal of strategic importance, not only in the psyche of the global audience but also in the economic, political and social agendas of many national and international agencies and governments.

It has been argued that between 1960 to 1980 mode of international terrorism was primarily dominated by the genre of nationalist, separatist, racist, and nihilist groups whose primary focus was on creating destruction for carving out their own social, economic and political niche that could satiate their nefarious demands and objectives.

However, from the period of 1980s with the decline of the left parties and groups especially in the European context as well in the context of the global stage, terrorism paradigm started to sway more towards religious fanaticism or fundamentalists as interpreted by Western Regimes.

In a similar vein, it has also been argued that this period could be categorized as a period wherein there was greater sharing of intelligence between the EU nations and the global community started to integrate more closely than ever before. However the domination by the western nations in hijacking agenda of terrorism still remained highly visible in the aforementioned period.

From the perusal of data furnished by the United States Department of Defence, it can be analyzed that while the total number of terrorists' attacks peaked in 1987 with almost 670 attacks reported, thereafter there has been a steady decline in international terrorism per se. However, it may be noted that whilst the trajectory of terrorism attacks has by and large declined in this period, there were small peaks in terror activities that were observable in the years of

1991, 1995 and 2000. From the perspective of similar data furnished by RAND/MIPT Data it can be gauged that a similar trajectory of decline in terrorism was reported for the period in question, although the RAND/MIPT data indicates that there was an increase in terror activities in years 1998 and 1999.

Furthermore it has been argued that from the geographical perspective of terrorism distribution investigation between 1996-2001, Latin America was the region that was worse affected by terrorism accounting for almost 200 attacks. This was by far the greatest number of attacks that any region had faced during the period in question. Moreover it can be revealed that while terrorism on a general declined on the international stage during the period of 2001, prior to Sept. 9/11 attacks in context of Latin America no such reprieve was there.

Region wise second region that was most effected by terrorist incidents and activities was Europe, where international terrorism peaked in the year 1996 with 121 incidents being reported.

The third worst effected region was Asia and Africa wherein almost 98 attacks of terrorism were reported in 2000. After Asia and Africa the regional distribution indicates that the region that was affected with the most terrorist attacks was Middle East wherein 1996, 45 international terrorist attacks were reported while interestingly it can be observed that North America had experience no terrorist attacks in 1996, 1998 and 2000.

All the aforementioned data clearly indicates that North America was more or less isolated and insulated from global terrorist attacks; as a result it produced a knee jerk reaction by immediately jumping into a rhetorical war on global terror when its own citizens were threatened by international terrorists on its soil in Sept 2001. The knee jerk reaction as performed by USA was partly motivated by a spirit of retaliation and partly motivated by colonialist expansion policies in the modern world. In order to leverage the power of anti terrorism and the opportunity that such attack provided to America, US policy makers left no stone unturned to jump into the bandwagon of over enthusiastic terrorism haters

Positively from the investigation of terrorism trends, it can be noted so far that North America was relatively immune from incidents of international terror. Moreover, with terrorism unfolding its wings in almost all the regions of the world, United States was never interested in finding a permanent solution to terrorism or threat of international terrorists because it remained secure and isolated as always from global community and global thinking. International terrorist attacks of 9/11 have often been referred as a significant watershed event in the history of terrorism because it changed the view and perceptions associated with terrorism as it affected a global superpower in its own soil and had completely diffused the concept of overwhelming military superiority of United States of America.

In declaration of the war on terror and in undertaking the rampant discriminatory action against Arabs and the Islamic world, George Bush and his cronies managed to create a new sensitive zone of terrorists and terrorism in the heart of Middle East region.

As seen from investigation earlier the number of terrorist incidents in the Middle East region were well below that of the other international regions , nevertheless the battle of rhetoric indulged by America made Middle East region and its inhabitants as the ultimate protagonists of terrorism and terror per se. According to Jameel, the orchestration of terrorist attack of 9/11 was part of a much larger Zionist design that facilitated the intrusion of United States in the oil rich regions of Middle East for virtual humiliation and annihilation of Iraq, a possible threat to Israel¹⁰.

During this time, it is interesting to note that the initial data released, by United States department of defence for the period between 2001- 2003 did show a 45% decrease in number of international terrorist incidents and attacks. However, this data had to be changed back because it was statistically manipulated by clubbing both significant and insignificant terrorist attacks to show that there had been an actual decline of terrorist activities between the period mentioned above to buttress the successful intervention of United States of America through its global war on terror. However, as the analysis of the data supplied by RAND/MIPT shows that if significant terrorist incidents are taken into account, then the false claims perpetrated by United States department of Defence are exposed; terrorism instead of declining in the aforementioned period had increased by almost 38% indicating a significant increase of terrorism, initiated by ham handed management of international terrorism by United States of America.

It is argued by Lacquer, that the hype of global war on terror and invasion and occupation of Islamic countries by United States of America on the pretext of terrorism was a convenient charade created by America to further its modern day colonial expansionism and facilitated the usage of financial resources put forth by Zionist regimes. The fact that international terrorism has only increased in 2001-2003 period, even after launching of global attack on terror provides emphasis to the fact that USA has mishandled the situation. In doing so has resulted in agitating the hornets' nest of terror and has provided new terror organizations with greater ideological, emotional and empathic zeal to forward their fight with United States and its civilians or the global community in general¹¹.

¹⁰ Jameel, M. *Israel and Terrorism : A global conspiracy*, Mathew Publications, 2004, pp.1-30

¹¹ Lacquer W., *The New Terrorism*, Oxford University Press. 1999, pp.14.

From the recent data gathered from NCTC in 2004 and 2005; it can be gauged that number of terrorist attacks had increased during these two years very sharply from almost 700 attacks to a high figure of 1200 attacks. What is more pertinent to observe is that along with the increase in the number of terror attacks there has been a tremendous increase in the very lethality of terrorist with number of fatalities increasing from 9,231 to 14,546 in 2005.

According to White, what is interesting to observe in the number of fatalities of terrorism is that these data never do include the attacks on innocent civilians covered under the camouflage of state sponsored terrorism such as the one perpetrated by United States on Iraq and Afghanistan¹².

In a similar vein the report released by NCTC in 2008, does indicate that there has been an increase of terrorism by almost 25% from between the period of 2006-2008 as well as the increase in lethality of attacks has increased by approximately 55%.¹³

From the analysis of the data furnished by NCTC report of 2008, it can be seen that of the 15,650 international terrorist attacks that took place globally, 65% of these attacks were based in Iraq and out of the total terror fatalities during this time of 22,5000, 69% of the fatalities were all concentrated in the Iraq region¹⁴.

Therefore, clearly from the analysis of the data it can be revealed that terrorism threat has become significantly amplified because of the ham handed policies pursued by United States and in its illegal invasion of Iraq, and destabilization of Iraq and the Pandora's Box of terrorism has been unleashed on the global community. According to Williams, United States launch of global war on terror was part of its specially calculated tactics of imperialist expansion because otherwise it would not have provided United States with the leverage of creating permanent bases in the oil rich regions of the globe¹⁵.

Thus, in conclusion the present research has delved into important theoretical and conceptual facets associated with terrorism and the rise of terrorism as the new global menace that can threaten the very fabric of international peace, stability and security. This article has highlighted the different definitions associated with terrorism. It has also outlined the conceptual difficulties in developing precise quantifiable measurement of the term terrorism because of the conceptual maze that surrounds the content,

¹² White, J. *Terrorism: An Introduction*, (3rd Ed), Thomson Learning Publications, 2003, p. 38.

¹³ National Counterterrorism Center, 2008 Report on Terrorism, <https://fas.org/irp/threat/nctc2008.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Williams, D., *Hobbes and Terrorism // Critical Review*, 21:1, 2009, pp. 91-108

nature, scope and type of terrorism. The article has also outlined the modern trends associated with terrorism especially in the perspective of the post World War II era.

«ԱՀԱՐԵԿՉՈՒԹՅԱՆ» ՍԱՀՄԱՆՄԱՆ ԽՆԴՐԻ ՃՈՒՐՋ
Մոհամմեդ Հաջ Իբրահիմ
(Ամփոփագիր)

Սույն հետազոտությունը՝ խորանալով ահաբեկչության և ահաբեկչության ահագնացող չափերի հետ կապված տեսական և հայեցակարգային կարևոր կողմերի ուսումնասիրության մեջ, թույլ է տալիս նկարագրել այն որպես նոր գլոբալ սպառնալիք, որը կարող է նշանառության տակ առնել միջազգային խաղաղության, կայունության և անվտանգության ինստիտուտները:

Սույն հոդվածում ընդգծվել են ահաբեկչության տարբեր սահմանումներ: Փորձ է արվել ուրվագծել «ահաբեկչություն» եզրույթի ճշգրիտ քանակական չափման, մշակման հայեցակարգային դժվարությունները՝ հաշվի առնելով ահաբեկչության բովանդակության, բնույթի, շրջանակների և դրա տեսակը բնութագրող հասկացության խառնաշփոթը:

Հոդվածում նախանշվում են նաև ահաբեկչության ժամանակակից միտումները, հատկապես Երկրորդ համաշխարհային պատերազմից հետո ընկած ժամանակահատվածում: