

Chapter 8

The what/where/how of terrorism been in the 21st century

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Abstract: What do we define as terrorism, how does the want to commit acts of terrorism manifest. Power paradigms shifting, the want for political recognition, whilst subjugated to intolerable conditions, the desire for the voice of a population that wishes to be heard. MalcomX, the leader of the Black Panthers once said “Violence is the screams of the silenced and unheard.” The majority of terrorism occurs in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) top five, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Syria. Terrorism has continued to fall in terms of attacks perpetrated and casualties even in the most affected regions. Terrorism still remains the biggest threat to global peace in the 21st century and should not be taken lightly. As terrorism is in itself an act that is unpredictable, vigilance and caution should be considered highly. As the future is uncertain we cannot be certain of where and when the next “9/11” will take place or in what form it will present itself, we do see patterns emerging in regions of Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The numbers are alarming and monitoring of the regions geo-political climate should be a priority or nation states.

Key Words: Terrorism, Power Paradigms, Mass Media Coverage, Political Targets, Technology, Religious, Extremist, Sahel, South East Asia, Nigeria.

Introduction

This paper focuses on terrorism in the twenty first century, examining how we define it, how it comes to fruition and what makes a terrorist attack successful. We can identify one of the main factors for the emergence of terrorism as the shifting of power paradigms, the lack of understanding amongst human beings and the realisation that terrorism is a natural phenomenon of the human species, there will always be the establishment and those who oppose. More than ninety percent of terrorism currently

occurs in the Southwest region of Asia as well as sub-Saharan Africa, these are the leading countries of the Global Terrorism Index GTI). As researched through the GTI and Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TESAT) the records show that terrorism is on the decline since it peaked in 2014. However, for the past twenty years, Southwest Asia and Sahel region has seen a steady rise in terrorism, identified as the most affected regions of the world. Terrorism is a phenomenon that relies on the shock of people as well as the mass media coverage of terrorist attacks and their political targets. The potential emergence of terrorist hotspots in Southeast Asia and the Sahel region in Africa is a topic of growing interest that analysts of the topic of terrorism should keep tabs on.

What is terrorism?

The act of terrorism is a phenomenon that is an intrinsic part of the human species, spurring from the frustrations of groups and individuals. This frustration is caused by shifts in power paradigms, usually occurring after the collapse or fall of an empire, colony, or state³¹². An example of this would be the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990's or the withdrawal of the United Kingdom's control of India, the latter case being especially problematic³¹³. The region that was once a colony of the British Empire was divided by the religious boundary of the Indian subcontinent² rather than by cultural or physical boundaries. To this day India remains in disarray, riddled with conflicts and violence as cultural groups are separated and divided by national borders².

Following the collapse or fall of an empire, colony, or state, governments of these nations are often unwilling to budge or compromise as they are led by rival groups and cultures. This causes tensions to rise in these nations as terrorist (separatist) organisations operate in the areas defying

³¹² Cronin, A.K., 2003. Behind the curve: Globalization and international terrorism. *International security*, 27(3), pp. 30–58.

³¹³ RealLifeLore (2020) "Why Pakistan's Geography Sucks", accessed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTPf13OneUQ&t=592s> [08/10/2020].

government laws². The lack of integration of minority groups in societies that are governed by the majority, often leaves people feeling oppressed, and helpless, all of which can push them to resort to the radical use of violence¹.

The paradigm between the haves and the have nots, those with power and those without power, causes the conflicts that we see today in the region of South Asia. Bruce Hoffman's defines terrorism as the act of violence to instil fear, deliberate, politically motivated use of force or violence with intention to influence the public opinion "violence perceived as directed against society-whether it involves the activities of antigovernmental dissidents or governments themselves, organized-crime syndicates, common criminals, rioting mobs, people engaged in military protest, individual psychotics, or lone extortionists".

Since the beginning of the 21st century mass media has made communication and worldwide communication more accessible, through the public's access to the internet people can instantly access information that they desire. Accordingly, terrorist organisations also have access to the widespread knowledge available on the internet – whether an organised terrorist organisation or a lone terrorist wishing to inflict terror upon the civilian population, they can now do so with ease³¹⁴.

Video recordings have been used by terrorist actors and by bystanders in recent years, making the mass exposure of acts of terrorism more widespread than ever before³¹⁵. The globalisation of the world has given western societies a wider perspective on the world, however western society and its citizens lack the knowledge and objectiveness to differentiate the society that they live in from the society that they are observing³¹⁶.

³¹⁴ Cronin, A.K., op.cit., pp. 30–58.

³¹⁵ Kydd, A.H. and Walter, B.F., 2006. The strategies of terrorism. *International security*, 31(1), pp. 49–80.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

Where is terrorism occurring?

Terrorism is a global phenomenon. In the 1970s, terrorism was commonplace on the continent of Europe mainly due to the activities of the IRA and RAF in Northern Ireland that arose from the religious and ethnic tensions in the region. As of the 21st century the area most affected by terrorism has been the Southwest region of Asia. Over the past twenty years the region has accounted for 93 percent of all deaths from terrorism. Four of the top five countries affected by terrorism are located in the Southwest region of Asia: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria. Since 2002, these countries, along with Nigeria, have had the highest number of terrorist activity in the world. As of 2020, these five countries are still the most affected countries by terrorism³¹⁷. This region experienced a large power vacuum when the United Kingdom joined the European Union in 1973. As was previously mentioned the region was separated upon religious lines, leading to the current problems that riddle the region to this day.

This does not mean that these acts of terrorism are successful as a key element of terrorism is to spread terror amongst the civilian population, the shock factor that we see so often in western society when an act of terrorism is due to the lack of said terrorist attacks occurring. Unlike in South-east Asia, the Western world was shocked by the Paris attacks of 2015, the Charlie Hebdo shooting and the Manchester arena bombing in 2015 since they are not commonplace. For this reason there was extensive media coverage at the time³¹⁸. Giving the terrorist organisations that perpetrated the attacks exactly what they need for the terrorist attack to be successful, the spread of terror through the civilian population through mass media. As is stated by Abrahms in *Why terrorism does not work* terrorist organisations and individual terrorist actors target citizens of states to show that the state is weak and cannot protect its citizens from the terrorists, when the

³¹⁷ Index, G.T., 2018. Measuring the impact of terrorism. *Institute for Economics & Peace*. November. URL: <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf> (accessed: 04.02. 2019).

³¹⁸ Ibid.

governments of states give concessions to the terrorist organisations after events where there are citizen casualties this reenforces the idea to terrorist organisations to target more citizens in the future.

The United States (US) is seen as the leader and defender of the free world. Since the second world war the US has continued to increase its presence internationally³¹⁹. This has been a double edged sword for the US since it is now more than ever in the lime light as the leading global power, while at the same time giving terrorist organisations an incentive to diminish and obstruct the US' agenda through different tactics – attrition, intimidation, provocation, serving as spoilers and outbidding³²⁰. Attrition tactics try to persuade the enemy that the terrorists can inflict considerable costs if a policy continues³. Intimidation tactics try to scare the population and present the appearance that the government cannot stop the terrorists, the government is too weak and not fit to stop the terrorists nor lead the people³. Provocation tactics attempt to make an enemy overreach in response/ retaliation to terrorists' attacks, the indiscriminate violence radicalises populations to join the terrorists in the future³. Spoiler tactics are used by making the moderates that wish to achieve peace look untrustworthy to the civilian population and the goal they wish to achieve as out of reach³. Finally, outbidding tactics focus on showing that the resolve of the terrorists is stronger than that of the enemies, therefore you should support them rather than anyone else³²¹.

The policy of high international presence was initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, due to the conflict between the US and USSR after the second world war and throughout the Cold War. Roosevelt believed in the domino theory, this theory claims that if a domino falls the dominos around it will follow. In this scenario the fall of a nation state to communism would lead to the nation states surrounding to follow suit.

³¹⁹ Cronin, A.K., *op.cit.*, pp. 30–58.

³²⁰ Kydd, A.H. and Walter, B.F., *op. cit.*, pp. 49–80.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

This prompted future presidents of the United States to follow the same international policy. To this day, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and also the former president of the United States Donald Trump have all advocated for a greater American influence over international affairs, this idea was initiated at the start of the new millennium and received impetus after the events of 9/11³²². The existing borders established in the region after colonialism have collapsed to the pre-existing cultural borders causing the current eruption of terrorism in the region and fuelling greater American involvement in the Middle East/ South Asia³²³. The conflict between religious traditions, globalisation, westernisation have elevated the scale of the conflict to splatter onto the global stage with terrorist organisations being active in Europe and North America³²⁴.

Similar to the 1972 Olympics, 9/11 was a black swan event that shook the fabric of the world. In hindsight, it should have been predicted and prevented. 9/11 was the first shock wave of the newest wave of terrorism, “sacred” terrorism, or religious terrorism, identified Christopher C. Harmon in *How Terrorist Groups End* as one of the four main branches of terrorism. Harmon claims that terrorism is the leading threat to long-term stability in the 21st century. Global Terrorism Index statistics confirm these ideas as terrorism has been on the rise for the first two decades of the 21st century³²⁵.

The effectiveness of terrorism remains a highly debated and contested subject since the act of terror is subject to a multitude of factors³²⁶. If a terrorist organisation is looking to destroy an ideology, it is unlikely that the national governments of international states will give any concessions to the terrorist organisation. This point is further elaborated on in Abrahms article on *Why Terrorism Does Not Work*, arguing that states would rather

³²² Cronin, A.K., op.cit., pp. 30–58.

³²³ Ibid..

³²⁴ Ilijevski, I., Babanoski, K. and Dimovski, Z., 2019. Situation and trends of terrorist acts within the European Union.

³²⁵ Jones, S.G. and Libicki, M.C., 2008. *How terrorist groups end: Lessons for countering al Qa’ida* (Vol. 741). Rand Corporation.

³²⁶ Abrahms, M., 2006. Why terrorism does not work. *International Security*, 31(2), pp. 42–78.

give territorial concessions to terrorist organisations⁷. This occurs in the case of most terrorist attacks through the removal of troops from occupied territories and changes to policies³²⁷.

Is terrorism a growing problem?

Through a thorough analysis of the Global Terrorism Index and the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, there has been a steady decline of terrorism since 2014 when rates peaked. Currently, the rate of terrorist attacks are 52 percent lower⁴. The greatest decline in deaths because of terrorism is in Iraq, Syria, and Nigeria, all countries that made the top five of the GTI⁴. This trend shows that countries not in conflict are not the primary targets of terrorist attacks, as is seen in the TESAT report which indicates that the majority of terrorist activities occur in regions that are in conflict. These numbers are also confirmed by the GTI which states that between 2002 and 2018, 93 percent of all deaths from terrorism occurred in South Asia, MENA and in sub-Saharan Africa regions³²⁸.

Through the analysis of the Global Terrorism Index and the TESAT reports it is clear to see that terrorism is not on the rise, we can also deduce that terrorism in Europe, the United States of America and Oceania are the peripheral regions affected by terrorism as it splashes out from the predominantly affected regions³²⁹.

The fall in cases of terrorism in the region can also be attributed to the fall and containment of ISIL in the Iraq and Syria regions, this is predominantly due to the expansive US foreign policy and the recent attack on an ISIL base which resulted in the assassination of the leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Although we do not know the long-term effects of Baghdadi's death on the ISIL organisation, we can see that the short-term outcome has led

³²⁷ Abrahms, M., 2006. Why terrorism does not work. *International Security*, 31(2), pp. 42–78.

³²⁸ Index, G.T., op. cit.

³²⁹ Ibid.

to many of the members leaving the terrorist organisation ISIL trying to return to the nation states that they were originally from³³⁰.

The fall of ISIL has led to a conversation developing around how these “reformed terrorists” should be handled and whether they should be allowed back into their own countries. Other questions posed include how should these people that were indoctrinated be allowed back, could they still be a national threat when they return home. The TESAT report of 2018 claims that there was a total of 653 individuals apprehended and concluded through court that they were guilty of terrorist offences. This rate is a higher than in 2017 (565) and 2016 (580). The report also shows that the number of perpetrated attacks on the continent of Europe has declined, with the number of terrorist attacks in 2017 at 205, while in 2018 the rates decreased to 129³³¹.

Future of terrorism/terrorist organisations

The final point that will be covered in this paper is the recent shifts in the landscape of terrorism, with a focus on the Sahel, South East Asia and the middle belt of Nigeria³³². All of these regions have seen a rise in in terrorist activity from Fulani extremists, separatist organisations and Islamist groups such as Al-Qa’ida and Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) who are in collaboration with each other³³³.

In 2017, ISIL lost more than 80% of its revenue from oil and natural gas fields that they had seized, tax and confiscated goods⁴. This brings the era of the Middle East to an end, as we see that governments are able to stop terrorists and terrorist operations before the acts can be carried out³³⁴.

³³⁰ Marcolini, B., T. Miller, J., Triebert, C. and Hill, E., 2019. How U.S. Forces Bombed ISIS Leader’s Compound. *The New York Times*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/100000006791542/trump-announcement-isis-leader-caught.html>> [Accessed 7 October 2020].

³³¹ Index, G.T., op. cit.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

Terrorism is a constantly moving phenomenon, the statistics of the Global Terrorism Index shows that this phenomenon is moving to the sub-Saharan regions of Africa as well as Maghreb region in North Africa, current data shows that there are over nine thousand active terrorists in the North African region, specifically Libya and Algeria³³⁵. Mali and Niger have also seen rises in terrorist activities, the Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) being responsible for the majority of these attacks³³⁶. There is also evidence that Al-Qa'ida has influence and sway over the terrorist activities that are ongoing in the Maghreb region and the Sahel region³³⁷. Al-Qa'ida and ISIL have also aligned themselves with the grievances of the locals in these regions to solidify their stronghold and undermine the governments in these regions as they lose control of their territories in the Middle East³³⁸.

The rise of Islamist terrorism in Southeast Asia can be attributed to the globalisation of the world, as well as the convenient access of technology³³⁹. In 2016 ISIL-affiliated groups seized control of Marawi City in the Philippines, the siege lasted for five months but ultimately failed³⁴⁰. Although the siege failed, it showed the faults in the Philippine government with its slow response to the new threat⁴. The lack of action as well as the corruption within the Philippine government lead to the majority of the terrorists escaping the law enforcement, regrouping, and continuing their training³⁴¹. This undermining of the state urged ISIL propaganda to push fighters to the Southeast Asian outposts for potential future attacks in the region³⁴².

Myanmar is another country in Southeast Asia that has seen a rise in terrorist activity in recent years (2010 – 2018), unlike the previously mentioned terrorist insurgencies that have been mentioned in this paper. The

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Cronin, A.K., *op.cit.*, pp. 30–58.

³⁴⁰ Index, G.T., *op. cit.*

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

terrorist activities that occur in the Rakhine region of Myanmar are due to ethno-separatist grievances, not ideological ones⁴. It is important to identify that the population under prosecution is a Muslim minority, for this reason there may be a spike in Muslim orientated terrorist groups aligning with the cause that the Rohingya people³⁴³. A similar trend can be seen with the Malay-Muslim Insurgency, although the group is distant from the ISIL- jihadist groups and movements, only seeking to gain independence from the Buddhist government in control of the state³⁴⁴. Since 2011 the separatists have conducted 189 successful terrorist attacks in Thailand, the leaders of the Patani-Malay believe that affiliating with more radical organisations such as ISIL would be “detrimental to the long-term plans of the organisation”³⁴⁵.

The final trend that this paper will cover is the conflict in Nigeria between the Fulani cattle-herders and sedentary farmers³⁴⁶. To give context to the conflict, Nigeria is suffering from desertification as well as harsh side effects of global warming leading to a scarcity of fertile land⁴. This coupled with lack of infrastructure in the agriculture sector of the country, rising tensions between Boko Haram and the government of Nigeria has led to a drastic rise of terrorist activity in the country³⁴⁷. Boko Haram violence has declined drastically³⁴⁸. However, the conflict between the Fulani extremists has steadily continued to climb as nearly two thousand deaths have been attributed to the Fulani extremists in 2018 alone, most of which have been civilian deaths³⁴⁹. Fulani herders are also predominantly Muslim whereas the stationary farmers in Nigeria are predominantly Christian, this adds another dimension to the conflict³⁵⁰. As the conflict continues to grow, there is no plan of a response from the Nigerian government to

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Muro, D. ed., 2018. *When Does Terrorism Work?*. Routledge.

combat or peacefully resolve the issue. The Nigerian government has had great difficulty enforcing its laws in the more rural parts of the country where the majority of the Fulani herders reside³⁵¹.

Conclusion

In conclusion terrorism is an act of violence or use of force to instil fear that is deliberate and politically motivated with the intention of influencing the public opinion through means of mass communication. Terrorism typically occurs in regions where there is a portion of the population that is subjugated to aggravating conditions. This then leads to outbursts of politically motivated violence like that of what we have seen in the Middle East. Terrorism is a phenomenon that occurs wherever there are shifts in political power, as rulers change, those under the ruled feel subjugated and persecuted. The majority of casualties that occur from terrorism are in the Middle East or South Asia. However, statistically the numbers of both attacks and casualties have continuously dropped since they peaked in 2014. Studying the trends that have been emerging over the years we can see a rise in terrorism activity in the Sahel region of Africa as well as in the Southeast region of Asia, these regions are riddled with fundamental faults in the foundations of government as well as with geopolitical issues that the governments of the states seem no closer to solving.

³⁵¹ Ibid.