

What constitutes an act of Terrorism?

Noor Dahri



Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاؤنٹر ٹیرورزم

A terrorist beheads someone to instill fear, to show that they are powerful and to coerce governments and the general population. They coerce governments to pay them or do as they say, or else. To try and turn a nation's citizens against the government and show how weak that nation is. That also coerces the general population to join them because they believe that they are strong and can do anything, and saying anything against them this will result instant retaliation. A drug cartel beheads someone for many the same reasons as a terrorist, but their lust for money and power trumps their ideological beliefs.

Though, drug cartels are kin to terrorists. Terrorists will engage in criminal activity to raise funds, to pay for training, training camps, weapons, recruitment to achieve the political end etc.... Maybe that's an over simplification. Clausewitz, a Prussian general and military theorist, was saying that "War is the continuation of politics by other means ..."

In that sense, I believe we see terrorism as a real war, where it joins an action and therefore a reaction, where the possibility of dialogues is trumped by military action or combat, where each party wants to hurt the other to destroy it because it causes harm, whether physical, territorial, economic, financial, religious or simply not allow that party to remain in power. I say that the legal war causes radicalisation because violence is used to obtain a goal, which is to defeat the enemy, be it regular or irregular, playing a heavy toll on civilians.

ISIS has clearly won the media war. No matter how heinous their crimes were, they were still able to recruit fighters from many nations especially Tunisia, Europe and eastern Asian regions. There does not appear to be any strategy to fight a Western propaganda war. One would have thought that the counter terrorism experiences with Al Qaeda would have taught us how to fight the media war.

However, that does not appear to be the case, and it may be impossible to win this [media] fight. After all, as Christianity shows, it's difficult to fight an idea when it claims to right all wrongs and offers a plausible explanation for a particular world view.

To me for example, ideology and religion are quite two different things, though one leads into the other to make an individual become radical. Religion may not necessarily strongly instigate an individual but the ideology of an individual based on the religious teachings he believes, strongly instigates him/her to act radically in addition to other dishonoring factors. In the case of religion, an individual becomes so strongly attached that he becomes a fanatic or an extremist based on his ideology with a little push towards negativity by external factors.

Individuals are radicalised by an array of experiences. Clark McCauley in his paper “Pathways towards Radicalisation” identifies twelve mechanisms of radicalisation and states “not any one of the twelve mechanisms can account for the large proportion of those which have been radicalised”. These twelve mechanisms are as follows:

- Personal Victimisation
- Political grievance
- Joining a radical group - the slippery slope (the consequence of being part of the group)
- Joining a radical group - the power of love (love for the cause)
- Extremity shift in like-minded groups
- Extreme cohesion under isolation and threat
- Competition for the same base of support
- Within-group competition - fissioning (splitting of a group where one becomes more radical than the other).
- Competition with state powers - condensation
- Conflict with an outsider group – Jujitsu Politics
- Conflict with an outsider group – Hate
- Martyrdom

Radicalisation is also a part of a social status of the individual; if he is poor and suffers a continuous humiliation from a group, that individual wants a kind of self-recognition to justify his or her existence. If both fail, which could push the individual to look for a group that could protect him and motivate him, if this is through violence that person will go to that aim in order to survive. In few years or so in the United States intolerance has been observed against other people’s views, especially political views.

Radicalisation tends to turn violent when an individual's or group’s sacred values have been violated or threatened. Individuals will receive a considerable boost to their sense of significance by confronting the group’s enemies with little consideration as to the personal risks they may be taking. In this way, the personal or group ideology justifies violence in defence of sacred values and justifies terrorism as an effective and morally acceptable means of significance restoration.

Not all individuals who buy into a violence-justifying ideology personally engage in violence; but all individuals who commit violence are likely to endorse a violence-justifying ideology. The question is this, are some of the new converts to Takfiri Islam searching for cultural alternatives, counter-therapy, spiritual answers they did not find in their inherited religion?

It has been reported that 90 percent of French youth who went to fight in Syria and Iraq did not have anyone in their family history who followed Muslim tradition; not even a grandmother! I am by no means making the case that political Islamic belief is radicalising extremists or is an agent of terrorism-just the opposite. Like many Eastern religions, it is a religion of peace, above all. It may be that it's better known reputation in Western Europe, as a mainstream religion, is one that is practiced by productive, non-authoritarian, peaceful communities, giving ISIS recruiters a legitimacy that they would not have were it not for the numerous examples. Millions of Muslims provide to spiritual explorers in Europe. And I am not saying Wahhabism leads straight to terror. The majority of Wahhabis do not aspire to wage global terror. "Religious exploitation" or "Grooming the spiritual seeker" is more the process of intentional radicalisation that ISIS recruiters employ to make an appeal to a wider audience among youth. In regards to the individual radicalisation, there was an incident that occurred in Aurora, Co, in July 2013 where a lone wolf actor assaulted and killed multiple civilians at a movie theatre.

The individual actor is claiming not guilty by reason of insanity, however he left detailed plans of his intent to cause mass casualties, wore body armour in an attempt to prevent his immediate death, and he also left booby traps at his residence in order to kill responders in an additional event. That to me screams of premeditation.

Photo: CIPS