



# Is There a 'New' Terrorism in Existence Today?

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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As a global phenomenon which has profound consequences for people, institutions and governments, it has been argued that the word “terrorism” is interpreted in such way to suit the interests of those who aim to define it. Hence, there are numerous definitions of terrorism, and multiple interpretations complicated the understanding of this phenomenon. Terrorism has always been a controversial term due to the failure of scholars, academics and policymakers to agree on a basis for determining when the use of violence can be deemed as legitimate. Laqueur (1977: 5) argues that an accurate description of terrorism ‘does not exist nor will be found in the foreseeable future’. Even though there is no agreed definition of terrorism, there is an argument that since the mid-1990s terrorism has changed (Spencer, 2006; Bolanos, 2012). In recent years, this complicated phenomenon gave rise to debates over the existence of a “new” and more dangerous terrorism. This idea has taken hold in the minds of academics and policymakers; however, the presence of a “new” terrorism has been criticised on several counts. Proponents of “new” terrorism suggest that there has been a radical transformation in the character of terrorism and that this has become so revolutionary that the threat of “new” terrorism is calling us “to construct new frameworks for thought and analysis” (Kegley, 2003: 4). On the other hand, scholars argue that today’s terrorism is not a fundamentally new phenomenon. Still, it is instead grounded in an evolving socio-political landscape which has dramatically changed post 9/11 (Crenshaw, 2007).

The “old” terrorism was regarded as a political weapon, designed to produce chaos with the strategic purpose of either maintaining a regime or creating the conditions for regime change. Crenshaw (2007) argues that “old” terrorists carried out their attacks towards specific targets aiming to change the attitude of their audiences that could help them achieve their political objectives aimed primarily at obtaining territorial autonomy. Stohl (1988: 5) argues that the aim of “old” terrorists was not to destroy, but to be heard as “terror is a message of strength, a warning designed to intimidate, to ensure compliance without the need to physically touch citizen [...] the more extensive is the message, the more successful is the act.” Stohl (1988) points out that the old terrorist groups chose their victims and targets carefully, to achieve their political, social, or economic aims which were clearly defined in their agenda. Terrorism represented a means to an end: bombings and targeted assassinations were used against symbolic targets in highly selective and discriminate attacks as an attempt to oppose autocracy and to force political change. “Old” terrorism had definite goals; a clear, hierarchical command structure; and, the use of tactics such as targeted kidnappings, assassinations and bombings, to carry out its socio-political agenda.

Terrorism expanded worldwide with the end of the Cold War, an expansion facilitated by globalisation and the increased transnational transportation and communication. The post-1990 terrorism reflects a

“new” type of terrorism, because acts of terror over the past two decades do not conform to traditionally-accepted notions of war and have involved irregular forces and strategies (Hoffman, 2003). Proponents of the “new” terrorism argue that the differences between old and new terrorism are outlined by the following variables: motivation, tactics, and organisational structure. Unlike “old” terrorism, “new” terrorism is structured in loose networks; is transnational, rather than localised within a nation’s borders; it is deliberately targeted at innocent civilians; motivated primarily by religious ideologies, rather than political ideology; and aimed at causing maximum damage. Whereas “old” terrorist organisations used to be clearly identifiable, with clear, hierarchical structures, and well-defined goals, “new” terrorism has been conducted by groups that have unclear or altogether undefined motivations, decentralised organisational structures, and vague aims. Additionally, while “old” terrorist objectives were political, social, or economic in nature and were used as a means to a specific end, new terrorists’ goals are religious in nature, with groups valuing and displaying violence for its own sake. While “old” terrorists used force to target specific groups of people to make a point, new terrorists tend to use violence indiscriminately, targeting large groups of people or regions, including civilians, without any stated goals.

Motivation is another factor that is considered to have undergone a revolutionary change in terrorism studies. In the context of this framework, motivation refers to the driving force that inspires the terrorist organisation. Whereas older groups usually had a clear political objective in mind (as well as a matching political ideology), many experts point out that contemporary terrorist organisations are interested in causing world chaos to bring in a new world order. Bolanos (2012) argues that one of the characteristics of “new” terrorism is the religious motivation, regarded as the core of the ‘new’ terrorist ideology. In the 1980s, terrorists changed from left-winged organisations, such as the Italian Red Brigades or the Red Army Faction, to religious fundamentalists (Rapoport, 2004; Hoffman, 2006). Nia (2010) supports this argument and suggests that terrorism has become religious, while “old” terrorism had political goals. The major religious force behind terrorism today is not Islam, but a radical, fundamentalist and archaic Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. Unfortunately, the drive to restore the long defunct Caliphate by ISIS has resulted in creating a global conflict which depicts Islam against the world. The problem here is that what was essentially a religious conflict has morphed, due to its scale and transnational aspects, into one of political dimensions.

Spencer (2011) argues that it is difficult to separate between religious and political motivations. “Old” terrorist groups who were believed to be politically motivated, were also partially motivated by religion

– these are considered hybrid groups such as Hamas in Palestine or Hezbollah in Lebanon (Kurtulus, 2011; Duyvesteyn and Malkki, 2012). Al Qaeda, for example, wanted the unification of all Muslims – which is a religiously motivated goal; however, it also aimed to eliminate the United States’ armed forces and to create a territorial Caliphate – which a political and territorial goal (Bolanos, 2012; Duyvesteyn and Malkki 2012; Kurtulus 2011). It is challenging to separate religion from politics, particularly when it comes to terrorism. Copeland (2001) suggests that the trends in “new” terrorism are a reflection of the peculiarities of “old” terrorism which had been submerged during the rise of politically-motivated terrorism in the 1980s. Crenshaw (2008) explains that many of the terrorist groups considered to fall under “new terrorism” because of their religiously-based motivations are in fact, not new at all, citing examples such as Al-Qaeda and Aum Shinrikyo, which formed in the early 1980s. She points out that instead of basing old and new terrorism in a chronological framework, it is more accurate to say that they continue to coexist in a historical context. Neumann (2009: 17) suggests that “new” terrorism “draws on themes and ideas which have existed in the earlier period”.

However, the “new” terrorism has changed its objectives over the decades. According to Crenshaw (2008), the new terrorist’s religious aim is related to the pursuit of mass casualties – the infidels. The “new” terrorists seek to kill as many people as possible (Crenshaw 2007). Bolanos (2012) argues that the “new” terrorism is characterised by violence targeted at the mass population. Victims are the instrument of terrorism (Stohl 2008: 13). The real target of contemporary terrorism is the people watching, not the victims of the attack, which is a new characteristic. The victims of “old” terrorism were chosen deliberately for their symbolic value - terrorists carefully selected their targets, and their attacks were directed at these symbolic representations of authority, such as politicians or government officials (Spencer, 2006). Nia (2010: 6) uses the example of Carlos the Jackal, a terrorist who in 1975 attacked an OPEC conference in Vienna and took 70 hostages, from which killed only three: an Austrian policeman, an Iraqi security officer, and a Libyan economist. This example shows that “old” terrorism targeted individuals who represented the authority to which they were opposed to. On the contrary, “new” terrorism’s objectives are “to kill in large numbers” (Bolanos, 2012: 31). If “old” terrorists wanted attention by selectively killing their targets, “new” terrorists want attention by depersonalising them and creating mass casualties (Nia 2010). One of the “new” characteristics of terrorism is that nowadays, terrorist organisations assume that it is legitimate to indiscriminately target civilians based on religious rationale. Evidence can be found in bin Laden’s “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders”, in which the intention to kill American civilians indiscriminately is explicitly stated (Lewis 1998).

Although the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre may appear indiscriminate due to a large number of civilians killed, Spencer (2011) argues that they represented an attack at the United States' military and financial core, two of America's symbols of power. It could be argued, therefore, that "new" terrorists are selective and plan their attacks in order to serve a political purpose, destroying symbols of authority. Although they select wider groups as targets, it does not always make "new" terrorism indiscriminate. The indiscriminate characteristic comes as a result of more civilians being included in the target groups.

Another difference between "old" and "new" terrorism lies in the structure of contemporary organisations. Neumann (2009) suggests that "old" terrorist organisations had a "physical centre of gravity" around which they set up their hierarchical systems. Old terrorist groups had identifiable leaders, like Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof from the Red Army Faction. Nowadays, terrorist organisations adopt a more fluid, decentralised structure with "no single central leader" (Neumann, 2009). "New" terrorist organisations take a diffuse network structure where fewer instructions are given by an identifiable leader, as it makes it difficult for criminal authorities to infiltrate. The "new" terrorism has more diverse sources, motivations, and tactics than the "old". It is far more lethal, global in reach, and characterised by network forms of organisation. Moreover, "new" terrorists are able to recruit members from all over the world and are not bound to a centre of gravity – recruits do not always receive orders face to face, allowing terrorist organisations to operate internationally and have a large number of militants (Neumann, 2009; Nia, 2010; Bolanos, 2012). When looking at ISIS, for example, it has intertwined characteristics of both old and new terrorism. In its development years, ISIS lacked a hierarchical structure, with groups spread all over the world, which is a characteristic of "new" terrorism (River, 2014). When the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, Al-Baghdadi became its known leader, and the organisation adopted an army-style structure, peculiar to "old" terrorism (Neumann 2009). However, ISIS is considered to be a "new" terrorist organisation due to its indiscriminate targeting of civilians, subjected to brutal and violent acts spread around the globe (Neumann, 2009).

Bolanos (2012) suggests that "old" terrorist organisations operated within national borders, while "new" terrorists have transcended national boundaries and pursue an international agenda. Contemporary international terrorists can travel with relative impunity and strike random targets. Nia (2010) points out that the "old" terrorist groups had definite nationalist goals aimed at overthrowing the political system and making a change in politics in a particular geographical area.

Examples include the ETA in Spain who sought independence, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka who fought for autonomy, or the IRA who sought the British withdrawal from Northern Ireland. The IRA, however, had support bases in the United States, which may prove that it did not limit itself to the national public (Duyvesteyn and Malkki, 2012). Nonetheless, “new” terrorist organisations operate transnationally aiming to create panic and massive damage to societies in order to focus the world’s attention on their cause. The “new” terrorism is believed to be a far more lethal threat characterised by “radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimation and justification, concepts and morality, and worldview” (Hoffman 2006: 88). Neumann (2009: 20) argues that “new” terrorism has become “increasingly transnational in reach and orientation”.

The dramatic change that comes with the “new” terrorism is represented by its use of indiscriminate violence intended to affect not only the direct victims of the attacks but also anyone who experiences it through the media worldwide, which enhances the “global” presence of terrorist organisations. Moreover, globalisation facilitated the use of information and communication technologies as means of collaborations between various terrorists, who in turn leave no clearly identifiable patterns, and are very hard to track down, making it extremely difficult for governments and law enforcement authorities to build accurate pictures of their scope of operations, membership and funding and to counter them.

The evolving dynamic of terrorism in the 21st century reflects both continuity and change in terrorism. New motivation, new actors, new rationales and motivations are inextricably intertwined with those of “old” terrorism. As Bruce Hoffman suggests in Lesser (1999: 15 – 17), “the overall increase during the past 15 years of terrorism motivated by a religious imperative encapsulates the confluence of new adversaries, motivations, and tactics affecting terrorist patterns today. While the connection between religion and terrorism is not new, in recent decades this variant has largely been overshadowed by ethnic- and nationalist-separatist or ideologically motivated terrorism”. Fundamentally, the core concept of terrorism has never changed. States must view terrorism as an ever-morphing threat which adapts and evolves continuously. Although it has its roots in the so-called ‘old’ terrorism, there is ‘new’ terrorism in existence today, with regards to their structures and intentions to follow international agendas. Terrorists target masses of the population all over the globe. The victims have become their instruments, and as terrorism crosses borders, it has become more challenging to deal with it at a national level than before. Shifts in the structures and ideologies are also present, and understanding these concerning changes might result in understanding the power and potential threats of “new” terrorism.

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