

Understanding Terrorism: Contested Concept, Conflicting Perspectives and Shattering Consequences

Abdul Rashid Moten*

Abstract: Terrorism is an old phenomenon but its modern manifestation was first noted in the 19th century with the anarchist group who assassinated Czar Alexander II in 1881. Since then it has continued unabated but its intensity and frequency increased in the 21st century. This study examines the trends in international terrorism and, in particular, analyses its causes and consequences. Based upon extensive literature and documentary research, this study found at least three perspectives that explain terrorism either as a reaction to socio-economic deprivation or as the product of religious fundamentalism or as a legitimate struggle to wipe out injustices perpetrated by the powerful against the powerless. Muslims condemn terrorism and suggest that the Western powers cease their policies of victimising the vulnerable populations, of sponsoring terrorists, of siding with Israel, and of denying others their right to liberty and sovereignty.

Keywords: terrorism, trends, perspectives, waves of terrorism, religious fundamentalism

This study analyses the trends and perspectives on terrorism. It attempts to answer the following questions: What is terrorism? How has terrorism evolved over the years in the type, frequency and lethality of attacks? How has terrorism been conceived by various actors and groups and with what consequences? The term “trend” refers to changes in the type, number, and mode of operation of the groups known as terrorists over time. The term “perspective” is used

*Abdul Rashid Moten is Professor of Political Science at the International Islamic University Malaysia. E-mail: rashidm@iiu.edu.my

here to refer to a standpoint from which terrorism is perceived and narrated. Thus, the same event or phenomenon can receive varying narratives depending upon the individual and the group perceiving it. The way terrorism is perceived has a direct bearing upon the way the term terrorism is defined and the nature of the response devised to face the problem and hence “perspectives on terrorism” deserve close scrutiny. This paper first looks at various attempts in defining terrorism. The second section analyses the trends in terrorism basing largely upon David C. Rapoport’s four waves of terrorism. The third section examines the phenomenon of terrorism from three different standpoints: the American, the Muslim, and the Social and Behavioural Sciences. The final section draws conclusions based upon the findings of this study.

Defining Terrorism

Terrorism is centuries old. Its early examples include the Assassins during the 11th and 12th centuries, 19th century European Anarchists and Social revolutionaries, Ku Klux Klan in the United States, and the like (Stern, 2000, p. 8). The term was first employed in France at the time of the “Reign of Terror” from 1789 to 1794. Since then, the term has undergone major evolution so that it “now seems to be mainly applied to actions by individual or group of individuals” (Mushkat, 2002, pp. 14-15). Terrorism moved dramatically to centre stage in international relations in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Yet, there is no widely-agreed definition of terrorism. Schmid and Jongman recorded 109 definitions in the 1980s; the number has doubled since then (See Schmid & Jongman, 1988). Despite plethora of literature, there seems no possibility of an agreed upon definition emerging in the near future (Shafritz, 1991). Definitions are coloured by political ideology, location, and perspective. The term has been used selectively and “attached as a label to those groups whose political objectives one finds objectionable” (Combs, 2003, p.5). Between 1968 and 1988, over 6,000 works were published on terrorism. According to Blumberg (2008, p.39) the WorldCat database (part of OCLC’s FirstSearch suite) shows that well around two thousand books a year are being published with “terrorism” among the key words of their cataloguing record. These studies are repetitive relying largely upon journalistic analysis

coupled with descriptive statistics (Schmid & Jongman, 1988). The position has not improved much. According to Alexander, over 150 books were published in the 12 months after 9/11, but most of these are of questionable quality (Alexander, 2002). Most of the research on terrorism is focused on describing the event and the identity of the terrorist with few concentrating on how or why terrorism emerged (Moghaddam, 2005). This is due, among other reasons, to the fact that a very substantial number of research on terrorism is carried out to justify both the government's view of the menace of terrorism and of the right approach to tackling extremism. Researchers not adhering to the government's view are denied funding and other supports which cripples their research (Herman & O'Sullivan, 1990). Consequently, the focus of the field is scattered and an unrealistic range of activities, behaviour and actors have been labelled terrorists. Nevertheless, the international community is agreed upon one characteristic, which is that terrorism involves violence and the threat of violence. Most analysts suggest avoiding attempts at a broad definition of terrorism and to focus instead on determining the indicators to help classify an act as terrorist or otherwise.

Yet attempts continue to be made to define terrorism. According to a U.S. Army manual, "terrorism is the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature. This is done through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear" (cited in Klare & Kornbluh, 1988, p.69). The British government defined terrorism as "the use, or threat, of action which is violent, damaging or disrupting, and is intended to influence the government or intimidate the public and is for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause" (Curtis, 2003, p.93). The Europol's 2008 Report, published annually since 2002, defines terrorism broadly as "a tactic or a method for attaining political goals" and classifies terrorism into six types: Ethno-nationalist and separatist, Islamic, left-wing, anarchist, right wing, and single-issue terrorism (Europol, 2009). These definitions do not throw much light on the nature of terrorism but they allow the U.S. administration and its allies to call anybody who opposes them or their policies a terrorist.¹ These definitions do not include terrorist acts carried out by states and hence would not permit discussing the

terrorist acts perpetrated, for example, by Israel against the Palestinian people and by the U.S. in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places.

Terrorism has an extensive history but the word “terrorism” was first documented in the late 18th century, during the French Revolution (Hoffman, 2006). America’s exposure to terrorist acts is relatively recent, exemplified by the assassinations of Presidents Garfield and McKinley along with others by anarchist groups and individuals between 1878 and 1914. The U.S. experienced the first sting of contemporary terrorism in 1961 with the hijacking of the first U.S. aircraft. Since that time, the U.S. has been attacked by many Muslim groups including al-Qā’edah. These groups champion the cause of Muslims all over the world, considered, for good reasons, to be oppressed and exploited by America and American interests.

Muslim groups did join hands with American forces as and when needed as in Afghanistan. The “strange love affair...went disastrously wrong,” between the U.S. allies and “some of the most conservative and fanatical followers of Islam” (Cooley, 1999; p.1). In the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the United States worked with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to establish an anticommunist force through the CIA. Soon, money and arms began flowing via Egypt to Pakistan to train young Muslims in the war against the communists in Afghanistan (1979-1989), aptly referred to as the “Afghan jihad,” the holy war in Afghanistan (Moten, 2008). America’s activities helped establish the Taliban regime and allowed Usama bin Ladin to gain his supporters. Bin Ladin stated:

To counter these atheist Russians, the Saudis chose me as their representative in Afghanistan...I settled in Pakistan in the Afghan border region. There I received volunteers who came from the Saudi Kingdom and from all over the Arab and Muslim countries. I set up my first camp where these volunteers were trained by Pakistani and American officers. The weapons were supplied by the Americans, the money by the Saudis. I discovered that it was not enough to fight in Afghanistan, but that we had to fight on all fronts, Communist or Western oppression (Rashid, 1999, p.132).

The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISIS) insisted on handling training and arms distribution for the holy war in

Afghanistan. The massive stockpiles of weapons that were left behind by the two superpowers went into the hands of various *mujāhidīn* groups (the Northern Alliance, the Taliban and others) who fought over the liberated country, shelled each other and destroyed their own cities. Some of these weapons later made their way to various conflicts around the world, challenging the U.S. attempt to establish an “empire.” (Johnson, 2004, p.4).² These gentlemen, whom President Ronald Regan called “the moral equivalents of America’s founding fathers,” suddenly became terrorists as they were waging a war against Israel and U.S. interests. Indeed, their fates as terrorists were sealed with 9/11/01. The point being stressed here is that “terrorism,” as an instrument of struggle, is a modern phenomenon and that without the cold war alliances and without support for the *mujāhidīn* in Afghanistan from the United States and Saudi Arabia, neither al-Qā’edah nor the transnational world of Muslim fighters would have come into existence.

The Trend

Trends in terrorism can be looked at from two angles: historical and contemporary. Historically, David C. Rapoport (2004) advances the theory of “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism” (see Figure 1). The first global or truly international terrorist experience in history is called the “anarchist wave” which was inspired by the failure of the democratic reform programme. Anarchists believed in abolishing all government and were very active throughout Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The most noted anarchist group was the Russian Narodnaya Volya (1878-1881) who assassinated, among others, Czar Alexander II in 1881. Thus, anarchists introduced individual terrorism – the selective use of terror against an individual or group. According to anarchist theory, the masses are asleep but can be awakened and mobilised to revolt through the instrument of terrorism. Anarchism, which began in Russia in the 1880s, appeared in Western Europe, the Balkans and Asia within a decade. The groups involved in this wave adopted assassination campaigns against prominent officials as their primary strategy.

The “anti-colonial wave” began in the 1920s and was aimed at national self-determination. The Irish Rebellion of 1919 to gain Irish independence from England is an example. The rebels used terrorist

acts against representatives of England, such as police, soldiers, judges and government officials, in an effort to make the cost of maintaining continued occupation too high. They believed that terror must be sustained over a long period of time to break down the will of the targeted government. Other examples include the Israeli terror group *Lahomei Herut Israel* or *Lehi* (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel) commonly known as the Stern Gang and the *Irgun* (National Military Organization in the Land of Israel). Menachem Begin, the leader of the *Irgun* who became the 6th prime minister of Israel (1977-1983), described his people as freedom fighters struggling against “government terror.” Their strategy was to eliminate police officers and engage the army in guerrilla-like (hit and run) action.

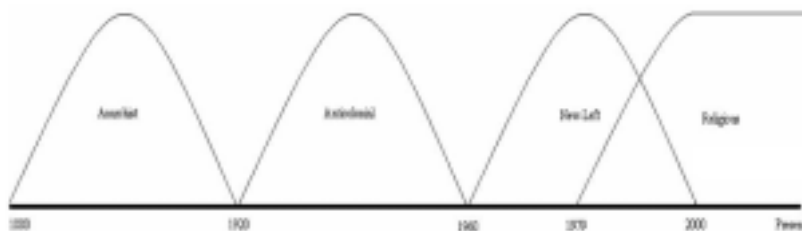
The “New Left Wave” emerged in the 1960s and was inspired by the belief that the existing systems were not truly democratic. It was stimulated by the agonising Vietnam War and the effectiveness of the Viet Cong’s primitive weapons against the Americans. The West German Red Army faction (RAF), the Italian Red Brigades, and the Japanese Red Army saw themselves as the vanguard of the Third World masses. This wave saw the combination of radicalism and nationalism. They adopted hostage-taking as their primary strategy. Thus, the Sandinista National Liberation Front took the Nicaragua Congress hostage in 1978, the Italian “Second Red Brigade” kidnapped and killed the former Italian Prime Minister, Aldo Moro, in 1979. They were also engaged in kidnapping from 1968 to 1982 and assassinating prominent figures such as Lord Mountbatten in 1979. Attempts were made on the lives of Margaret Thatcher in 1984 and John Major in 1991 (Rapoport, 2004, p.57). This wave diminished greatly as the 20th century closed. However, few groups of this wave have survived, namely, in Nepal, Spain, Peru and Colombia.

The “religious wave” in which religion became very significant emerged in 1979. Islam is at the heart of this wave although Sikhs have sought a religious state in Punjab.³ One Jew murdered 29 Muslim worshippers in Abraham’s tomb. Christian terrorism based on racist interpretations of the Bible emerged in the American “Christian identity” movement. This wave was precipitated by the Iranian revolution of 1979, the storming of the Grand mosque in

Makkah in 1979 by a group of Muslims, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Specific trends that occur within this religious wave are, for example, the use of suicide terrorism and the targeting of soft (unprotected) targets. Suicide bombing became common. From 1983 to 2000, the Tamil Tigers used more suicide bombers than anybody else. “The uniqueness and persistence of the wave experience indicates that terror is deeply rooted in modern culture” (Rapoport, 2004, p.47).

The four waves signify four general ideological trends. Each wave, caused by a precipitating event, lasted about 40 years before receding and giving way to a succeeding wave. In the case of New Left and religious waves, there has been some overlap but the former eventually faded as the “fourth” religious wave took the centre stage. Most terrorist groups gradually disappeared, a few (like the Irish Republican Army) proved durable.

Figure 1: Four waves of modern terrorism



Source: Developed from Rapoport, David C. (2004). *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*. In Audrey Kurth Cronin and J. Ludes Eds., *Attacking terrorism: Elements of a grand strategy*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Most scholars and practitioners look at terrorism during the period covered in Rapoport’s third and fourth waves, which is characterised by changes in targeting, strategy, tactics and logistics. There are many who contend that contemporary terrorism of al-Qā’edah type is something new and hence is not covered under the four waves theory of Rapoport. Terrorism as used by al-Qā’edah and other contemporary movements mark a total break from the past. It is an act of violence designed to have an impact on a large number of people, possibly an entire nation. They seek to advance their cause by disrupting the lives of many more people than they hit. Al-Qā’edah is a transnational movement with like-minded local representatives advancing their common goal independently of each

other (Hoffman, 2004). In addition to using guns and bombs, the assault strategy of the terrorists includes hijacking commercial airliners and the use of other instruments. If U.S. information is to be believed, the 19 people responsible for the September 11, 2001 incidents were well-schooled in handling aircraft and using explosives equipment. The terrorists know the value of the Internet, fax machines, cellular telephones and encryption. They learn to shoot and to assemble bombs on the Internet. They produce highly sophisticated propaganda videos using multiple languages and graphics. They take advantage of legal and widely available strong encryption software that makes their communications invulnerable to surveillance.

During the period under consideration, the incidents of terrorism have increased in frequency. As shown in Table 1, in 2005, there were over 11,000 terrorist incidents that killed, injured or involved the kidnapping of over 8,000 individuals. In 2006, this increased to over 11,000 individuals. What is not very clear from the table is that terrorism is becoming more violent. A fewer number of incidents are causing greater casualties and infrastructure damage. During the 1970s there were a total of 8,114 terrorist incidents worldwide, which resulted in 4,978 deaths. During the 1980s there were 31,426 incidents, resulting in 70,859 deaths. The RAND-St Andrews joint-university database of international terrorist incidents records 2,536 incidents in the 1970s, resulting in 1,975 deaths, and records 3,658 incidents in the 1980s, resulting in 4,077 deaths. During the 1980s, the number of international terrorist incidents was about 50 per cent more than in the 1970s, and twice as many people were killed. During the 1990s, the number of international terrorist incidents actually fell but the number of fatalities increased. The 1998 bombing in Kenya killed 201 and injured 5,500 people. More than 6,347 people lost their lives in the collapsed twin towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Brian Jenkins' (1975, p.15) bold assertion that the "terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead" is invalidated by the contemporary trend in terrorism. The object of terrorism remains publicity for the cause. The terrorists desire to cause maximum damage to the enemy, without which it is difficult to grab newspaper headlines.

Table 1: Incidents of Terrorism Worldwide

	2005	2006
Incidents of terrorism worldwide	11,153	14,338
Incidents resulting in death, injury, or kidnapping of at least one individual	8,028	11,170
Incidents resulting in death of at least one individual	5,135	7,332
Incidents resulting in the death of zero individuals	6,018	7,007
Incidents resulting in the death of only one individual	2,881	4,091
Incidents resulting in the death of at least 10 individuals	228	291
Incidents resulting in the injury of at least one individual	3,838	5,718
Incidents resulting in the kidnapping of at least one individual	1,152	1,334

Source: National Counterterrorism Center, 2007. *Annex of statistical information* (April 13, 2007): 4. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/83396.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2009).

Terrorism, it must be noted, is not confined to a particular country or region but it has developed links worldwide. In 2006, major incidents of terrorism were found in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region (66.7 per cent) followed by South Asia (14.1 per cent), Western Europe (7.0 per cent) and Latin America (5.5 per cent) (National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, 2006). Indeed, the major centres are Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is evidence that those possessing weapons and are active in the conflicts in these areas move to other places with false documentation and international contacts. They can blend easily into a local émigré community, where they can plan and execute attacks without being readily identified. Thus, activists in one country receive assistance from activists in other countries and regions. Terrorism has become glocal. The origin may be local but it attracts forces from other regions and hence becomes global.

Unlike in the past, terrorism is much more decentralised and anonymous. The terrorists do belong to an organisation but without

a clear command and control apparatus. They do not issue communiqués taking credit for terrorist acts and explaining determinants of their actions. As of today, no one has claimed the responsibility of September 11 attacks.⁴ In 2006, more than 60 per cent of the terrorist incidents went unclaimed. The unannounced identity makes it difficult for the government to retaliate against them or their relatives. Despite anonymity, terrorist incidents get media attention.

Since the 1970s, notable shifts in terrorism are noticeable. Terrorists are using new “low-tech” weapons such as passenger airplanes and placing conventional explosives at chemical factories and other strategic places. This also includes suicide bombing, “the targeted use of self-destructing humans” the number of which increased, according to Atran (cited in Noor, in press) from 81 in 2001 to 460 in 2005. Some new weapons are labelled “high-tech,” such as letters contaminated with the lethal anthrax bacteria and the use of sarin nerve gas in 1995 in the Tokyo subway by the Japanese sect Aum Shinrikyo. Experts fear the possibility of terrorists acquiring nuclear, biological and chemical weapons which could kill millions.

Finally, there are also changes in the motives of terrorism. After the Second World War came a revival of terrorists seeking the revolutionary goal of political independence from colonial rulers. Sometimes, as in Jewish Palestine, the terror was directed against officials; in other places, terrorists – calling themselves guerrillas or freedom fighters or *mujāhidīn* – attacked civilians: the FLN in Algeria bombed beaches and cafés and the PLO hijacked aircraft and even a cruise ship. These acts were labelled liberation struggle. Since the 1970s, terror in the name of religion became very common. Terrorism involving Muslims has continuously been highlighted in the media and condemned in the West. There are others not much discussed in the media. Buddhist cultists killed a dozen and injured more than 5,000 people when they released nerve gas in the Tokyo subway in 1995. A month later, Timothy McVeigh set off a truck bomb that killed 168 children and adults at the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. There are continuous terrorist attacks against abortion centres and doctors in the United States. Often the campaigns of ethnic nationalism and religious extremism go hand in hand. Militants of

all faiths have been involved in terrorist violence. Christian religious groups, such as the Aryan Nations, are active in North America, and are becoming more closely associated with the Militia Movement. Hindu right extremists in India continue to kill and burn non-Hindus, mainly Muslims as in Gujarat. Similarly, the Jewish Defense League maintains her presence in North America. In Israel and the Occupied Territories, the combination of nationalism and religious fervour manifests itself in acts of Jewish terrorism.

Perspectives on Terrorism

Terrorism, as described above, has been perceived differently by different groups and individuals. Academics of the behavioural persuasion try to explain terrorism as a reaction to social, economic, political and other environmental factors. American policymakers emphasise the religious determinant of terrorism. Muslims look at it as a legitimate struggle against injustices perpetrated by the powerful.

Social and Behavioural Perspectives

Social and behavioural scientists do not associate terrorism with a particular religion or region. Terrorism, according to this perspective, is the product of internal and international forces and it can be countered by tackling its root causes (Council, 2002). Social scientists carried out several researches in understanding and predicting terrorism, and the pace of research has gained momentum since 9/11. Though not taken seriously by policy makers, social scientists warned, prior to 9/11, of the possibility of suicide bombers crashing an aircraft into the Pentagon or other buildings. They wrote (Council, 2002, p.7):

Al-Qā'edah's expected retaliation for the U.S. cruise missile attack against al-Qā'edah's training facilities in Afghanistan on August 20, 1998, could take several forms of terrorist attack in the nation's capital. Al-Qā'edah could detonate a Chechen-type building-buster bomb at a federal building. Suicide bomber(s) belonging to al-Qā'edah's Martyrdom Battalion could crash-land an aircraft packed with high explosives (C-4 and semtex) into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), or the White House.⁵

The research carried out by social scientists found that terrorists do not differ greatly from other people in self-esteem, religiosity, socioeconomic status, education, or personality traits such as introversion (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). They suggest that terrorists are normal people though they may find significant gratification in the expression of generalised rage. They join terrorist organisations for revenge or retribution for a perceived injustice. Studies by Ariel Merari (1985) and others have found, for example, that Palestinian suicide bombers often have at least one relative or close friend who was killed or injured by Israelis.

Scholars in social and behavioural sciences admit that it is difficult to devise a definition of the term “terrorism” that is acceptable to all. Generally, they define terrorism as the illegal use or threatened use of force to coerce societies or governments by inducing fear in their populations to attain political and/or ideological ends. They do admit that the terrorisation of an established government against its own citizens is the major determinant of terrorism. However, they shy away from taking the argument to its desired conclusion. Instead, their emphasis is upon international, economic and political determinants.

Scholars argue that terrorists come largely from regions with a long history of politico-economic and cultural ties with the West, in particular, those that have experienced colonialism and economic and cultural subjugation. Colonialism and dependency have resulted in economic and political dislocation, emergence of a Westernised ruling elite divorced from the rest of the society in terms of values, and conflicts between religious and secular values. Most of the social, political and religious movements identify what is known as “economic and cultural imperialism” as objects of their opposition. Earlier scholarship labelled them as nativistic movements aimed at preserving traditional values and ways of life. Given their abhorrence of Westernisation and certain aspects of modernisation, and also the fact that they occasionally resort to violence, they are in contemporary terms called terrorists.

Another determinant of terrorism is the linkage between demographic and economic aspects of most non-Western societies, including Muslim societies. It is argued that most of these societies

are located in the high-fertility, high-growth regions of the world. Resource-poor, most of these societies experience tremendous pressure on land and the education system, and they produce large numbers of unemployed youth with a high potential for dissatisfaction. Exposed to the West through the media and other agencies, these people have high expectations. This has given rise to what is known as the revolution of rising frustrations. The poverty and the sense of frustrations are well articulated by various social movements. Extremist organisations find ready recruits among these frustrated youth.

The situation is worsened by established governments that are characterised by authoritarianism. The United Nations Human Development report lamented in 2002 that some 73 countries did not hold free and fair elections, and 106 governments restricted civil and political freedoms (United Nations Development Programme, 2002, p.13). There exists a dramatic gap between the levels of freedom and democracy in Muslim majority countries. Governments in the Muslim world range from a monarchy (9) to illiberal democracy (21) to states run by military in mufti (20). Most of the monarchies and illiberal regimes enjoy the support and patronage of Western powers. These governments, instead of resolving the problem, repress opposition movements for ventilating the grievances of the frustrated population. Consequently, these movements are radicalised and go underground. They also establish relations with organisations outside the state for further support. They maintain extreme secrecy, sustain a high level of ideological commitment among members and carry out military-like activities.

Although every situation is different, researchers have found that military responses to international terrorism reinforce terrorists' views of their enemies as aggressive and cruel.⁵ Such a perception makes it easier for them to recruit new members and strengthen alliances among terrorist organisations. Following the invasion of Iraq, for example, al-Qā'edah's influence and ideology spread to other extremist groups not previously linked to the movement. The futility of fighting terrorism with large-scale military strikes is perhaps clearest in the case of Iraq, where U.S. troop casualties have steadily increased over time. Despite the claim that 70 per cent of al-Qā'edah's core leadership has been eliminated, the organisation has

carried out more attacks since September 11, 2001, than it did in the three years before.

On the basis of their findings, social scientists suggest that the United States can fortify measures that promote self-protection, encourage citizens to be vigilant, and improve training and information sharing among various organisations and the allies (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004). These non-provocative measures should be accompanied by fair-trade agreements, joint investments of venture capital, cultural exchange programmes, respect for human rights, increased foreign aid to the needy, and by banning educational materials that condone or incite violence. In short, they adopted the “root causes” approach suggesting that priority should be given to political, social and economic development in the Muslim world, which has been the breeding ground for all kinds of violence (Stern, 2003).

The American Perspective

The American policy makers do not agree with the “root causes” solution to the problem. They argue that socioeconomic deprivation is not correlated with terrorism. They attributed 9/11 to Bin Ladin, the man, al-Qā’edah, the organisation and Islam, the religion professed by Bin Ladin and other Muslims. What is implied here is that Islam and Muslims, unlike secular institutions, are inclined toward violence. William Cavanaugh (2007) abhors the labels “religious” and “secular” which lead to the categorisation of the world into “*us* in the secular West who are rational and peacemaking, and *them*, the hordes of violent religious fanatics in the Muslim world.” Yet, as he admits, this dichotomy persists because “we in the West find it comforting and ideologically useful.” In the U.S., the blame game was led by neoconservatives in the administration who often presented Islam as the new villain to be confronted by American military might. They consistently presented Muslims as incapable of democratic rule. Muslims, according to them, espouse values that are antithetical to world peace and religious tolerance. Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker of the House, identified the enemy as that wing of Islam which is hostile to Western values. To Robert Merry, the enemy is Islam, as the fundamental values of Islam and the cultures that gave birth to today’s Muslim societies are largely

antithetical to such Western ideas as individualism and separation of church and state (Merry, 2005). Some people suggest that prior to labelling Islam as a violent religion, a conducive mind was prepared through the publication of “Clash of Civilizations” thesis propounded by Samuel Huntington, funded by the CIA and distributed the world over. Even without the support of the CIA and others, Huntington’s theory would have received admiration from the U.S. establishment elite as well as the general public. The message Huntington delivered to scholars and policy makers is deceptively simple: the West must unite and maintain its military superiority to confront the “threat” emanating from, among others, the Islamic civilisation. He argues that the conflict between Islam and the West goes back at least 1,300 years. It manifested subsequently in numerous historical battles between Muslim and Christian armies. This conflict has taken on a renewed significance in the post-Cold War era which witnessed Muslim fundamentalists and terrorists bent on destroying American interests in the Middle East. To him, the Islamic world is barbaric; “Islam has bloody borders and Muslim states have had a high propensity to resort to violence...” (Huntington, 1996, p. 258). The disturbing range of events like 9/11, the Madrid bombings and others are used to prove Huntington’s thesis right. There are people in the U.S. who believe that the attack on the World Trade Center was a self-inflicted injury by Bush. In any case, the popularity of Huntington’s thesis is due to his identification of a foe that is well-recognised by the U.S. public because of a well-developed history of stereotypes against Muslims. It also provided needed justifications for the U.S. and the West to stretch out their military in the Muslim world.

Al-Qā’edah is the most widely mentioned as the group responsible for both the World Trade Center bombings in 1993 and 2001. Its leader, Bin Ladin, has also been charged with the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (Kushner, 2003). The core of al-Qā’edah’s original members joined the *mujāhidīn* and fought against the Soviets during the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (Herbst, 2003). Al-Qā’edah is popular among the Muslims and pockets of al-Qā’edah appear in small suburbs in Germany, cafés in Tel Aviv, in the streets of Baghdad, and in the mountains of Pakistan, and continue to remain

active in the U.S., United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, and other countries. It has reconstituted its operational capabilities, replaced captured or killed operational lieutenants and restored its leadership control. The al-Qā'edah and its affiliates use terrorism, subversion, propaganda and open warfare. They use weapons of mass destruction to inflict the maximum possible damage on anyone who stands in their way. There is an apparent growth of cross-national links among different terrorist organisations involving military training, funding, technology transfer, or political advice.

The U.S. leads the world in identifying and labelling organisations as supporting and sponsoring terrorism. The Country Reports on terrorism released by the Office of the Coordinator for counterterrorism on April 28, 2006 listed 26 organisations as terrorists. All but one of these organisations was Muslim. It also listed 17 other Muslim organisations as a “secondary group of concern.” The U.S. also identified Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria as sponsors of terrorism (Department of State, 2006). Four of these states are populated predominantly by Muslims and are accused of providing supplies, training, and other forms of support including “safe haven” to non-state terrorist organisations (Terrorism Research.com, 2006). Iraq, since the “liberation” and the execution of Saddam Hussein, is no longer officially a state sponsor of terrorism. However, the country remains a central front in the global war on terrorism. Terrorism experts believe that the State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism is merely a political tool used by the U.S. in order to impose sanctions. Syria and Cuba remain terrorist states despite Washington’s admission that these countries have not been involved in terrorist activities in more than a decade. They also claim that the list intentionally excludes countries known to have terrorist links because these countries are important to the U.S. for economic or other reasons.

In order to prevent terrorism, the U.S. administration adopted the strategies of intelligence, protection, and coercive action to be enforced by resorting to brute military force. George W. Bush called the “war on terrorism” a “crusade,” a loaded term which recalls the Christians’ medieval wars against Muslims.⁶ Notwithstanding, a strong denunciation from various quarters in the West, is that the

religion of Islam is being maligned by the media as well as in scholarly publications as one that supports and rewards terrorism.⁷ The first step in this war was the invasion of Afghanistan, the overthrow of the Taliban regime and elimination of a safe haven for al-Qā'edah operatives. Prior to the invasion, the U.S. coerced Pakistan to provide the needed logistical support by threatening it to be prepared to "be bombed back to the stone age" (Musharraf, 2006, p. 201).⁸ The U.S. claimed to have captured or killed nearly half of the known al-Qā'edah leadership, Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al Zawahiri, as well as the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar remain at large and Taliban resistance has resurged since 2003 (Perl, 2007).

The second step in the war on terrorism was the invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003. The justification for the invasion was that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and that he aided and protected the al-Qā'edah terrorist organisation. Both the accusations were ill-founded. Iraq did not pose any threat to the U.S. nor did it possess any weapons of mass destruction. In any case, Saddam was arrested and executed and Iraq almost reduced to rubble. Iraq has since become a hub for terrorist activities (Perl, 2007, p.2).

The war against terrorism, as announced by the White House, was needed to save the U.S. and its allies from threats posed by terrorist groups and rogue states that may cooperate with them, and to defend civilisational values under threat from radical elements armed with religious dogma. The war was explained by a vision of the world where good must battle and defeat evil (Suskind, 2004, pp. 102, 106). However, the actions undertaken by the U.S. since September 11, 2001 do not necessarily reflect the above concerns.

The war in Afghanistan may be consistent with the plan to rid the world of safe havens for terrorist groups; the invasion and occupation of Iraq is patently inconsistent with that objective. Chalmers Johnson (2004, pp. 174-85) characterises the real motive for going to war in Iraq as "oil," "Israel," and "domestic politics." Johnson demonstrates that an "oil war" was planned in the 1990s during the second Clinton administration and Bush's war aimed at completing the process. Even the Afghanistan attack and the Taliban

overthrow were carried out not because they were harbouring al-Qā'edah but because they were not cooperating with an oil consortium, led by the U.S. company Unocal, to allow a pipeline across their country from Central Asian oilfields. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline accord was signed on May 30, 2002 by the heads of state of Turkmenistan and Pakistan and the former Unocal consultant, the prime minister of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai. Johnson also presents evidence that Iraq was attacked by the U.S. to support the regional hegemony and expansionist foreign policy of Israel whose leaders have close ties with key figures in Washington. The war equally aimed at creating a number of semi-democracies to secure stability and to crack down on radical opposition groups contesting U.S. dominance. Iraq had to be occupied because it is a leading country in the Arab world and because, unlike most other governments in the region, it refused to guarantee key U.S. interests in the region.

The democratisation of the political systems in the Middle East region and the liberalisation of the economy would take place, however, only when all the governments acquiesce to U.S. dominance of Middle Eastern and international affairs, and when domestic political actors have accepted the primacy of the U.S. The stumbling block in this enterprise has always been what is known as radical Islamists who are determined to overthrow pro-Western governments in the Muslim world, destroy any Arab-Israeli peace process, and expel U.S. forces from the Middle East.

The concern about radical Islamism started with the shock of the Iranian revolution of 1979 but it became a major concern only after the end of the Cold War when the expansion of radical Islamist groups seemed to threaten the stability of a number of U.S. subservient regimes, including those in Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia (Salla, 1997). A cursory look at the list of terrorist groups that the State Department publishes indicates that the U.S. administration identifies radical Islamism as enemy number one. Consequently, the U.S. continues its policy of unwavering support for Egypt and Saudi Arabia to safeguard U.S. interests and accept the international status quo. This policy is dictated by U.S. national interests but is given a moral dimension by arguing that regimes

may be corrupt and autocratic, yet they are better than the ones who desire to replace them.

The Muslim Perspective

In the beginning, the war on terror and the invasion of Afghanistan generated little controversy in the Muslim world. Soon, however, Muslims realised that it aimed at marginalising and defeating the Muslims who aspired to lead a life according to the tenets of Islam.⁹ The invasion and occupation of Iraq made them realise more than ever that this was the continuation of the long-standing policy the U.S. administrations undertook after the end of the Cold War with varying degrees of intensity (Gerges, 1999). The U.S. military action solidly based on the theory of the clash of civilisation led some Muslims to argue that the real cause of terrorism is American state terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism.

From a Muslim perspective, the definition of the term “terrorism” is West-centric and hence it is exclusively identified with the actions of non-state actors. State terrorism, the cause of greater deaths, is never a key feature in any discourse on the subject. Terrorism is automatically attributed to the killing of any Westerner but not the murder of civilians *en masse* in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan, or the horror perpetrated in Abu-Ghraib in the name of freedom and democracy.

To be sure, Muslims in general and Muslim leaders in particular, have often condemned terrorism of all types. The popular Internet site *Beliefnet* contains statements by prominent American Muslims condemning those involved in 9/11 and subsequent acts of violence. The *Fiqh* Council of North America reaffirmed in 2005 “Islam’s absolute condemnation of terrorism and religious extremism.... Targeting civilians’ life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is *harām*, or forbidden, and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not ‘martyrs.’”(American Muslim Perspective, 2005). In 2007, the Muslim Council of Britain convened a meeting of more than 200 Muslim leaders who declared all terrorist acts utterly reprehensible and abhorrent. Islam, they declared, is a religion of peace which rejects terror and promotes peace and harmony (Smock & Huda, 2009, p.1). Muslims are quick

to point out that they do not pose any existential threat to the West. Europol's annual *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* for 2007 to 2009 show that about 99.6 per cent of terrorist attacks in Europe originated from non-Muslim (separatists and leftist) groups leaving only 0.4 per cent that could be attributed to radical Muslims. According to the Europol report (2009, p.7), there was only one "Islamist attack" in the United Kingdom in 2008.

Muslims condemn all types of terrorism carried out by individuals, groups, or states for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause. They believe that most of the violence attributed to non-state actors emerges because of state terrorism or state-sponsored terrorism. Many states are involved in terrorist activities as well as sponsoring terrorism but scholars single out the U.S. and Israel as in the forefront of terrorism. The "war on terror" is a ploy to deflect attention from the U.S. imperial aim to dominate the world.

The war on terror began in the 1980s under the Reagan Administration. At that time, the U.S. sponsored several states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, South Africa, Canada and others to finance and implement its terrorist operations abroad. The U.S. also continues to finance and support countless undemocratic and dictatorial regimes worldwide. The proxy war against Nicaragua directed by the CIA to attack civilian targets inside Nicaragua is but one example. The U.S.-backed atrocities were condemned by the International Court of Justice in The Hague as "unlawful use of force" (Higgin & Flory, 1997, p.20). There are other examples: the continued Zionist policy, since 1948, of "ethnic cleansing" and land confiscation in Palestine to create the "Jewish state" of Israel; the killings of refugees at Sabra and Shatila, Qibya, and elsewhere; the Gaza massacre in 2009 and continued Israeli blockade of Gaza; the Israeli bombing of Tunisia in 1985 on "no credible pretext" killing 75 people; the U.S. bombing of Al-Shifa Pharmaceutical plant in Sudan by the Clinton Administration in 1998; the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001; and, indeed, the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. Muslims harbour a deep sense of humiliation and resentment over the relatively bloodless conquest of Baghdad and the perceived unbridled projection of American

power and influence into the region. According to the American media analyst Edward Herman (1982), the West and Western interests have pushed “terrorism” to the forefront as an ideological instrument of propaganda and control.

Washington’s actions in the Muslim world in general are seen by many Muslims as evidence of collaboration with regimes that compromise Islamic values and oppress their citizens. Governments of some of the predominantly Islamic countries in the Middle East, including Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, have supported the U.S. in the past. Others, especially Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, were particularly helpful after the events of September 11, 2001. These countries have received much support from the U.S. and other Western countries despite their autocratic nature and the flagrant violations of human rights. Additionally, the U.S. established military bases in Saudi Arabia to have a forward-deployed force in case tensions resumed. For many Muslims around the world, the notion of a foreign military “occupying” the soil that hosts two of the most sacred sites in Islam (Makkah and Madinah) is a sacrilege. Strong American support, both political and military, for the Jewish state of Israel in a region that is predominantly Arab and Muslim also inflames anti-American sentiment. All of the above factors may have contributed to hostile acts such as terrorism.

One of the reasons for the popularity of al-Qā’edah among Muslims is the fact that Usama bin Ladin has given forceful expression to these grievances. Bin Ladin issued a *fatwā* (religious edict) in 1996 in which he argued that the “Crusader military forces” of the U.S. and United Kingdom had established a base in Saudi Arabia from which they intend to impose a new imperialism on the Middle East to control the region’s oil wealth. Hence he calls upon his “Muslim Brothers” to help those in Palestine and in the land of the two Holy Places to fight against the Americans and Israelis (Alexander & Swetnam, 2001, p.19). The same argument holds for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In 1998, Bin Ladin wrote that all Muslim religious luminaries “are unanimous that it is an individual duty to fight an invading enemy” (Anonymous, 2003, p.70). This was repeated in his message of December 9, 2001, declaring that “jihad has become *farḍ-‘ayn* [obligatory] upon each and every

Muslim...” (Venzke & Ibrahim, 2003, p.160). He has also elegantly expressed why state terrorism leads to counter-terrorism by non-state actors in 2001: “Those [Westerners] who talk about the loss of innocent people didn’t yet taste how it feels when you lose a child, don’t know how it feels when you look in your child’s eyes and all you see is fear. Are they not afraid that one day they [will] get the same treatment?” (Anonymous, 2003, p.47).

From a Muslim perspective, then, terrorism is not specifically a “Middle Eastern” or “Islamic” problem. It so happens that Muslims are at the receiving end more than others. It is not just Europeans, nor indeed Americans, who are the targets of terrorism but also all those in the Middle East and elsewhere who stand against this totalitarian and fanatical, but determined and patient, enemy. Like other incidents, 9/11 is the product of particular, identifiable, political factors – rooted in the recent history of the Muslim world and of the Cold War and its aftermath. These may be seen as the general phenomena of armed resistance to oppression by states. Its roots are in modern secular politics; it has no *specific* regional or cultural attachment; it is an instrument used to challenge states and to right the wrong.

Terrorism of disaffected individuals from repressed societies is indicative of something gravely wrong with the foreign policies of Western powers, especially of the United States of America. It is this aspect that has not received due attention from the U.S. policy makers during the Bush presidency. President Barack Obama’s attempts to foster a new dialogue with the Muslim world have not gone beyond lip service. The aims of U.S. foreign policy are essentially to attain and enforce a global system in which the Western powers under American leadership would maintain global dominance. This requires these powers to control the world’s resources at the expense of non-Western nations. This fundamental objective of foreign policy is found in a declassified top-secret report produced by the U.S. State Department’s Policy Planning Staff (1948, pp.510-29) as follows:

We have about 50 per cent of the world’s wealth, but only 6.3 per cent of its population... Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to

maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming... We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction... We should cease to talk about vague and ... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we will have to deal in straight power concepts.

The American and British military interventions, individually and jointly, were undertaken to establish and maintain this global “pattern of relationships” with the difference that they do so in the name of democratisation and human rights. Susan George (cited in Curtis, 1995, p.229) writes that the Western powers used “development” as “the password for imposing a new kind of dependency, for enriching the already rich world and for shaping other societies to meet its commercial and political needs.” According to Mark Curtis (1995, p.229), Western policies towards underdeveloped nations were “geared towards organising Third World economies along guidelines in which British, and Western, interests would be paramount, and those of the often malnourished populations would be ignored or further undermined.” Michael Parenti (1995, pp.37-38) observes that though the U.S. leaders profess a “dedication to democracy,” they have been instrumental in overthrowing democratically elected governments by pro-capitalist militaries. The U.S. government, since the Second World War has given more than \$200 billion in military aid to over eighty countries in order to “protect ruling oligarchs and multinational corporate investors from the dangers of domestic anti-capitalist insurgency.”

Muslims, on the whole, condemn terrorism of disaffected individuals and groups and, more particularly, of the state. Terrorism is committed by groups of all sorts and is not tied to any particular culture, region or religion. States have caused major miseries and greater numbers of political deaths than non-state actors. The states, therefore, need to mend their ways and change their foreign policies so as not to hurt the feelings of the depressed people. Finally, victims of terrorism are not the West alone but largely the people in the non-

Western world. Both should shoulder the responsibility of resisting terrorism.

Conclusion

Terrorism is an old phenomenon though the objectives, justification and the instruments of implementation have changed over history. Over the years, terrorism has developed from a tool used by anarchists to bring down governments, to a tool for liberation, a tool of the Cold War and finally to a tool to attain imperial interests. Ethnic and religious sentiments have been used extensively as a justification for the use of terror. It is amazing that an age-old phenomenon is devoid of an agreed-upon definition just because the parties to the conflict desire to twist it to attain their interest. The weak resort to terrorism as they cannot resort to war against the physical strength of the powerful.

The Muslim World, in the post 9/11 era, has been the scene for major Western/American operations. Consequently, Muslims consider the U.S./the West as the major threat to their security and well being. These actions and perceptions are major reasons to root in rather than uprooting terrorism. The use of force to uproot terrorism has not yet given any hope or optimism for a peaceful, humane world order.

Three major perspectives compete to debate the nature and causes of terrorism. Social and Behavioural Science focuses on the root causes which are simply poverty, ignorance, and lack of political expression which are breeding ground for terrorist groups. Consequently, they call for a certain set of priorities in dealing with terrorism. These are political, social and economic development in the Muslim World. The American approach initially denied any socioeconomic reasons for terrorist attacks. The Barack Obama administration has lately adopted a comprehensive approach to deal with terrorism. It is doubtful if the U.S. has the will and resources to actually address the fundamental causes that give rise to terrorism in the first place. The U.S. nevertheless continues to associate terrorism with religious fundamentalism and presents the threat as a mere security issue, and dealing with this would invoke intelligence, protection and coercive action. Muslims do side with the social

scientists but emphasise the empire-building ambition of the U.S. as terroristic, causing the emergence of anti-terrorist groups using hit and run tactics. It is wrong, Muslims argue, to associate terrorism with Islam and thus set up a false conflict between Islam and Christianity. It is also wrong to identify non-existent clash of civilisations as the cause of terrorism. The major cause of terrorism is political, the foreign policies of Western powers, especially the U.S. Muslims in general hate the U.S. for denying the Palestinians their right to life, liberty and statehood, for defiling the sacred soils of Makkah and Madinah, and for inflicting cruel punishment to the people of Iraq, Afghanistan and others. The struggle against terrorism to succeed requires powerful states to cease policies of victimising the vulnerable populations, of sponsoring terrorists, of siding with Israel, and of denying others their rights to liberty and sovereignty. The consequences for trying to convert its “slipping preeminence into an exploitative hegemony” will be that “the United States will be a prime recipient in the foreseeable future of all of the more expectable forms of blowback, particularly terrorist attacks against Americans in and out of the armed forces anywhere on earth, including within the United States” (Johnson, 2004a, p.233).

End notes

1. Lack of clear definition is matched by the lack of formal policy to deal with terrorism. In the United States, there are various entities such as Delta Force, Navy SEALs, Special Forces, CIA Paramilitary, FBI counter terrorism units, government contractors and others involved in combating terrorism. But their operations and budgets are classified and hence it is impossible to determine the true government response to terrorism.
2. Chalmers Johnson rightly claims that “This book is a guide to the American empire as it begins openly to spread its imperial wings” (Johnson, 2004, p.4).
3. Sikhs, forming some 16 million of the Indian population, demand a Punjabi-language majority state which was denied. The ensuing confrontations and increased terrorist incidents led in 1984 to the death of many Sikhs by the Indian soldiers. Sikh extremism was reinforced, and political assassinations increased. On October 31, 1984, the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by two Sikh bodyguards. In the days that followed, anti-Sikh rioting paralysed many urban areas claiming at least 2,000 lives.

4. Bin Ladin, accused of masterminding 9/11, categorically denied having carried out this act. Later, he is reported to have said that he had prior knowledge of the attack and much later that he directed the attack.
5. Concerning 9/11, President George W. Bush expressed surprise and said on April 13, 2004: "Had I had any inkling whatsoever that the people were going to fly airplanes into buildings, we would have moved heaven and earth to save the country – just like we're working hard to prevent a further attack" (cited in Sammon, 2006, p. 30).
6. Sandler and Enders (1993) examined 20 years of terrorist activity and found a significant rise in terrorism following U.S. military reprisals against Libya.
7. In April 2010, President Barack Obama ordered a revision of America's National Security Strategy, created by the Bush administration, outlining the doctrine of pre-emptive strike, with the aim to remove terms that link Islam to terrorism.
8. The ultimatum is attributed to the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, who denied it. Prior to that Musharraf received the famous phone call from the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who was quite candid: "You are either with us or against us." Musharraf "took this as a blatant ultimatum" (Musharraf, 2006, p. 201).
9. According to Said (2002, p. 159), the Arab public opinion became supportive when Bin Ladin associated his cause with that of the Palestinian question.

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