Terrorism, Definition, History and Different Approaches in the Analysis of Terrorism Phenomenon

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Abstract. Nowadays, the political phenomenon of terrorism is considered as an effective factor on political, social, and economic changes which has replaced the recognized political phenomenon such as revolutions, wars (total war among two or more political units with distinct identities in the form of national states), coups, insurgencies and etc. and has challenged political life in all its levels (sub national, national, and international political groups). In this paper by using descriptive-analytical method, the authors try to explain the spread of this political phenomenon across the world, its definition and types, also analyze different approaches in order to understand it. The authors believe that the logical-rational approach is the best way to explain and understand this phenomenon.

Introduction

Nowadays, the phenomenon of terrorism is growing around the world. This phenomenon has been dramatically widespread in particular since the beginning of the twentieth century’s last quarter. When the word “terror” or “terrorism” is heard, it is integrated with fear and horror for everyone; even the analysts of this identifiable and searchable phenomenon are threatened by terrorists [1]. The result of “crises” such as political legitimacy, national identity and practical knowledge, disputes over the geopolitical issues and political geography of countries which sometimes have a direct effect on creation of state and international terrorism (e.g. border disputes between eastern shores of the Mediterranean countries) is exclusively determined in terrorism discourse atmosphere [2]. Terrorist activities such as abduction, hijacking, and murder which are violent and hateful are not enough to expand terrorism to the international crisis level. There is a more secretive and intensive war among great powers and other successors in order to redefine legitimacy in international relations. Therefore, a new approach to understand and analyze terrorism is needed. The extra importance of these days’ concern is that the era of revolutions (within the boundaries of political and national geography) and wars (in the form of conflict among two political-national independent units and with the same power in the specific political geography) has approximately finished. Hence, the motivation factor in both national and international area for political and social developments has led to the destructive phenomenon of terrorism at all sub national (political groups), national, and international levels and also at state and international system levels specifically since the advent of nuclear weapons [3].

This phenomenon both in terms of intensity and quantity surprisingly happens in democratic countries such as, United States and in the Europe, not in nondemocratic and the totalitarian states. In the following, the definition of terrorism, its types, historical evolution, and existing analytical approaches which authors believe are inefficient will be explained. Then, the logical-rational approach to answer how this phenomenon occurs will be discussed.

This means each terrorist activity is an action which follows a rational logic behavior at the same time. Thus, every terrorist has intention, motivation and evaluate profit and loss in his/her terrorist act. So, to prevent it we should understand its definition, motive, intention at first, then face to it
through the use of proper tools such as dialogue, negotiation or appropriate strategies and political approaches.

1. Terrorism Definition

Terrorism is mainly a political phenomenon, however it is different from other political phenomena which are analyzed in politics such as revolution, insurgency, coup, banditry, war, guerrilla operations, and so on. However, terrorism is joined with violence and tries to create fear and horror in society in order to achieve its political targets [4]. Until now, no comprehensive and exclusive definition is given about terrorism that would be acceptable among researchers, experts, and scholars. Therefore, there is no consensus in definition of terrorism. Nevertheless, scholars have the same opinion about one of its characteristics that terrorism is integrated with violence or threat of violence. However, there is no effort to define this phenomenon [5].

In 1990, United States Department of Defense presented a definition of terrorism: “The Illegal use or threat of use of force or violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological” [6]. Encyclopedia Britannica defines terrorism as: “The systematic use of violence to create fear against governments, people, or individuals to bring about a particular political objective” [7]. By the way, although, there is no single definition about terrorism, however it seems the main components of terrorism include: first, terrorism is purely a political phenomenon; second, it is always integrated with violence or threat of violence; third, terrorism has profit-base rationality; and forth, it is a meaningful phenomenon which has a massage. Its meaning or massage is that a terrorist has become helpless to use the different ways such as dialogue and negotiation in order to achieve goals, and transfer his points to the opposite parties (that are mainly governments) [8].

2. Present Approaches in the Analysis of Terrorism Phenomenon

2.1 Religious approach

Religious approach is one of the approaches in the analysis of terrorism phenomenon. According to this approach, each terror or terrorist phenomenon that happens in today’s communities is attributed to religion. It is believed that the root of violence and consequently the root of a terrorist action rely on religious fanaticism. This idea has been more superior to other opinions in theorizing and providing comments among experts.

Nowadays, the issue of religion’s impact on creation of violence and terrorism is demonstrated through civilizations relation. Huntington theory of “clash of civilization” is one of these discussions. Islamic civilization means “Islam and Muslims” in western countries and specifically in the United States believes. When the United States faces with a terrorist phenomenon which is performed by a Muslim, then some officials relate it to religious texts. In the case of theoretical discussions about terrorism, since it is assumed that terrorism is rooted in religion in this approach and Islam is a popular religion, thereupon, Islam is considered as the factor of terrorist actions by Muslims. Thus, when the supporters of this approach try to provide the solution in order to perform counterterrorism they suggest military solution.

This approach is inefficient in description and recognition of terrorism phenomenon and cannot describe it completely. This is because it theoretically considers that the phenomenon of terrorism is rooted in religious texts, while the text of each religion necessarily does not direct to terror. Therefore, religious approach cannot describe the phenomenon of terrorism comprehensively.

2.2 Psychological-social approach

Most of the research analyzing terrorism phenomenon (especially suicide terrorism) are mainly seeking to describe that this phenomenon is performed by the people who have personality problems and are not properly socialized. From this perspective, there is no rationality in terrorists’ acts. Thus, at first, terrorism is basically an irrational phenomenon. Secondly, it cannot be described and analyzed by any rational approach or standard. Hence, until now, “the scholars in the
psychology of terrorists (specifically suicide terrorists) have introduced terrorists as untrained, jobless, and solitary individuals who are less than 20 years old and are teenagers [9]. This approach is apparently inefficient in analysis of terrorism phenomenon. Since, the present reasons and evidences specifically from 1980s demonstrate different results than above mentioned claims. Today, we know that terrorists, especially suicide bombers can be an educated person, married or single, female or male. They can be 13 to 47 years old. This means that, though the small amount of people may become terrorists, however, terrorists are coming from different levels of society.

2.3 Philosophical approach

Nowadays, philosophical approach is another way to analyze the phenomenon of terrorism. According to this approach, there are different and opposite views about this phenomenon. The intellectuals who study terrorism from philosophical perspective analyze it in terms of “violence” concept.

The “theory of civilization” is one of the theories that explains and describes “violence” [10]. From the civilization point of view, violence is “the performance of abnormal behaviors, whether contrary to the nature of human being or against the human community’s nature”. In other words, violence is “to lead a group unlike their nature and norm”. The followers of civilization theory explain the reason of violence by anthropological perspective. According to their views, “the theory of civilization actually is an anthropological theory in which people went out of nudity, barbarism and entered into privacy and civilization through different means and reasons. Morality, religion, culture, and science altogether prevent human being from his anti-right and deviated instincts”. Thus, “violence belongs to ignorant individuals”. When human being lived in primitivism, violence was a norm. However, as human became more civilized, violence disappeared gradually and replaced by peace and security. In this era, violence becomes an exception. In this way, “the process of civilization moves to overcome humanity [peace, security, and …] to bestiality [violence and …]”.

However, there are some other experts that analyze terrorism phenomenon within contemporary history namely, modern age. This means that they consider terrorism as a phenomenon which is related to modern era. Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida can be mentioned. Each of these experts describes terrorism by their own language. Despite differences in their views, they are agreed in some points. Both of them consider “enlightenment” as a start point of modernity. The modernity that becomes universal at the moment. They identify globalization as a process which has started from enlightenment age and has come forward and developed in terms of modernity. From their perspectives, there is a context of inequality and injustice behind the process of globalization unlike its merely positive manifest. It means the development of a modern world in which inequality and injustice exist. This inequality and injustice that globalization is somehow its consequent, has led to crises in modern communities. The phenomenon of terrorism is one of those crises. Thus, the development of modernity joined with universal inequality and injustice has led to globalization, while globalization has intensified them and their results such as terrorism. Therefore, Habermas and Derrida both believe that “globalization is the main factor in the rise of terrorism”. Habermas states that “inequality’s growth is the result of hasty modernization”. He believes “the rapidity that is used to reach modernity and consequently creates defensive reactions in traditional life styles is guilty” [11].

However, Derrida says: “these defensive reactions are the products of modernity themselves”. He considers that rigidity and dogmatism in common and prevalent discourse as the main reason. In his perspective, “common dialogue, namely, mass media and official rhetoric discourse easily relies on some interpretation such as “war” and “terrorism” (national or international)” [12].

Habermas suggests a solution to solve this problem: “one should act out through the liberalization of relations and realistic disposal of anxiety and stress in order to open the mind and create an attitude. In daily communicational behavior, there should be reliance. This is the essential
prerequisite in which rational descriptions are widely transferred by mass media, schools, and families.

This approach is inefficient too in understanding and analyzing terrorism phenomenon. Since, it just can explain about the philosophical aspect of this issue. However, terrorism is not merely a philosophical matter for human. Terrorism is a kind of action and a social phenomenon. Since it follows some objectives in order to achieve power and benefits, it is also a political issue for today’s nations and states.

2.4 Logical-rational approach

The most powerful approach to analyze the phenomenon of terrorism is logical-rational approach. Robbert A. Pape is one of the scholars in this field. He believes that logical-rational approach means that terrorism follows a logical strategy. This means that terrorism is targeted and is used to achieve a political goal by terrorists. So, it is not the result of dogmatic hatred or the ignorance. It happens by the certain purpose of terrorists and its objective is to apply the threat of punishment in order to force governments to change their policies. This especially leads to withdrawal of a democratic government from the land that is considered as mother land by terrorists. On the other hand, he believes that to achieve its goals, terrorism tries to have the lowest cost and create the most damages to opposite side at the same time. In Pape perspective terrorism had been effective and efficient for terrorists in this regard. The efficiency of terrorist attacks (including suicide bombers attacks) “is because of the analysis and completely evaluate of costs and benefits. According to this analysis as the most effective method, one terrorist organization can use it to achieve the most damages and the least costs at the same time … based on this strategic logic and its hidden rationality, organizations such as, Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and the Tamil Tigers are not irrational or insane people when applying suicide attacks”.

Generally, Robert Pape collected 188 suicide terrorist attacks during 1980 to 2001 in his study in order to prove that terrorism is strategic. He explained that terrorist organizations evaluate this attacks effective, while they are aware of its restrictions. Finally, Pape introduces five results in order to prove that terrorism (suicide terrorism) is a strategic logic plan. Firstly, suicide terrorism is seeking to obtain specific political objectives. It increases or decreases the intensity of terrorist attacks based on the amount of achieving goals. Secondly, suicide terrorism is designed in order to put the pressure on the democracies to give territorial concessions. The terrorist conflicts during 1980 to 2001 were performed to achieve territorial autonomy (that land that terrorists consider as their mother land) in Lebanon, Israel, Seri Lanka, Kashmir, and China. Thirdly, terrorists believe that terrorism is efficient. For example, when the American and French forces leaved Lebanon territory in 1983, terrorists considered it as the result of their efforts to put pressure on those countries’ forces. Fourthly, suicide terrorism gradually applies punishment against the governments in order to make them more involved, so, it increases the security costs of government by threatening civilians and can achieve more benefits. Finally, the best way to restrict suicide terrorism is to reduce the terrorists’ confidence on their abilities to perform such attacks [13].

Logical-rational approach is more effective than other approaches in analysis of terrorism phenomenon. However, it has some defects; for instance, this approach is not able to explain how the spiritual and mental status of terrorists encourages them to do terrorist operations. This means, this approach is not able to describe that two people in the equal and same rational status necessarily would do terrorist action.

In general, each of the described approaches illustrates one aspect of the process of this phenomenon. Meanwhile, as it mentioned before, logical-rational approach is to some extent more able to explain and analyze terrorism.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of terrorism is growing universally and it affects political, social, economic policies. This phenomenon has happened from the past in different forms and according to the political systems from traditional political ones to modern age (total modern states, totalitarian,
democratic systems, and etc.). However, it creates a dangerous status due to specific political, social, economic, cultural, and technological conditions and particularly in the situation that political units do not utilize total wars.

In order to understand this phenomenon four approaches have been presented. The first three approaches apparently have failed to provide a solution in order to cope with this phenomenon. However, logical-rational approach is able to clarify some aspects of terrorism. Unfortunately, there is no unbiased research in recognition of this destructive political phenomenon. This is because of the problems, barriers and the political sensitivity in doing research. There is a hope that officials and experts can peacefully investigate on this subject in order to understand it and find a solution to eliminate this horrible phenomenon.

References


[8] Pape, op. cit. pp. 89


