

On the Fairly Reasons for Single-Issue Terrorism in Developed Countries

By

Ali Awwad Rashed al-Shraah

Associate Professor, Al al-Bayt University, Mafraq, Amman, JORDAN.

ali_shra@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper is dedicated to discuss about the supposed ethical reasons for Single-Issue Terrorisms on developed Countries, handling as example the antiabortion group Army of God. The goal is to debate the idea of legitimacy of terrorism and criticise the myth which says that terrorist violent behaviour is proper of non-democratic states with no stability or development.

Keywords: *Terrorism, SIT, ethics, legitimacy, antiabortion*

1. Introduction

Terrorism is categorised as a violation of human rights, alongside crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. The theoretical premises for its inadmissibility can be founded on the Weberian paradigm of the State as monopoly of legitimate violence.

According to the RAND [1], the key elements of terrorism are: a) Violence or the threat of violence, b) Calculated to create fear and alarm, c) Intended to coerce certain actions, d) Motive must include a political objective, e) Generally directed against civilian targets.

The terrorist almost inevitably sees himself as an ethical actor. The trivialisation of the violence and dehumanisation of victims leads to a gradual expansion of range of targets and methods. Such is the case of the terrorist attacks with anti-abortion reasons that exists, particularly, on developed democratic countries such USA and Canada.

The research has been conducted using two US databases, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, START[2], and the Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents of RAND. Both databases have great acceptance by the accuracy of its methodologies and the constant update that is made of them. This does not mean that the information does not have limitations.

Single-Issue Terrorism

The term “Single Issue Terrorism” is broadly accepted as extremist militancy on the part of groups or individuals protesting a perceived grievance usually attributed to governmental action or inaction[3]. Also labelled as ‘special interest terrorist’, it can be seen as a form of terrorist that does not seek to either exact fundamental changes in a political apparatus or subvert any government but instead aims at spurring behavioural changes in governments or other political entities with regards to one particular perceived issue.

Martha Crenshaw[4] makes the categorical separation of single issue terrorists calling them ‘reformists’, a sub-category under ‘sub-revolutionaries’, next to ‘nationalists fighting against foreign occupiers’, ‘minority separatists’, and ‘anarchists or millenarians’.

SIT on democratic developed world

Most of the SITs fights are shared with the citizens; their actions are part of a long political violence escalation continuum. That is why SIT tends to be a phenomenon almost always observed on democratic developed world.

Dyson explains this situation saying that SIT is the most common form of violent political extremism expressed in the United States and in most of the industrialized nations of the world because “they believe that the progress being made through legal means to achieve the ultimate objective is simply not fast enough and must be hastened by the engenderment of fear”. [5]

Due to the fact that SIT is terrorist action seeking to address particular and sometimes very narrow issues, the list would have been far too extensive. Here, I shall focus on a classic type of SIT.

Anti-Abortion SIT

Core motivations of anti-abortionists are seen by the actors as espousing great nobility: they fight to save innocent lives. They fight for the right to life, even if that means taking lives. A huge portion of the anti-abortion movement is Christian-based fundamentalist. As Baird-Windle & Bader states [6], their acts are meant as selfless and redemptive gestures.

On developed countries hundreds of antiabortion groups exist nowadays and want to reverse abortion legislation and recriminalize it. Anti-abortion or pro-life terrorism is by far the most violent form of SIT.

According to the National Abortion Federation, from 1977 to 2013, the United States and Canada have seen a total of eight murders and seventeen attempted murders against abortion providers.

Collins,[7], observes that the seven murders of doctors and abortion clinic employees between 1993 and 1998 resulted in fewer health care providers and healthcare settings willing to offer abortion care.

Sundstrom says [8]that the socially conservative political climate in the USA dominates the discourse around abortion and seeks to justify violence aimed at abortion providers. One antiabortion terrorist is the Army of God that considers its members as the only one remnant of God-fearing men and women of the United States.

Ethical Theories beyond SIT

All groups of SIT perceive their respective actions as an ethical behaviour, what does it means?

For the Virtue ethics, the oldest ethical theory in Western philosophy, a right action is made by a virtuous person doing the right thing for the right reason, thus ethical, can be a violent one.

For Consequentialist ethics, a moral act depends only on the consequences or the motive behind it. Most terrorists invoke this view to justify their actions.

The ethical perspective, when only uses the scope of classical perspectives, is too short for understand a contemporary situations as SIT. But as political scientists we should try to understand the perception of legitimacy about SIT positions, particularly if we want to prevent.

Political approach to SIT

Now I want to show some data on terrorism and go to conclusions.

According to the START [2], USA has suffered 2646 terrorist attacks caused by anti-abortion movements between 1970 and 2013. The attacks include assassination, armed assault, bombing/explosion, hijacking, hostage taking, attack against infrastructure and unarmed assault even. The targets for anti-abortion terrorist are, from higher to lower, business, government, police, military, abortion related, airports and aircraft, government diplomatic, educational institutions, journalist and medias, maritime, NGO, citizens, religious figures, others. The weapon used on antiabortion attacks, from the more frequent to the less, are biological, chemical, radiological, nuclear, firearms, explosives, others.

Some perpetrators are: individuals, Sovereign Citizens, The Justice Department, AlQaida in the Arabian Peninsula, Minutemen American Defence, Neo-Nazi Group, Ku Klux Klan, Anti-Abortion, others.

According to the same source, Canada has suffered 69 incidents of anti-abortion terrorism during the same period. Almost all the attacks have no fatalities, but in 1985 there were an attack that caused 101 fatalities. The perpetrators also include the antiabortion Army of God.

The problem for democratic developed countries

Some characteristics that mark ideologies are that they tend to see on very black and white. Ideology also includes urgency and the desire for change or for resisting change. Those who believe in an ideology typically believe that they have an exclusive knowledge that can be useful to elevate or save mankind. All the above elements, we can see them on SIT antiabortion perpetrators.

Plus, all the SIT antiabortion attacks are made by individual. According to the PIRUS data [2], in the United States those individuals generally have a record of mental problems. This is not surprising, lone actors are less likely to be able to maintain strong social relationships. Lone actors are more likely to have had some type of crisis associated with a quest for significance.

There is a general increase in individuals engaged in terrorism over time. According with the GTD [2] during 2010 we saw more lone actors than group actors. This is very important because, it suggests that this phenomenon is going to be growing over time. Also is important because lone actors tend to be deadlier than group actors.

How can a person become a lone actor? I do consider that the quest for personal significance is the greatest human motivation.

Conclusion

Academically, even when we're trying to be comprehensive about grievances and ideologies, we shall never forget that terrorism is defined by the nature of the act and not by the identity of the perpetrators or the nature of the cause.

That's why the ethical legitimacy of the cause doesn't work to understand SIT. That doesn't mean that ethics or morality should be apart from political State perspectives. In fact, ethics and morality are always on the State program. As example the European Union has a consensus on the definition of terrorism, it qualifies terrorism as unacceptable due the idea that on democratic society objectives can be pursued through peaceful political means. Consequently, there shouldn't be any terrorist reaction into the population, but they are.

Just by observing SIT, terrorism is not a proper problem of undeveloped countries, non-stable States or low rent nations. Terrorism is a fact across the whole world and maybe it is more related to the availability of the weapons, the low respect for others life and the increased feeling of the lack of power in front of global processes that affect individuals directly.

Terrorism is inadmissible because it is an attack on the fundamental rights to life and integrity of the victims, but also against the sovereignty of the people. What we don't share with terrorism is exactly terrorism, the use of terror as a method to stand a political or ethical position. This notion is not entirely academic. Right now thousands of young people from undeveloped and developed countries have gone and are going to fight in terrorist groups that they perceive as absolutely ethical. If we want to communicate with them and persuade them to opt for other forms of behaviour, it appears indispensable to engage and understand their ethics rather than deny it.

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