



TERRORISM AND ITS PSYCHO-SOCIAL IMPACT ON SOCIETY

DR. RITU PAREEK

Associate Lecturer,
Birla Institute of Technology,
Mesra (Ranchi), Jaipur Campus. RAJ (INDIA)

ABSTRACT

Terrorism as a threat is considered to be the greatest challenge of today's era. A clear evidence of this is the regularly dominating news headlines filled with terrorist attacks and thwarted plots. Terrorism is an attack on human rights. It is a crime which most of the time targets innocent people. The innocent masses are not the direct target of the terrorists, but are only a hidden means to achieve and serve political and economic agenda. Terrorism affects different aspects of the society including its political, social and economic set-up. Terrorism is a political tactic which aims to demoralize the community and undermine its sense of security; it leaves everlasting effect on every aspect of society. A country like India has been struggling against terrorism, yet it continuously faces terrorist attacks which disturbs its economic progress and its social fabric. Terrorism in any part of the world is a threat to world peace and to human existence. The paper discusses how these disruptive activities affect the psychological status, social beliefs, attitude, and economical and political condition of any country.

The tragedy of 9/11, one of the history's most deadly attacks, made US to declare war on terror. Subsequently, the attacks created a feeling of pervasive fear and abhorrence all across America. On September 12th, the nation awoke to a reality, which was familiar to the rest of the world and the first question the Americans asked was, "Why do they hate us?" Why did it happen?" For some it was a rhetorical question, while others waited for the government and the media to provide them the answers.

Terrorism is considered to be the greatest challenge of today's era. A clear evidence of this is the regularly dominating news headlines describing terrorist attacks and thwarted plots. Terrorists are not a simple enemy to identify. They have innumerable complex impulses and motives as individuals and as groups. For some, terrorism is a dreadful crime, but others

argue that one region's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. The paper discusses how these disruptive activities affect the psychological status, social beliefs, attitude, and economical and political condition of any country.

In 2001, the US state Department had officially designated 22 foreign terrorist organizations. By 2003, the number included 16 more figures, which then became 36 organizations. It shows that either terrorism is a tremendous growing industry or the definition of terrorism has become gradually liberal in its description. Terrorism cannot be termed as an inexplicable occurrence; it is more like that of a strategically planned political violence. It is a tactic, not a movement and may occur in spurts, or even longer period of time.

According to the US State Department, "The term terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience" (638). Accordingly, "International terrorism means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country" (1). At the same time US also considers that, "terrorist acts are part of a large phenomenon of politically inspired violence, and at times the line between the two can become difficult to define" (67).

These definitions raise many questions. Is kidnapping or airline hijacking violence? If innocent civilians are casualties of violence directed against another specific target, is it an act of terrorism, or a tragic mistake? What are the consequences of it?

Terrorism in any part of the world is a threat to world peace and to human existence. The aim of terrorism is to demolish the authority of the state or the law. Since the social, economical, political and military powers of the state are mutually dependent on each other, any attack that will harm to any one of them will naturally affect the others. States are the potential targets of the terrorist attacks, but these terrorists may not always aim for physical destruction. The purpose of these terrorist groups might be to create pressure on the national authorities. In order to create psychological pressure, these terrorist groups use methods of generating fear among the public. Terrorists also terrorize by using threats or physical destruction to kill and maim innocent people, create sensationalism and chaos, and gain instant publicity for the terrorist's cause. The terrorist acts are unprovoked and intentional, causing over whelming fear.

Terrorism is an attack on human rights. It is a forceful and unlawful method to achieve the desired goal. The soul motive of terrorist activities is to overthrow the existing law and order system. Terrorism is a crime which most of the time targets innocent people. The innocent masses are not the direct target of the terrorists, but are only a hidden means to achieve and serve political and economic agenda. Terrorism affects different aspects of the society including its political, social and economic set-up. Terrorism is a political tactic which aims

to demoralize the community and undermine its sense of security; it leaves everlasting effect on every aspect of society. A country like India has been struggling against terrorism, yet it continuously faces terrorist attacks which disturb its economic progress and social fabric.

The common public is always the end sufferer of the terrorist attacks. As it is a general consensus that human conflict cannot be done away within society and terrorism is an extreme form of this conflict. The repercussions of the terrorism are very serious for general public. Terrorism not only affects economic development and prosperity but there are also psychological effects and heavy consequences can be seen on human personality and society.

Political Consequences

Terrorist activities use power with the purpose to create an effect. They tend to influence the politics of the government through destruction. This method aims at changing the government policies by applying pressure. Therefore political leadership is the target of the strategic planning of the terrorist organizations. These organizations know that the attacks will affect society and thus they succeed in creating psychological pressure on the politicians. The main aim of terrorist activities is to deprive the target state in reaching their social, economical and political targets. The political objectives also include issues such as (i) causing a government to change its policies, for instance, causing it to withdraw from territory, surrender control, release political prisoners, or descend further into destabilizing aggression; (ii) creating general panic to bring about a demographic change; (iii) convincing one's adversaries that the price of its policies is too great in terms of the human suffering required; (iv) publicizing one's grievances, i.e., to be heard in order to merit attention and perhaps gain support and sympathy from others; or (vi) instilling confidence and promoting unity within a subjected population by showing that its members have the power to hit back at their oppressors.

Psychological effect

The most striking consequence of these terrorist attacks is the human loss caused by bomb attacks. It causes heavy civilian mortalities. According to Barth Li, "During the past 35 years the world has witnessed nearly 20,000 terrorist incidents, ranging from the hostage takeover during the 1972 Munich Olympics to the 2002 and 2005 tourist bombings in Bali. These incidents have resulted in more than 90,000 casualties worldwide." The more losses caused by a terrorist attack, the greater the psychological effect it has on the general masses.

Terrorists create a sense of fear in the minds of the people. This fear leads to sense of discontentment and terror among people. It also leads to a sense of helplessness, which further creates depression among people regarding their personal and social well-being. Moreover, the violent acts of terrorism badly disturb the mental growth and force people into

constant stressful situations. Being affected by the repercussions of terrorism produces a hostile attitude among the masses. It further damages human and familial relationships, which ultimately affects the working performance of the individuals. These disruptive activities enhance anger and resentment among the people against the government and state bodies. People become the victims of psychological disorders such as anxiety, annoyance, aggression and frustration. The social relationships also suffer and face great loss in the presence of these psychological disturbances.

Social consequences

Terrorism not only negatively impacts individuals but also the whole social system. Due to terrorism the society splits which harms the social fabric and unity. It causes social segregation and isolation among the different strata of the society. As the difference between the sufferers and the accused gets broadened, the feeling leads to social disturbance and people feel divided within the society. Because of the continues violent attacks, social prosperity and well-being of the masses is always at risk which makes the lives of the people more difficult and intolerable. The incidents of murder, torture, mutilation, kidnapping and extortion create an atmosphere of suspicion, fear and panic all around. The terrorists kill unarmed civilians including women and children.

Economic Consequences

Terrorists' attacks, whether local or international, cause immediate human, economic and psychological repercussions of differing intensity. There may not seem a direct economical consequence but panic actually influences the economy significantly. Panic caused by the terrorists' activities affects the patterns of consumption and investment behaviour of the individuals and companies can then lead to distinct market disturbances. According to Dr. Michael Williams, "the main effect of terrorist attacks is their ability to disrupt the population's spending pattern". Therefore, the perception of a terrorist attack plays a big part in the impact on the economy. It can for example, lead to drops in demand in the tourism area. Indeed, "hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and other tourist-related business confronted a sharp drop in demand, in the United States but also in many other countries, in particular in the Caribbean and in the Middle East."

Conclusion

Threat of terrorism has been evident for many years, but only in recent times this threat has became fact. The paper is an attempt to focus the psychological, social, political and economical consequences of terrorist attacks. Any act of terrorism by the nature of its very purpose leaves a lingering impact on those who are either its victim or even its witness.

There is still an ongoing debate about the effect of terrorism on today's global economy. Some argue that it is still a secondary disturbance, and that the cities which are the main targets of the attacks, tend to recover quickly and effectively. Others argue that international terrorists' activities have long term effect on industries such as tourism and these consequences are likely to have a domino effect on other industries.

The terrorist attacks significantly affect the mental health of the individuals. They became depressed anxious and worried. These feelings of depression also affect their behaviour. They feel emotionally upset, sad, nervous, and feel stress most of the time. The current stream of terrorism made them more concerned about the safety of their families as well as their own. Therefore, there is a need to offer an empathic, non-judgmental, collaborative approach to help these ailing individuals to achieve a better level of adjustment.

REFERENCES

James R. Barth et al 2006, "Economic Impacts of Global Terrorism: From Munich to Bali,"
Milken Institute October 2006

Siegal J. Larry & John L. Worrall. Criminal Justice. Boston: Cengage Learning. 2014

US Department of State. Patterns of Global Terrorism. 1984

Vanhala Helena. The Depiction of Terrorists in Blockbuster Hollywood Films, 1980-2001.
North Carolina: Mcfarland. 2011

Visco Ignazio. "Economic Consequences of Terrorism." OECD Economic Outlook. Vol 1
No. 71, June 2002.

<http://www.financialexpress.com/article/fe-columnist/the-fast-lane-economic-cost-of-terror/34641/> Accessed: December 2015