Striking Terror

Synopsis: Fear is perhaps the most infectious condition of all. Bathtub drowning and road crashes kill more people, but terrorism inspires greater horror. Here is a look at the numerous facets of terrorism including how the phenomenon is a part of the established channels and networks.

Keywords: terrorism, terrorists, ideology, Islamic State (ISIS), Al-Qaeda, Irish Republican Army (IRA), ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom) Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jamaat-ud-Daawa (JuD), Hezbollah, United Self Defense Forces of Columbia (AUC), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), Shining Path

Prologue

Among the challenges faced by the world today, terrorism deserves a special mention in view of the dread it inspires. It is not that terrorists kill the most number of people, more fatalities result from road accidents. The problem is, terror activities strike fear in the hearts and minds of people. Many still feel the awe inspired by the 9/11 attacks and 7/7 London bombings.

The 9/11 Strikes Epitomize Terrorism
Image Courtesy of Robert at
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:North_face_south_tower_after_plane_strike_9-11.jpg

Definition

Terrorism is theoretically defined as the **use of violence against civilians by non-state entities for the attainment of political objectives**. All terror tactics involve **costly signaling** i.e. demonstration of destructive ability through overt and covert acts of gruesome violence.

Devastation so effected is merely a tool for instilling fear of further damage and reprisal in case of defiance by the target populace or the concerned state apparatus. Fear of death is more potent than death itself. And through this fear, they seek to achieve their aims.

Objectives

Terrorist operations are geared towards the achievement of the following objectives:

- **Policy Change**: through 9/11, Al-Qaeda wanted the US to modify its policy for West Asia, especially the stationing of troops in Saudi Arabia. Hezbollah in Lebanon has removal of Israeli troops from South Lebanon as one of its stated objectives

- **Regime Change**: the replacement of existing leadership / governments in numerous Muslim and Arab nations by radical Islamist regimes is an important goal of the Al-Qaeda

- **Territorial Change**: the Irish Republican Army (IRA) wanted to create a unified Ireland under Irish leadership and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had the dream of a Tamil homeland by carving out territories from Northern Sri Lanka and Southern India

- **Status Quo**: is the maintenance of existing regime or territorial arrangement. Numerous turf wars between rival terror groups on one hand and between terror groups and the state machinery on the other are fought for this aim

- **Social Control**: is the exercise of control over the target population through a mixture of force and benevolence. Some terror outfits such as Hamas (in Palestine) provide social services in the areas of their influence and even contest elections with successful results. The exercise is directed towards social control

  Jamaat-ud-Daawa (JuD), the parent organization of Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), for example, is registered as a charity institution in Pakistan

  Threshold Dynamics is a concept in social physics postulating that when two opposing ideas have an almost equal acceptance in the minds of the target population, an extra effort by proponents of one idea enables them to cross the threshold of credibility in the minds of the people and generate greater acceptance for their idea. This concept is put to great use by terrorists wanting to exercise social control.

Tactics

Terrorist organizations seek to achieve their objectives through the use of the following [tactics](#):

- **Attrition**: demonstrates to their adversary, state or non-state, their capability to engineer destructions over a prolonged duration

- **Intimidation**: forces the target population to support the terrorist's cause

- **Provocation**: incites their adversary to respond to acts of terror with indiscriminate violence that results in great hardships for the people, and people end up supporting the terrorists

- **Spoiling**: comprises physical and ideological attacks on people / intellectuals with moderate opinions. This helps terrorists maintain or extend their sway over the target population

Osama bin Laden was the Face of Terrorism for a Long Time
Image Courtesy of Hamid Mir at
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Osama_bin_Laden_portrait.jpg#filelinks

- **Outbidding**: proves to the target population how one terror syndicate is better than other such gangs

Factors of Terror Production

Successful operation requires a terrorist outfit to possess the following ingredients:

- **Funds**: are the lifeblood of terrorists. Money made from narcotics trade, smuggling, extortion, fake currency and merchandises, ransom

kidnappings, and credit card fraud are important [sources] of terror funds

The Islamic State (ISIS) [relies] on oil revenues. Latin American terror outfits such as the United Self Defense Forces of Columbia (AUC), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), and the Shining Path in Peru rely heavily on narcotics proceeds to the extent that they have earned the tag of 'narcoterrorists'

Terrorists use [established] money laundering channels also employed by non-terrorist influential people and groups. This is one of the areas where terrorists become a part of the system, making their elimination a mammoth challenge

Arms manufacturers are another piece in this jigsaw. Global arms trade between legitimate states often creates conditions for the [transfer] of arms to terrorists. Plus, this industry has a [vested interest] in the proliferation and continuation of conflicts and wars

- **Safe Territory Inhabited by a Supportive Population**: makes a safe haven available for the terrorists to disappear into when under fire. The supportive population not only nurtures the terrorists-in-hiding, but also provides a steady stream of recruits for the 'cause'. These novices replace the killed, crippled, and imprisoned cadre

Ambulances rushed to Russel Square in London after the 2005 Bombings
Image Courtesy of Francis Tyers at
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russell_square_ambulances.jpg

Ethnicity and **Religion / Sect** are important elements that bind terror groups to their supporting populations. Thus, the IRA had safety of the bolt-hole in the Catholic Irish Republic. The ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom) had their proposed homeland, Basque-

inhabited mountainous border between Spain and France, as a safe territory

Al-Qaeda represents the globalization of terror and has safe cells spread across the world. The most famous of these refuge spots was the Tora-Bora mountainous region along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border where Osama bin Laden found refuge from the International Coalition Forces for quite some time

- **Ideology**: is usually connected with the objectives of the terrorist venture. Such a philosophy provides the pretext or cause for which the group fights, helps raise funds and recruits, and creates active and passive support groups

  Such conceptual frameworks also allow terror ventures to have front organizations that handle propaganda on behalf of their blood thirsty masters. Front organizations usually participate in politics to gain legitimacy and demonstrate efficacy

- **Ruthlessness**: with which the group demonstrates it seriousness and forces their state and non-state rivals to take note

Finally, the Counter Theory

People regard a regime, any regime, capable of governance if it is seen to be benevolent and invincible. Terrorists possess force and claim to be fighting for a cause, for a certain group of people. A successful counter-terrorism strategy, therefore, requires fighting both these carefully cultivated perceptions.

Efficient management of the media is necessary to create a climate of opinion against the ideology espoused by terrorists. Exposing the real face of these outfits educates people and fractures the psychological foundations of terrorism thereby diminishing their acceptability in the minds of the people. This dents the aura of benevolence of terrorists.

Once an enabling environment is created, the state needs to avert acts of terror and punish the perpetrators of acts already executed to demonstrate the limited strength of terror outfits. This requires seamless coordination between political leadership, bureaucracy, intelligence and counter terrorism agencies, and local police.