

## An Analysis of Religious, Psychological and Socio-Political Factors Promoting Terrorism

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### Headings

- [Introduction](#)
- [Psycho-Social Dynamics](#)
- [Psychological Attention](#)
- [Individual vs. Group Level Psychological Explanations](#)
- [Moral Convictions of Terrorists](#)
- [Theoretical Basis of Terrorism](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

### Abstract

*This Terrorism is an intentional act of violence, rational enough to generate fear amongst the target audience or society focusing upon the determination of bringing desired change in that particular society. It has been observed that terrorist organizations may prevail in the repressive regimes that they perceive as sympathetic with their ideology. However, they target the societies for terrorist operations where the basic rights of individual and legal protections exist while avoiding repressive governments when conducting operations. As terrorism is not an irrational act, targets chosen for operation are based on the assumption that after the attack, required results are achieved by the assault. The motives behind the act may be psychological, Religious or political, depending upon the nature of the activity. In the current study, all these factors are discussed in detail that may provoke an individual to become a terrorist.*

**Key Words:** Terrorism, Extremism, Psychology, Socio-Economic, Violent Behavior.

### Introduction

Terrorism is not a new Phenomenon; World confronted it for centuries, but during the last three decades, it has attributed more attention of the world. Modern terrorism now reached on a stage where it requires new mechanism and strategies to overcome, including preparation along with the modern patterns and a new kind struggle to culminate it [\(Unraveling Al-Qaeda's Target Selection Calculus 2007\)](#). The tragic events of September 11, 2001 emerged so intensely that they have led the world to the justifiable assumption to be in the age of terrorism. On the eve of these horrific events, a report about terrorism was published which complained that the world is still unable to reach upon an undisputed definition of terrorism. The report stated that "it is a concept that resists precise definition," that it is not "a central element in major theories of war and conflict," that it is difficult to "make comparisons or draw general conclusions," and, above all, that "there is no comprehensive unifying definition of terrorism". [\(Economic Studies, 2002\)](#) The attacks reckoned as terrorists may use weapons of mass destruction, weapons of mass casualty and weapons of mass disruption. The desired outcomes through a terrorist attack are not necessarily achieved

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through immediate victims as they are mostly objecting to being exploited by the planners of assault in order to pressurize the third party.

The goal of Terrorist activity is to bring about political change by creating an atmosphere of fear. Most terrorist attacks are designed in a way to ultimately generate extreme losses which would intensify the political message required to convey. The nature of terrorism is nurtured specifically in a way so as to target individuals, indiscriminate and indirect just concentrating upon a specified objective. Indiscriminate and indirect sense of terrorism is deliberated in that the target specified for killing has no importance for perpetrators. Who is killed in a terrorist attack has less significance, but the importance is given to the fact that people got killed. Keeping in view the strategy of present-day terrorism, it is obvious that anyone can be a victim of a randomly selected terrorist target. The target which seems apparently random remains no longer random, its appearance as random create public anxiety and stress changing the behaviour of the government, which is exactly what the terrorists want to accomplish ([Terrorism Research, 2012](#)).

Organizations declared as Terrorists never groom in a vacuum but are born, grow, and die in a broader perspective on account of reaction by their opponents. Thus one can analyze the basic components of terrorism as follows,

1. Terrorism is a rational selection among violent and less violent alternatives.
2. Individual in a terrorist Organization has no significance. He is considered a part of a large group organized for the common objective. Tactics are adopted to maintain group cohesion. The supremacy of the group supersedes individualism.
3. With the espousing of terrorism, a group establishes an atmosphere in which it feels a sense of power and centrality. Attention attained through media in society itself becomes self-gratifying.
4. Terrorists assert themselves as elite forerunner. They live in the heaven of their own dreams after concluding that the issue of conflict is not debatable. They are so sure about the purity of their cause that action becomes superior to debate.
5. When Political goals are planned to achieve through viciousness, then political violence is justified through terrorism. The targets chosen for terrorism are depersonalized just declaring them as a symbolic label. Thus, giving a figurative tag becomes a legitimate target, and individual victims are perceived as symbols of an oppressive system.

Terrorism in society appears in the shape of a political act, the intention behind which is to bring a Political change. It has never seen to be driven by using personal desires or motivations. It has a remarkable effect on society wherein it prevails. This impact is created in the form of terrorist attacks which include weapons of mass destruction, mass casualty and mass disruption. The distinctions are made to concentrate upon the motives of the act rather than the approach used. A weapon of mass destruction as revealed by its name causes damage to infrastructure consisting of buildings (Symbolic, i.e. world trade Centre), dams, bridges, computer networks etc. A weapon of mass casualty includes the weapons that cause huge sickness and/or demise in a society where conducted. Biological and chemical weapons are the weapons of mass casualty. Finally, weapons of mass disruption include the weapons that cause social, political and financial damage to society. Weapons of Mass disruption also encompass Magnetic pulse weapons to disrupt soft wares by generating virus in the networks. It also encompasses cyber terrorism which results in hacking into computers and destroying financial institution information. A terrorist group may also use a weapon that alone achieves all three stated desires. Terrorism is usually a criminal act besides the dreams vowed by the terrorists ([Kepel 2002](#)).

## **Psycho-Social Dynamics**

It is a general consensus among social scientists that human conflict and corruption cannot be done away from society. The human conflict results in the form of violence or terrorism, the end sufferer of which is

the general public. The repercussions of terrorism are very serious for the masses. No doubt, terrorism not only directly affects economic development and prosperity but the psycho-social repercussions and heavily damage human personality and the society. First of all, terrorism creates a sense of trepidation in the minds of the people, which further leads to frustration and terror. Due to which the sense of defenselessness prevails in human minds. It further leads to hopelessness among the people regarding their personal and social well-being. The violent acts badly damage the mental growth of human beings and put them into a constant stressful situation. Such attacks especially, leave harmful and far-reaching effects on the minds of the children when they see dead bodies and horrible scenes of the terrorism on the media. (These days the media gives extraordinary coverage to the incidents of terrorism all over the world and people find themselves involved very much which creates resentment in their minds).

Being affected by the ramifications of terrorism, the snobbish attitude develops among the masses. It further damages human interaction which ultimately affects the working performance of the individuals. The regular terrorist acts bring about the rationale of losing reliance and cohesion of the people in the government and state. It also enhances anger and resentment among the masses against the government and the state apparatus. Terrorism not only badly impacts on the individual, but also the whole social system has to suffer the consequences. Social chaos takes place among the people belonging to different schools of thought. This split becomes the cause of significant social division which harms the social fabric and unity negatively. Due to the fear of terrorist attacks, people try to get away from their social and professional responsibilities. For example, a soldier cannot perform his duty if he witnessed other companions dying in the deadly terrorist attacks. Of course, one will join his duty, but due to permanent fear of losing life, he would perform duty in the state of fear.

Terrorism also promotes social segregation and isolation among the different strata of society. It creates distance between the supporters and suffers from the accused attacks. That means it enhances the social disturbance and people feel divided in the society. It also categorically affects the social progress and well-being of the people. Because of the vicious activities, the businesses and economy of the country suffer, which directly minimize the job opportunities; as a result, poverty increases, which damages the society as a whole (Michael, 2007).

### Psychological Attention

The effects desired to create by terrorist actions are not always aimed at the victims of violence. Rather these victims are commonly gadgets to be exploited to pressurize a third party. To attain such purposes, statistics of the attack should reach the target audience that may be governed and any Law enforcement agency. So groups, while planning for terrorist assault, keep focus upon seeking the maximum attention through media to convey their message to the right audiences. Immediate victims are absolutely the primary medium that generates the favoured mental effect on the huge target audiences. In a terrorism affected society, it is generally a psychological act to be communicated among society through violence. The strategies used for violence are adopted so as to gear up publicly inflicting damage to symbols, thus inspiring fear. To generate a high degree of fear of timing, place, and approach of attack is designed to accommodate mass media coverage and augment front-line news impact. A terrorist operation primarily has the purpose of manipulating prominent perceptions and could try to gain this through mass media coverage (Hoffman 1998).

Terrorist Organizations may rely on media which they perceive as friendly or sympathetic with their cause. News media can be manipulated by planning in such a way that it provides the advantage of initiative given to the terrorist. In case of a terrorist incident, pressure upon generalists to report speedy in order to scoop competitors provides chance to terrorists present their claims that could be seriously evaluated if time were available to concentrate upon the claim. The PTSD (Post Trauma Stress Disorder) impacts upon the victims of a terrorist event, especially on survivors have no importance for terrorists. What's critical for

terrorists is the envisioned psychological impact that resulted from the news of their deaths or sufferings, which will force target audiences to contemplate their cause. Terrorists mostly base in repressive regimes which can be sympathetic to them and justify their cause. States which possess powerful security forces and have fewer civil liberties typically suffered a much less from terrorism than liberal states with tremendous security forces [\\_\(Xiangsui 1999\)](#).

Terrorist Organizations with secular ideologies having non-religious desires are witnessed to commit very discerning and discriminate violent actions in order to achieve a specific political objective. They try to maintain minimum casualties to achieve their aim [\\_\(Wikipedia n.d.\)](#). On the other hand, if a group is religiously orientated, it will try to inflict as many casualties as viable. The reason behind the assumption is that fear of ethical backlash hardly ever concerns this type of terrorist organization [\\_\(Harmon 2000\)](#).

### **Individual vs. Group Level Psychological Explanations**

Scholars deliberated the reasons behind an individual's decision to take part in violent activities. It's mostly observed that the impact of events that happened in individual life provide upward thrust to build antisocial feelings. Such individuals have grievances with society and seek a choice of revenge in order to redress their grievances. For the purpose of evaluation among the violent and nonviolent activists, it is revealed that family backgrounds and close circles around the individual were almost the same among both categories. Few psychological commonalities were found amongst violent activists.

Political violence is a quite familiar social phenomenon in some societies. When combined with stated requisites, people include themselves as part of large organizations which also define their social status in society. Therefore, while examining the phenomenon at the group level, another factor of psychological motivation is the depth of institutional dynamics amongst terrorists. The ultimate outcome of those dynamics is the symptoms of a self-perpetuating cycle of rationalization about political violence. If any group get succeeded to achieve the desired goals, is no longer needed; consequently, success threatens the psychological well-being of its individuals.

### **Moral Convictions of Terrorists**

Moral conviction refers to a terrorists' explicit supposition about the truthfulness of his cause. A group may have concluded that "they have been morally wronged and that an effective, immoral, and evil enemy is arrayed against them. This enemy is considered adept at betrayal, exploitation, violence, and repression. Those conclusions may have some legitimacy, mainly whilst a history of exploitation has been recorded. If a group concludes that it's far inherently and morally superior, can be derived from ideological convictions, ethno-national ideals or religious beliefs". From this attitude, the purpose will become virtuous and holy. The sense created through moral purity will become the bottom line for the simplification of good and evil. After such provisions, terrorists may decide not to compromise maintaining terrorism as a legitimate choice.

The end justifies the means. No matter how much the means are morally and ethically wrong. Many terrorists have developed the concept of self-sacrifice that lay at the bottom of their routine activities. They are sure about the superiority of these concepts and urge people to follow them because people who comply with their concepts are more pious from people who do not. This developed concept encompasses a religious, ethno-national or ideological basis commonly. Any action, no matter how much heinous taken within the parameters of that concept are justified because the set concept itself purifies the actual believer. Keeping in view such perceptions, any system aimed to replace the existing one becomes most suitable, and destruction of the existing system seem justifiable. For instance, terrorists operating on the basis of religious purposes seek to create a God-inspired society where they can practice according to their faith. This society will reflect the decrees, morality, and values of their spiritual faith. As well as terrorists based upon the Political ideals wished to outline their society in line with their ideological angle. Irrespective of the

strategy undertaken by the terrorists, they firmly believe that their promised good (often a utopia) justifies the actions taken by them, irrespective of how much violent these actions are [\(Crumpton 2006\)](#).

## Theoretical Basis of Terrorism

For the purpose to establish a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy, the motives behind terrorism are necessary to understand. Terrorists are not always an identical group. They have diverse roots which are not same from one place to another. Some pose themselves as legal, geopolitical players, while others have role of nothing more than gangs or thrill-kill cults. All these terrorists believe upon the theoretical bases providing a guise for their cause.

## Political Theories

Political theories which justify violence and terrorism are as follows,

### Anarchism

Anarchism was first introduced in the world during 1840 by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. While violence witnessed during the nineteenth century had symptoms of terrorism. As a theory of Political Science, Anarchism rejects the existence of State like conventional Marxists as well as denies any form of coercive government, domination and exploitation. Terrorism differs from Anarchism in the sense that it not a form of Government (Except some type of State Terrorism) but Anarchism has the far-reaching form of government. As mentioned earlier, anarchists deny terrorism due to its different diversities, but keeping in view the theoretical bases, anarchism somehow validates terrorism. This validation sums terrorism as a type of criminal activity that encompasses attacks upon the values of an organized, peaceful society.

It is important to mention here that Anarchism no longer supports terrorism. Historically, Anarchism was found behind acts of violence, but in the recent past, it has ceased to support any form of violence. Theoretically, they have weak linkages except for some notions like "propaganda of the deed" which was basically originated in Italy by Carlo Pissacane [\(Kushner 2003\)](#).

### Fascism

Fascism supports terrorism locally as well as internationally. Fascism is a theory which supports the consolidation of all economic and political power into some form of super-patriotism. Thus it also advocates genocide or endless war with one's enemies. It has been witnessed historically that Fascist who failed to get control over government or could not able to be in power, ultimately turned to become terrorists. Thus frustrated Fascists start partaking in domestic violent activities as they no longer believe in the basic rights of citizens on the mere basis that someone is just inhabitant of a country. Critical analysis reveals that Fascism consists of ironies and inconsistencies. On the one hand, "it is anti-modern in its adoration of the land, a return to country life, and its fascination with peasant dress or costume. On the other hand, it is pro-modern in its worship of military technology, favouritism of big business, mass mobilization of people, promotion of commercialized sport, and its surprisingly liberal attitude toward the involvement of women in the movement". Some of the current regimes who do not vow themselves as Fascists but their actions are mostly incurred with those regarded as Fascist [\(Passmore 2002\)](#).

## Globalization

Today, World has emerged into a global village. This phenomenon is achieved through the latest means of communication and transportation. It has impacted the modern world a lot in the shape of dreams, fantasies, and rising expectations. However, most of the time, when these hopes are not fulfilled, it leads to dashed hopes and unfulfilled achievements. We have witnessed the gap between the haves and have-nots

not; which is more widened after the emergence of a globalized world. Now, the conflict between power, wealth and justice has been started between rich and poor nations around the globe. Wealthy people (or nations) are perceived as seizing power and wealth, and poor people (or nations) are seen as wanting justice. Rich people or Nations have emerged to become the factor or root cause of terrorism since they contribute to the circumstances which cause terrorism. The theory of Globalization holds that if poor are provided with a chance to peacefully achieve what they have not achieved, terrorism will not thrive [\(Nassar 2004\)](#).

### **Sociological Theories of Terrorism**

Terrorism creates fear among society. Several factors play the role to enhance fear and dread created by the result of Terrorism. Atmosphere of fear leads to distress which ultimately leads to helplessness. When an individual feels helplessness for a long time then, he enters into a stage of hopelessness. This is a dangerous time when he is not sure about his future, so he disintegrates himself from the wellbeing of society. The frustration-aggression theorists state that a frustrated person is more dangerous in society. Here emerged the concept that each frustration leads to some type of aggression, so as to relieve the aggression for some degree. The reason behind the myth is that stress and hassles will come to a point where they "break the camel's back" and the displacement of released energy offer some relief and in terms of catharsis. Contemporary sociological theorists are basically concerned with the creation of fear, and the way establishment adopts the strategies and role of media as well as the character of other groups to sustain that expression of fear.

1. The theorist who prioritizes the role models or emphasizes to use such techniques necessary for neutralization of individuals involved in terrorist activities are called Learning Theorists.
2. As for as those who express the views "about the acts of other people" are often known as Labeling theorists.
3. Whereas Control theorists concentrate upon the role of the individual in society who feels being excluded and neglected as an active citizen. He thinks himself excess for the society without love, commitment, and deprived of formal education. On the ideals of John Lock theory "man's mind is a blank sheet", Individual's idle time becomes the "devil's playground" for him.
4. Some theorists give essence to the institutions of mediation. Their importance becomes obvious as their presence provides opportunity for collective measures to resolve permanent clash. More radical versions of skirmish concept might glamorize terrorism being symptoms of a proto-revolutionary action. Theorists thinking upon such lines are called Conflict theorists.
5. Those, who like to focus upon the impacts of aggressive proneness, incitement, and the support for third parties are known as Integrated Theorists." [\(Ross 1996\)](#)

### **Psychiatric**

The hypothesis developed after several studies expresses that religious terrorists are more dangerous due to "terrorist-as-mentally-ill" phenomenon which states that behaviour of a terrorist is developed due to bad childhood experiences with a retorted sense of nature. After some evaluations conducted about the mindset which compels or forces terrorists to commit heinous acts (killing human beings) draws upon a view of mental infection developed in the terrorists. Jessica Stern also conducted a study about "the psychological perception of distinction among "doomsday" terrorists, who might use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that could end all life on earth, and perilous terrorists, who could limit themselves to the use of traditional weapons".

Walter Laqueur provided another approach to understand terrorism; he stated that we need to differentiate among extremists and fanatics. Two understand both differences between both terms, and we should know that fanatics are religious zealots and extremists are political zealots. The idea of fanaticism

consists of some implications of mental infection; however, it's not in itself a diagnostic class. He further strips away any religious implication and declares maximum terrorists as fanatics. It is the fact that while committing a terrorist activity, the target audience is more emphasized than victim of an attack [\\_\(Laqueur 1999\)](#).

### Biological Motives of Terrorism

According to David Hubbard, individuals in a society convicted for repetitive and cyclical acts of violence are due to some hormonal or neurochemical fluctuations occurred in their body or brain chemistry. Three compounds are important to emphasized, like, norepinephrine, acetylcholine, and endorphins. Norepinephrine is suspected as being the most influential, as it's associated with the flight or combat mechanism present in human biology. In 1929, the hypothesis of "fight or flight" was presented by W. B. Cannon referring to a state of stimulation due to stress, and within which heart, lungs, and muscle start to perform more effectively. While studying biological viewpoint, reasons behind terrorist activities seem pretty solid, and it's more feasible to link a ramification of components inside the ordinary terrorist profile with biological factors [\\_\(Hubbard 1983\)](#).

### Criminological Theories

Is it possible to implement traditional criminological theories to terrorism? While in the case, most of the times, traditional criminologist theories are framed just to explain the motives found behind street crimes like theft or burglary, and provide some tactics, by applying which will make these crimes hard to increase. Durkheim perceived terrorism as being a part of the "normality of crime". He further explains that it's part of a virtually intolerable form of crime while each crime serves positive meanings (of innovation and evolution), however alternatively, some sorts of crime cause disintegration and are cancerous like terrorism [\(Ruggiero 2005\)](#).

### Conclusion

Terrorism is the most crucial issue to be studied at present. There are numerous social and political factors that cause and promote terrorism in society. A society becomes victim of the monster when it fails to redress grievances raised among individuals. Terrorism differs from conventional crimes and needs to be analyzed in line with background conditions prevailed in a particular society. Terrorism becomes a complicated phenomenon without a comprehensive and agreed-upon definition. In the absence of such definition, the famous statement stating that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' produces chaos to understand the term. The target of terrorists is mostly civilian population; besides their stated goals like national liberation or political objectives. The necessity to establish typical definition is crucial for combating terrorism and designing effective counter-terrorist techniques. A possible definition of terrorism may be "the aim to create a political change through means of grave fear, violence and intimidation, more frequent attacks are designed to create mass casualties to intensify their political message".

Terrorists have a firm belief in their ideology so they don't hesitate to commit actions which otherwise would not be expected from human beings, including killing and injuring of innocent people. Terrorist exhibit a psychological condition in which an individual expresses antisocial personality disorder or psychopathic personality disorder. In such condition, individual is contemplated by means of an absence of empathy for the suffering of others. But apparently, they do not seem dangerous or mentally ill while performing so heinous acts. A common feature of such mental condition is when a person considers himself at extreme rightness as "I am correct and proper. You're bad and wrong." It's far a very polarized thinking which allows them to distance themselves from opponents and makes it less complicated for them to kill human beings.

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