

## **Contemporary Issue Is Religious Terrorism The Greatest Security Threat of our Time**

Afolabi Muyiwa Bamidele, Adi Irenyang Nuhu & Bodunde David O. PhD  
*Intelligence and Security Studies Programme, Department of Political Science and International Studies,  
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.*

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**ABSTRACT:-**Terrorism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has taken a new dimension. The rebirth of modern religious terrorism is considered as the most alarming threat in the contemporary global system. The new trend of suicide attacks and bombings in the name of God has widen the debate on terrorism and extended the political importance of terrorism study. Although fanaticism is not new, its re-emergence is much peculiar to Islamic religion hence the coining of the term 'Islamic terrorism' among diplomats, analyst and scholars. Unlike previous extremisms, the modern Islamic terrorism is characterised by greater lethality with wider onslaughts across frontiers. Different non-state actors have emerged as proponents of this contemporary insurrection. Prominent among others are Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, the Islamic State of Iraq, Boko Haram, the Haqqani Network and the Kataib Hezbollah. From the foregoing, this paper deliberates on the existence and general characteristics of contemporary religious based terrorism. It begins by discussing briefly the different four terrorism waves and elaborates on the fourth wave which explains the contemporary rise of religious violence. Additionally, this paper examines the spread of what is today known as Islamic terrorism. Notwithstanding, the characteristics of the contemporary 'holy war' will be appraised with the intention of differentiating it from previous terrorist movements of preceding waves.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

As a guide, it is important to start any terrorism discuss by providing a workable definition. There is no any generally acceptable definition of terrorism. As such, there are diverse terrorism definitions owing to the political, emotional and philosophical differences among states and scholars. Whittaker (2004) maintains that defining terrorism largely depends on individual and state viewpoint. Terrorism is viewed differently among authority responsible for securing its citizens, from an observer who witnessed the terrorist act, from a victim or relation and from the perpetrators of the terrorist act themselves. Besides a terrorist in one state maybe accorded a revolutionary status in another hence the maxim one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter (Seymour, 1975). However, individuals and organisations have come up with different definitions of terrorism. Hoffman (2006) contends that terrorism in contrast to other forms of violence is ineluctable political in aims and motives, violent or threat of violence, undertaken to have psychological effect on its victim and beyond, normally executed by a non-state entity with a well-defined chain of command. Jenkins (1986) defines terrorism as a theatre perhaps a scene. A wider definition of terrorism is contained in the United Nations security Council Resolution 1566 which defines the term as criminal conducts including those against civilians, carried out with the purpose of causing much fatality including bodily injury or taking hostages, aimed at terrifying the general public or group of persons or particular people, intimidate a community or to compel a state or international arrangement to do or to abstain from doing any act which satisfies offences contained within the scope of international conventions and protocols on terrorism, and which are undertaken for political, philosophical, ideological, ethnic, racial, religious or akin nature (Wilkinson, 2001). From the preceding definitions, this paper describes terrorism as the unlawful use or threat of violence especially against civilians which is aimed at pursuing goals that are political, ideological or religious.

Terrorism has been for long an integral part of the history of states. Its history dates back to man's keenness to use violence to achieve desirable goals. Different shades of terrorism have emerged at different era of human existence. For instance, terrorism during the earlier times often referred to as the terrorism of antiquity witnessed the demonstration of violent campaigns by the nationalist and religious Zealots, Assassins and Thugs. This era was superseded by the French Revolution in the late 1790s were leaders of the revolution employed terrorist acts to stage their objectives and dispose opponents. As well, terrorism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also transpired in Russia as a means of defeating the Tsarist autocracy and corruption. On its part, terrorism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced the rise of non-state actors who terrorised states under the guise of nationalist, separatist and anticolonial activisms. This era saw the rise of terrorist sect like the Irish Republican Army in Ireland, the Kurdistan workers Party in Turkey, the Left-wing Red Army Faction in Germany, the Red Bridge in

Italy and a host of others. Perhaps, during the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, anti-colonial movements especially in Africa and Asia adopted some terrorist like modus operandi to oust out colonial rule.

## **II. THE FOUR TERRORISM WAVES**

Terrorism has for long been part of the history of states. It has been employed at one point or the other to shape the political, socio-economic and religious make up of diverse societies from the distant past to the contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century. Motivations and nature of grievances for terrorist differs from one region to the other or perhaps, from one terrorism wave to the other. Understanding terrorist intents and motives from past and present epoch becomes important in interpreting the rationale for such extremism and effecting suitable counter terrorism strategies. For instance, Whittaker (2004) summarised terrorist motives into four categories;

- To obtain what is unfairly denied in terms of land, freedom, basic rights and opportunities
1. To reassert identity, status, legitimate possession, where these are challenged or lost
  2. To protect where an entity is threatened or ill-treated
  3. To restore where former rights, privileges, advantages have been denuded or taken away'' (Whittaker, 2004, p.51)

These widespread factors are much reflected in accounts of terrorist uprising on bases of nationalist, revolutionary, anti-colonial or religious based agitations.

In an attempt to buttress the age long history of terrorism, Rapoport (2004) describes the account of terrorism using four waves; the Anarchist wave, the Anticolonial wave, the New left wave, and the most modern Religious wave. These waves began in the late 1870's with each lasting for about 40 years. The first wave-Anarchist wave, introduced the internationalisation of terrorism (Rapoport, 2004). It had its roots in Russia 1880s in response to the slow democratic developments. Rosenfeld (2011) argues that terrorism during this era was characterised by the anarchist's use of violent ideas and tactics as a means of dethroning the political authority. Hence terrorist in the first wave centred on the assassination of the influential ruling class. The modification in economy and technology influenced the activities of the first wave activist. Rapoport (2004) maintained that changes in communication and transportation strategy played a significant role towards terrorist successes during this era. As such, information was easily disseminated among terrorist and transportation to target areas was relatively at ease. The dissenters while emulating the French Revolution of 1787-1799 saw themselves as terrorists not guerrillas or freedom fighters (Rapoport, 2004). Moreover, the Anarchist was grounded on four major doctrines; 1. Modern society contains huge reservoirs of latent ambivalence and hostility, 2. Society muffles and diffuses them by devising moral conventions to generate guilt, provide channels for settling some grievances and securing personal amenities, 3. However, moral conventions that subjugate can be challenged and our children will hail these endeavours as noble efforts to liberate humanity and, 4. Terror is the quickest and most effective means to destroy conventions (Kegley, 2003, p.39)

The second wave referred to as the Anti colonial wave began in 1920s after the World War I. Rapoport (2004) describes the root of the second wave to be grounded in the attempt of the victors of World War I to disintegrate the empires of the defeated nations. This wave was triggered by the institution of the Versailles Peace Treaty. The Anti colonial wave founded the likes of terrorist associations like the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Agoniston (EOKA) also referred to as the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters, Irgun and Lehi among others who terrorise foreign authorities for the purpose of territorial liberation (Rosenfeld, 2011). Unlike the first wave, Kegley (2003) contended that the second wave in terms of tactics employed less of robberies and assassinations. Rather, major strategies went into guerrilla-like warfare against troops. In fact, anti-colonial organisations did not refer to themselves as terrorist but freedom fighters struggling for national liberation (Rapoport, 2004). Although Rapoport (2004) discussed this wave as mostly successful, terrorist groups rarely achieved their primary objectives. For instance, the IRA gained an Irish state but could not acquire the whole Island, EOKA struggled to unite Cyprus and Greece but had to go along with the state of Cyprus which later fragmented into two. Moreover, the Jews and Arabs in Palestine had contrary views in their struggle to terminate British rule in their territory (Rosenfeld, 2011).

The worrisome Vietnam War resulted in the arrival of a new wave referred to as the New Left wave. The Vietcong's effective use of terror against the American armies renewed the hopes for radicals that the western power was also vulnerable (Kengley, 2003). Many groups such as West German RAF, Italian Red Brigades, American Weather Underground, Japanese Red Army and the French Action Directe occupied the New Leftist Wave while perceiving themselves as liberators for the third world where much western intimidation was already in existence (Rapoport, 2004). Just like the first wave, the third wave also combined radicalism with nationalism. Moreover, the term 'international terrorism' was reintroduced as targets and attacks were more international in nature. Thus Kegley (2003) revealed that for instance, the Palestine Liberation Organisation were more vigorous in Europe than on the West Bank. Airline hijackings and assassinations were prominent strategies of the third wave. Over one hundred hijackings occurred during this period and prominent public figures were assassinated as a means of punishment. Notable among others was the assassination of

British ambassador to Ireland in 1976 and Lord Mountbatten in 1979 by the Irish Republican Army. Besides, the Palestinian Black September Organisation assassinated the Jordanian Prime Minister (Rapoport, 2004). Also, various hostage crisis dominated this wave. For example, Italian Prime minister Aldo Moro was kidnapped in 1979 and later murdered by the Red Brigades (Rosenfeld, 2011). Nevertheless by the 1980s, the third wave began to recede. International cooperation on counter terrorism became much vigorous thus revolutionary terrorist were overwhelmed from one country to another as evident in Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (Kegley, 2003).

As the New Left wave began to fade away, the religious wave (fourth wave) started evolving. Religious identities had played important motives for terrorist organisations. Moreover, Rapoport (2004) contended that religious and ethnic characteristics often overlap and have stimulated terrorist uprisings in earlier waves as evident in the Armenian, Macedonian, Irish, Cypriot, Israeli and Palestinian struggles. These were demonstrated in the earlier waves with the aim of creating secular states based on universal international principles. However, the religious era of the fourth wave took a different dimension. This time, terrorist organisations aimed at establishing a new world based on religious detects (Kegley, 2003). The propagation of Islam is at the heart of this era. Nonetheless, several world religion in previous ages have succumbed to the use of unlawful violence to protect and promote their beliefs. Rapoport (1984) further elucidated this trend when he described terrorism in three religions using the terms thugs, Assassins and Zealots-Scicari. The thugs were interpreted to be violent Hindus who terrorised their victims as a means of worshipping their goddess; Kali of terror and destruction. Likewise, the Assassins also motivated by religious dispositions employed terrorist acts to protect Islamic doctrines and cultures with a conviction that Islamic community and institutions were inextricable. The Zealots-Sicari on their part were founded on the faith that terrorism in the name of God is rewarded with an eternal life after death. In equal trend, the Sikhs used terror to struggle for a religious state in Punjab. The Jews terrorised the Muslims and attempted to destroy their holy temple in Jerusalem and attacked the Palestinians (Kegley, 2003). In Hebron, a religious terrorist massacred 29 worshippers in Abraham's tomb and similarly, the Israeli Prime Minister was assassinated in 1995 by a religious extremist (Hussein, 1995). More so, Barkun (1996) in his book *religion and the racist right: the origins of the Christian identity movement*, discussed the prevalence of terrorism in Christendom. The Christian terrorism was based on racial elucidation of the Bible. This has often time been associated with the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995.

The modern religious terrorism associated with Islamic revolution has presented a new configuration of global international terrorism. Ghaliand and Blin (2007) argued that the history of this new vogue of modern violence is largely tied to Iranian Islamic Revolution in the Middle East 1979. The revolution which prompted the overthrow of the shah and struggled to establish a new Islamic Caliphate based on fundamental beliefs was celebrated and admired by not only the Shi'ite but among Islamic communities in the entire Middle East. The fall of the shah undermined the power of the US and other western states thus, radical Islamists in other Muslim states renewed their hope of establishing Islamic empires based on 'sharia' (Wilkinson, 2001). Meanwhile, the Muslim resistance and the anti-Soviet mujahedeen war from 1979 to 1989 further influenced the rise and progression of modern terrorist groups. The successful elimination of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the disintegration of the Soviet Union that followed suit shaped the hopes of 'fanatical warlords' (Garrison, 2003). This optimism has ensued the development of more radical organisations in the Middle East and beyond with objectives which Laqueur (2007) referred to as the return of fundamentalist Islam and those of its protagonist. These groups now exist in almost every Muslim country while notable ones in terms of capacity and lethality have been Hezbollah in south Lebanon, Hamas based in Gaza and the West Bank and al-Gama'al al-Islamiyya in Egypt and the transnational Al Qaeda network (Wilkinson, 2001) including those in far West Africa like Boko Haram and Ansaru. The existence and ceaseless attacks by these transnational network of religious extremists deepens the debate between religious terrorism and other secular terrorism. Meanwhile answers could be found while discussing the distinguishing characteristics of horrific manifestation of religious skirmish.

### **III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW ISLAMIC TERRORISM**

Paramount in discussing the new global Islamic terrorism is the role of religious conviction. It is worth arguing therefore that religious terrorism in the contemporary world setting is founded on the premise of establishing a global authority based on sharia detects. For instance, Rabasa et al (2006) while reviewing the emergence and expansion of Al Qaeda discussed its organisational objectives to include the struggle towards establishing a strict sharia religious rule system. Perhaps, its aims at expelling the US and other Western 'infidels' from the middle east and to establish a pan-Islamic federation. Undoubtedly, fanatical interpretations of the Quran influences these objectives thus, Islamic terrorist organisations legitimize their objectives and violent campaigns as a Jihad backed up by the Quran (Venkatraman, 2007). As such, the orthodoxy of Jihad as an act of defence and to preserve Islam especially in Islamic communities and beyond largely differentiates religious terrorism from secular terrorism. Likewise, the motivations for these holy wars do not just arise from mere religious beliefs. Rather, grievances are also rooted in problems of alienation, humiliation, demographics,

history and territorial struggle (Stern, 2003). Perhaps, political intentions cannot be distanced from these struggles. For instance, Sedgwick (2004) has argued that while Al Qaeda is largely motivated by its religious conviction, the group is also tied to the desire to fulfil a political objective. While Al Qaeda's religious objective is ultimate, its political intents are immediate which includes an ambition to create its own global Islamic oriented empire. Tan and Ramakrishna (2002) maintained that the relationship between religion and violence lies on their reliance of extreme violence unlike previous secular movements who are conscious of the political counterproductive effect of excessive violence. This introduces the debate about their sheer lethality.

The wanton use of violence by the new global terrorist networks has introduced newer forms of attacks and higher casualties recorded. Hence, Hoffman (2006) aptly cited that the new terrorism is new mostly because of its new lethality. This is further buttressed by Laqueur (2000) when he discussed the new religious extremism as a radical transformation, perhaps a revolution in the nature of terrorism therefore the exhibition of cruel brutality which effects mass killings and societal panic. Moreover, the incorporation of suicide bombing into the contemporary terrorism has heighten its destructive feature and increased the audacity of terrorist. Although Atran (2003) has traced the genesis of suicide terrorism to the ancient Zealots, Assassins and even the French Revolution, its return in the contemporary religious wave has made it a more prominent tool for terrorist. In fact various religious dignitaries in places like Afghanistan, Palestine and Egypt have justified this barbarous trend as 'shahada' martyrdom (Laqueur, 2003). Therefore, the new terrorism is largely indiscriminate in the choice of its target and victims unlike previous secular movements which were selective in terms of victims. No wonder Laqueur (2003, p.9) concludes that 'the aim of the contemporary terrorism is no longer to conduct propaganda but to effect maximum destruction'. Most notorious among other attacks was the 9/11 suicide attacks by Al Qaeda which resulted to about 3,000 deaths. As such, Wilkinson (2006) describes it as one of the greatest attacks in the history of terrorism.

Additionally, one unique feature of the new terrorism against the old is its well-structured system or rather, its peculiar networked organisational make up. For instance, Tan and Ramakrishna (2002) attributes the networked operational system of the Al Qaeda to be a product of increasing globalisation and information revolution that is dominant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such transformations in telecommunication, data processing, transfer and transportation eases organisational planning and coordination from around the world. Indeed high tech developments eases the strategies for terrorist leaders like Bin Laden (also known as the modern terrorism Chief Executive Officer) as it enables flexibility of tactics and allows for control at multiple levels (Hoffman, 2006). Notwithstanding, the accessibility of ready technology for modern terrorist largely enhances their striking capabilities. On this note, terrorist may expand their targets to include the cyberspace while accessing the enormous information available online to develop new ideas and strategies (Tan and Ramakrishna, 2002). Given that terrorist can now have easy access to technological knowhow, the threat of modern terrorist assembling and acquiring weapons of mass destruction is inevitable. Perhaps, Al Qaeda's encyclopaedia of Jihad highlights its predisposition to the use of chemical and biological weapons. Although Cameron (2000) while discussing their propensity to the use of chemical, biological, and radiological nuclear weapons, he however concluded by citing that modern terrorist are more likely to maintain their use of conventional weapons to cause mass destruction. Nevertheless, the 9/11 attacks and other terrific strikes has raised concerns about the outcomes of contemporary and future terrorism.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Hence this paper began by examining the various terrorism manifestations in four different waves, in many different ways and for varied causes. There is a connection between terrorism and revolution, there is a connection between terrorism and politics, and there is a connection between terrorism and religion. Whereas the old terrorism encompassed the anarchist, anti-colonial and leftist movements, the Iranian Revolution ignited the new global terror of religious fanaticism. This paper suggest that unlike its predecessors, the new Islamic religious terrorism of the fourth wave develops unique attributes which presents it as the greatest threat of our time. Its use of vicious violence and increased lethality, misinterpretation of religious doctrines and the exploit of the 21<sup>st</sup> century technology further offers the reason for global panic. Besides, the existence of what is known as the most dangerous international terrorist networks in the history of modern terrorism like Al Qaeda and its other comrades not only intensifies the threat to contemporary international security, but also presents a concern for the future.

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