

The New Terrorism Debate

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Abstract

This paper explores whether or not the traits found in the new terrorism paradigm correspond with Hamas' behavioral and organizational characteristics. By focusing on the core concepts of the new terrorism paradigm this paper discusses how Hamas fits within the parameters laid out by those concepts, and compares these assumptions with the analysis of Hamas' behavior in some of the recent terrorism literature. Based on this comparison this paper argues Hamas is less ideologically/religiously motivated, as the new terrorism argues, and more politically as well as structurally motivated. This conclusion therefore argues that the weight placed on the relevance of the new terrorism perspective should be reevaluated.

INTRODUCTION

How governments, leaders, and policymakers perceive the motives of terrorist organizations is paramount to understanding and responding to terrorism. In the nineteen nineties the terrorism literature began referring to a phenomenon known as the new terrorism. The new terrorism is believed to be terrorism that is motivated less by political goals and more by religious fanaticism. The new terrorism is thought to be both deadlier and more destructive

than the old terrorism. Based on these short descriptions it seems obvious that jihadist groups fit the new terrorism profile; however, the recent electoral participation of Hamas in the Palestinian political process and the group's subsequent majority in the Palestinian parliament raises some questions concerning the supposed apolitical aspects and religious fanaticism of some groups placed within the new terrorism profile. The recent events in the Occupied Territories raise the question, How accurate is the new terrorism paradigm?

This paper will explore whether or not the traits of the new terrorism correspond with Hamas' behavioral and organizational characteristics. By focusing on the core concepts of the new terrorism, this paper will discuss how Hamas fits within the parameters laid out by those concepts, and compare these assumptions with the analysis of Hamas' behavior in some of the recent terrorism literature. In the aftermath of the Palestinian elections the future of the Israeli/Palestinian peace process largely depends on how policymakers understand and perceive Hamas. Perceiving an appropriate way to deal with Hamas is vital to the region's stability as it can deter or give incentive for more terrorist organizations to participate in the political process. Comparing the relevance of the new terrorism paradigm to the behavior of Hamas can aid in this endeavor.

CONCEPTUALIZING TERRORISM

Before going further it is necessary to conceptualize the term terrorism. The use of the words terror, terrorist, and terrorism carries a political and moral weight when invoked. At the most basic level terrorism can be defined as the illegal use of political violence¹. Terrorism violates the conventional and international norms of what is acceptable engagement of political violence; however, war crimes and atrocities committed by state armies, though terrorizing, are not the same as terrorism. At the heart of terrorism is the fact that it is political violence that engages in unconventional warfare in order to circumvent the constraints placed on the actors by the nation state. Thus groups like Irish Republican Army (IRA), Spain's Basque separatists (ETA) and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) engage in asymmetrical

warfare since they lack the capacities and capabilities, such as a state and a military, to confront their foes head on. On the other hand states may engage in terrorism themselves when it serves their interests to pursue unconventional warfare with actions that cannot be directly linked to the state. For example when Israel blew up Ghassan Kanafani, along with his niece in Beirut with a car bomb in 1972² it committed an act of terrorism, just as similar bombings by any other group are considered acts of terrorism. On the other hand the targeted assassinations carried out by Israel in clearly identified helicopters, though abhorrent and terrorizing to Palestinians, is not terrorism. The helicopter attack contains the full acknowledgment of state action and the subsequent responsibility of such action, such as possible repercussions from other states or the international community.

What is essential to realizing what is and what is not terrorism is the understanding that the use of violence as a means to avoid the repercussions and the possible direct confrontations with nation states. Whether it is the asymmetrical assaults on state structures and civilians by non-state actors, or the clandestine actions of state-actors both are functionally terrorism, since both avoid state associations, are in violation of conventional norms, and operate through violent, unconventional means.

Another essential key to conceptualizing terrorism is the role of the audience. Crenshaw explains that, “the victims or objects of terrorist attack have little intrinsic value to the terrorist group but represent a larger human audience whose reaction the terrorists seek.”³ Terrorism is not an attempt to extinguish, or destroy one’s foes rather it is the attempt to impact the behavior of the terrorist’s adversary by targeting a larger audience. The fear of terrorism, the insecurity created by terrorism on a specific population, rather than immediate attack itself is what the terrorists are after.

A terrorist organization is a bit more difficult to define. Roughly, an organization that engages, funds, plans, launches terrorist attacks is a terrorist organization. There is perhaps some bias here that favors excluding states from being defined as terrorist organizations. Since the state has the right to use violence it can easily engage in terrorism and then withdraw or dismantle the organization that perpetrated the attack. Does this mean a state can

become a terrorist state? This is a conceptual and definitional oxymoron extending beyond the scope of this paper. It is therefore easier to label a non-state organization as a terrorist organization since the majority of its violence will fit the following definition of terrorism.

A working conceptualization of terrorism is then: unconventional political violence, or the threat of political violence meant to have an impact on both the immediate victims and the audience that is carried out by non-state actors and, or clandestine state agents. Car bombs, letter bombs, and suicide bombings are all acts of terrorism no matter whom or which organization is responsible for their use. This definition is an attempt to give a functional definition to terrorism, not a moral dimension to terrorist attacks.

THE NEW TERRORISM

Within the scholarship on terrorism it is not uncommon for critics and authors to differentiate between secular terrorists and religious terrorists. Bruce Hoffman marks this distinction by explaining religious terrorism and secular terrorism are believed to have different origins and thus differentiate in motive, intent and action. Hoffman discusses the differences between political terrorism and religious terrorism, by explaining that religious terrorists regard their violence to be “first and foremost a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative.”⁴ Secular terrorism on the other hand is considered to originate out of some structural grievance affecting the terrorists, such as frustrated political aspirations. Secular terrorists then tend, according to Hoffman, to use violence “either as a way of instigating the correction of a flaw in a system that is basically good or as a means to foment the creation of a new system.”⁵ For example ethno-nationalist terrorists, such as the IRA, ETA, or PLO believe in the state system and in fact attempt to utilize their terrorism as means to become members of such a system. Religious terrorists on the other hand, “see themselves not as components of a system worth preserving, but as outsiders seeking fundamental changes in the existing order.”⁶

Religious terrorism is thought to be more violent, more destructive, and more murderous due to the fact that religious terrorists are not seeking the appeal of constituencies. Again Hoffman explains “whereas secular terrorists attempt to appeal to a constituency of...actual supporters or potential sympathizers...religious terrorists are at once activists and constituents engaged in what they regard as a total war. They seek to appeal to no other constituency than themselves.”⁷ Continuing with the IRA as a reference group, it is believed that the IRA took into account of the opinions of the North Irish, Irish, and the Irish communities in the US in deciding the severity of their actions. Religious terrorists are less likely to engage in such a cost benefit calculus since the outside constituency is comprised of infidels, heretics, and apostates.

This perspective of viewing secular terrorism as something different than religious terrorism has formed into a dichotomy of the ‘old’ terrorism and the ‘new’ terrorism. Walter Laqueur explains the new terrorism:

the ‘new’ terrorism has increasingly become indiscriminate in the choice of its victims. Its aim is no longer to conduct propaganda but to effect maximum destruction. [An] important difference between the old terrorism and the new terrorism is the crucial importance of paranoiac elements in the terrorism of far right and extreme left, perhaps most of all in terrorists inspired by religious fanaticism.⁸

Echoing both Laqueur’s and Hoffman’s observation are Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin who note the difference between secular and religious inspired terrorism and the consequent paradigm shift, stating that “the old paradigm of predominantly state sponsored terrorism has been joined by a new, religiously motivated terrorism that neither relies on the support of sovereign states nor is constrained by the limits on violence that the state sponsors have observed themselves or placed on their proxies.”⁹ The general consensus is that the new

terrorism is best defined and a result of “the emergence of religion as the predominant impetus for terrorist attacks.”¹⁰

At the root of this concept is the assumed increase in fanaticism among terrorists. The notion that the practitioners of this form of terrorism are more fanatical, radical, and perhaps irrational than the secular organizations in the old terrorism is one of the key points of what distinguishes old terrorism from new terrorism. The paranoia and fanaticism of the new terrorism is essentially what creates an increased distance from the political and ‘rational’ motives of the phenomenon’s predecessors, and as a result is considered to be what makes the new terrorists all the more unpredictable, irrational and dangerous. The deadlier and more indiscriminate nature of the new terrorism is thought to be evidenced in the Oklahoma City Bombing, the Tokyo subway attacks by the Aum Shinrikyo cult, Kobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, 9/11 and other Islamist terrorist attacks, including those of Hamas.

The fanatical nature of the new terrorism is thought to leave little option for policymakers in dealing with the threat other than force. In the past, the old, secular terrorists could be reasoned with, negotiated with, or compromised with. Their conflict was structural and political in nature; the new terrorists however, are less concerned with political and structural grievances. Instead they are fanatics who engage in “performances of violence that symbolize a cosmic war.”¹¹ The new terrorists are less rational and therefore must be confronted with equal force, as Laqueur mentions “there are no cures for fanaticism...”¹²

The perspective of new terrorism has had a definite influence on the logic and language of the current War on Terrorism. The inspiration of its sentiments can be heard in both US and Israeli speech. For example in a BBC interview the former Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, explained Islamist groups, particularly Hamas, carry out “insane Islamist terrorism [because of] the insanity of radical Islam.”¹³ Netanyahu claimed Hamas and other Islamist groups commit “their crazy terror” because the West, including Israel, is “free and democratic.”¹⁴ President Bush makes similar remarks. According to the White House the Islamists are “beyond appeal and must be hunted, captured, or killed.”¹⁵ These statements illustrate the conventional wisdom found within the construction of the new

terrorism. The terrorists are beyond appeal since it is assumed their religious fanaticism is irrational, thereby distorting all structural appeals and constituent constraints. If this is indeed the case what can there be to appeal to? However evident the existence of the new terrorism is it remains an important task to explore whether or not there really is that much difference between secular and religious terrorists. Returning to the case of Hamas it is relevant and perhaps necessary to ask if the new terrorism is an applicable categorization towards the Islamist organization? Or does Hamas still have the same motives, intent, and actions as yesterday's terrorists?

HAMAS AS A MODEL FOR THE NEW TERRORISM

A terrorist organization is thought to fit within the new terrorism paradigm if it posses the following traits: its motives are religious rather than political, it has an organizational structure that is non-hierarchical and lacks constituent constraints, it is fanatical rather than rational, and has emerged within the last ten or fifteen years. Beginning with the last trait first one sees that Hamas has been one of the most active, and deadly terrorist organizations in the 1990s. The organization emerged out of the Palestinian intifada and several years later in 1993 began its campaign of suicide bombings. For the new terrorism theorists the time and space of Hamas' existence, at the cusp of the apparent emergence of a new phenomenon, is enough to begin associating the group with the new terrorism.

Secondly, Hamas possesses an overt religiosity in which all forms of its violence are justified, rationalized, and normalized through the use of Islamic scriptures and clerical guidance. Looking briefly at the organization's charter one is confronted with continuous references to Islam. In fact Hamas defines itself as well as the Palestinian struggle entirely through an Islamic lens, as evidenced by the quotes taken from its charter:

The basis of the Islamic Resistance Movement is Islam. From Islam it derives its ideas and its fundamental precepts and view of life, the universe, and humanity;

and it judges all of its actions according to Islam and is inspired by Islam to correct its errors.¹⁶

Going further Hamas justifies the liberation of Palestine by explaining the land was divinely donated to Muslims by God. “The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf [endowed] to all Muslim generations until the day of resurrection.”¹⁷ The liberation of Palestine is thus a religious struggle as well as a religious duty, and according to Hamas:

“There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by Jihad.”¹⁸

It is one thing to use religious language, or any form of weighted words, in speeches, manifestos and charters and another thing to act according to such language. To the new terrorism scholars Hamas’ campaign of suicide terror appears to be the intersecting event of Hamas’ religious rhetoric and the reality of its religious convictions. Suicide bombing is a culmination of thought and action; it is religious thought manifested into religious violence. Hamas’ notorious use of suicide bombing then appears to be the final observance of traits that corresponds with the new terrorism. It exemplifies both religion and is the self-evident expression of fanaticism. Suicide bombers are thought to murder others by blowing themselves up as a result of religious radicalism and perceived religious imperatives.

As a result of the religiousness and fanatical character of the new terrorism Hamas is perceived to be structured differently than an organization fitting within the old terrorism perspective. A Rand Corporation publication explains the rationale of the organizational structure of the new terrorism:

Islamic fundamentalist organizations like Hamas and the bin Laden network consist of groups organized in loosely interconnected semi-independent cells that have no single commanding hierarchy. Hamas exemplifies the shift away from a

hierarchically oriented movement based on a 'great leader' (like the PLO and Yasir Arafat).¹⁹

The structural differences between the new terrorists and the old terrorists are thought to be a result of the organizations' fanatical nature. The lack of the new terrorists' concern with setting political goals and the necessity of establishing a constructive framework for achieving these goals is reflected in the absence of a monolithic, hierarchical, centralized structure. The authority of leadership is irrelevant since all these groups seek to do is wage fanatical terrorist campaigns against their enemy, as dictated to them by their own religious duty.

Based on the combination of these traits and the observable applicability in Hamas, it seems scholars could not help but conclude that Hamas fits the category of the new terrorism to a tee. In reality, however, the image of Hamas as the exemplary new terrorist group is filled with assumptions and very generalized analyses. In fact if one looks at Hamas in any detail it is easy to draw different and a starkly contradictory conclusion with that of the new terrorism.

Suicide Terror

Suicide terrorism seems to be the comprehensive, illustrative characteristic of the new terrorism. The images of would-be suicide bombers proclaiming the glory of their martyrdom on posters and in videos seems to be a definite confirmation of the phenomenon's fanaticism. The fanaticism of one's willingness to kill him or her self for an expressed religious duty is hard to deny. From the religious fanatic all other logic of the new terrorism, the religious over the political, the limit of constraints by constituents, and the organizational structure falls into place. Yet how fanatical is suicide bombing? Contrary to the new terrorism theorists, suicide terrorism is not a result of religious fanatics fulfilling a divine duty rather it is structurally motivated and strategically implemented. According to Robert Pape suicide terrorism "is not simply the product of irrational individuals or an expression of fanatical hatreds."²⁰ Mia

Bloom adds that, “Palestinian suicide bombing is a violent, *political* act carried out by people who deliberately blow themselves up together with a chosen target.”²¹

There are two questions that arise out of suicide bombing. The first is whether or not the individual is irrational or fanatical? And the second whether or not the organization is irrational or fanatical? The new terrorism takes the approach that the motivational impetus for individuals to commit terrorism, that is their fanaticism, is the same as that of the terrorist organization.

In his book the *Shahids*, Shaul Shay discusses the attempts of constructing a psychological profile of Palestinian suicide bombers. By doing so he explores the aggregate causes for individuals to engage in suicide bombing, summarizing that:

The main motives for the decision made by healthy suicide attackers to set out on suicidal missions were a combination of religious belief, faith in the contribution of the attackers’ death to the realization of Palestinian independence, and investment in the social and economical upward mobility of the attacker’s family, which is to win prestige and monetary grants after the son’s passing.²²

Though Shay’s study acknowledges the importance of religious beliefs it does not solely rely on the notion of religious fervor, fanaticism, or faith bound obligation to explain suicide terror. Contrary to the new terrorism paradigm Shay gives equal credence to economic motives, and most importantly to the idea of a national, not religious, struggle.

The importance of the national struggle is perhaps the most important variable when it comes to suicide terrorism. Again one sees the new terrorism overlooks the relevance of national liberation in its analysis, since national liberation is something old, secular terrorists are concerned about, not the new terrorists. If national liberation is a relevant motive for the individual perpetrator of suicide terrorists to become shahids, martyrs, then one can assume it is similarly relevant motive for the terrorist organization. Again Pape offers his analysis. Pape observes that in conflicts that involve suicide terrorism, “religion is rarely the root cause,

although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of broader strategic objectives.”²³ In place of religious fanaticism as the motivational impetus for suicide terror Pape found that:

Every major suicide campaign from 1980 to 2003 has had a major objective – or as its central objective coercing a foreign government that has military forces in what they see as their homeland to take those forces out...suicide terrorists’ [organizations] political aims...generally reflect quite common, straightforward, nationalist self-determination claims of their community.²⁴

Therefore by contrasting the studies conducted by Shay and Pape with the theories of new terrorism one sees that though suicide terrorists may appear to be religious fanatics their motivations stem more from sociological, economic, and political concerns. Secondly, organizations and the individual perpetrators of suicide terror do not engage in the act out of apolitical, ideological objectives, rather there exists a correlation between military occupation and suicide terrorism. Thus the reasons for terrorism have seemingly stayed the same, ethno-separatism and national liberation, while the tactics have grown more murderous and gruesome. From this perspective the new terrorists are the same old terrorists utilizing new tools of violent coercion against their targets.

Constituents

National liberation movements are political movements. As mentioned in the introduction, the IRA, ETA, and PLO utilized terrorism as a means not to overthrow the state system, but in an attempt to become part of it. From Pape’s analysis the same can be said for suicide terrorist organizations. If this is the case do these terrorist organizations also have constituents, and consequently is the terrorism they engage in constrained by their constituency?

Contrary to the new terrorism, suicide terrorist organizations do indeed have constituents and work under the constraints placed by those constituents. Pape lists the

reasons why suicide terror organizations have constituents, and why their actions are conditioned by community support. Suicide terror organizations need volunteers, must avoid detection, and rely on the social acceptability of martyrdom in order to continue their campaign. Pape explains that “most suicide attackers are walk-in volunteers and thus the terrorist organization must have a relatively high profile so that it is easy to find.”²⁵ As a result of the organization’s high profile the organization must also court community support in order to “avoid detection and surveillance and elimination by security forces.”²⁶ Finally, in order to obtain volunteers and deter detection the community must support the concept of martyrdom. As Pape points out “it is the community that designates the qualifications for martyrdom.”²⁷

Community support for the so-called new terrorism further undermines the fanaticism as motive variable, unless one wants to go so far as declaring an entire community or population as fanatical. In the new terrorism paradigm the fanaticism of terrorist organizations separates them from the political sphere, the structural sphere, and consequently it is assumed the organization operates independently and regardless of public support. As Pape pointed out this is not the case, suicide terror is largely dependent on public support. Mia Bloom, in her analysis of Palestinian suicide terrorism, further supports Pape’s analysis, stating:

Suicide bombing is an effort to punish and deter Israeli actions and to create a ‘balance of terror.’ The Palestinians seek to persuade Israelis that they will pay a high price for the occupation and force them to pressure their government to withdraw from the Territories and thus end the occupation.²⁸

Bloom points out that when the realities of the occupation intensify with incursions and targeted assassinations public support for ‘martyrdom operations’ intensifies as well. Thus the new terrorism’s observation that there is not a correlation between structural circumstances and terrorism is erroneous. Bloom goes on to conclude that the more suicide terrorism is perceived as a legitimate form of resistance by the population, the more likely it is rival

groups within the population will engage in its use. She uses evidence of secular groups such as the Marxist-Leninist PFLP and Fatah use of ‘martyr operations’ against Israel at times of high public support for such attacks. This is a critical disagreement with the new terrorism theory. Rather than perceiving the development of more deadly terrorism and suicide terrorism as the result of fundamental shifts in the terrorists, the terrorists’ ideology, and nature of terrorism itself it is more likely the newness of the new terrorism is a result of protracted conflicts, with tangible structural consequences on the population and an overall escalation of violence.

It appears that contrary to the new terrorism, events like the Oklahoma City Bombing, and the cyanide attacks in Tokyo are anomalies rather than precedents. Other forms of new terrorism, especially Palestinian suicide terrorism are seen to be intricately correlated with separatism, ethno-nationalism, occupation and the state system. These are the very things that have been consistently seen as the variables and contributing factors to the old terrorism.

Organizational Structure

Hamis utilizes the “all channel network” a structure in which there is:

no single, central leadership, command, or headquarters – no precise heart or head can be targeted. The network as whole (but necessarily each node) has little to no hierarchy, and there may be multiple leaders. Decision making and operations are decentralized, allowing for local initiative and autonomy.²⁹

In order to be effective this decentralized structure is thought to depend on “the presence of shared principles, interests and goals – at best an overreaching doctrine or ideology – that spans all nodes and to which their members wholeheartedly subscribe.”³⁰ Placed in the context of the new terrorism paradigm one sees that confirmation of such a structure for a group like Hamas is the consequence of the group’s apolitical objectives and irrational expression of violence. The group does not need guidance since it is assumed its

terrorism is not strategic. As already mentioned the new terrorism theorists miscalculate and underestimate the strategy of suicide terror. Furthermore they observe the structure of Hamas' militant wings as a semi- all channel network, and ignore the existence of the group's political wing. Jeron Gunning acknowledges the existence of both a political wing and a terrorist wing of Hamas. Gunning observes:

The logic by which each wing operates, and the pressures they experience are significantly different. The military wing's behavior is dictated by concerns about operational efficiency and secrecy; the political wing's behavior by concerns about popularity, legitimacy and visibility.³¹

The all-channel network of the militant wing is designed to make it more efficient, avoid detection, and insulate its operational capacity from the loss of leadership; however this decentralized structure does not necessarily grant the militant cells autonomy from the political wing. The cells have the independent ability to disseminate suicide terror, but when it can do so is at the behest or authorization of the political wing.

One Hamas leader explains the relationship stating that, "If we (the political wing) agreed in negotiations to halt operations, we would see that immediately because we have indirect connections with the military wing, and all the time they respect our declarations."³²

The control Hamas' political wing has over the militant wing is evidenced by the yearlong ceasefire between the organization and Israel. The fact that Hamas has moderated its attacks on Israel and not perpetrated a suicide bombing in over a year shows that though not directly linked to the groups' military wing, Hamas' political wing has the power to silence its bombers in order to pursue a political course. The conclusion that Hamas fits the new terrorism organizational structure is only partly correct. The structure does indeed exist, yet not independently of the political wing, and not for the operational reasons of committing irrational, fanatical terror as expressed by the new terrorism theorists.

CONCLUSION

The new terrorism creates little room for there to be political solutions to conflicts that involve terrorism. The reasons for this are of course the theory's confirmation that the terrorists are not concerned with matters of the political or structural. As seen with the case of Hamas the theory of new terrorism seems to be lacking in any real description and characterization of the terrorist organization. What then is the potential for cooperation between Israel and a Hamas ruled Palestinian Authority?

If one steps away from the new terrorism theory for a moment, Hamas becomes a terrorist organization that, though deadlier, appears to operate for all the same reasons as earlier terrorist organizations. It seeks national liberation, uses terrorism for perceived strategic reasons and is bound by the constraints of its constituents. Entering into the political process has further tied the organization to the wishes and whims of its constituents. This perception is radically different than that crafted by the new terrorism. So much so that it threatens to offer a simple approach for dealing with Hamas; if Hamas' behavior is conditioned by the groups constituents then the way to change what Hamas wants is to change what the Palestinians want, and explore what factors contribute to a population's militancy and endorsement of violence. Not surprisingly the answer itself is most likely violence and occupation, rather than fanaticism.

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NOTES

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