

Al-Qaeda Terrorist Attacks on the United States of America: Implications on Global Peace and Security

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Abstract: The article sought to look into the numerous terrorist attacks targeted against the United States of America by Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda and many other Islamic fundamentalists see America as their arch enemy because according to them, America's foreign policy in the Islamic world seems to breed a sense of imperial domination in many countries of the Islamic world. Al-Qaeda thus employed terrorism to fight the US, thus undermining international peace and security. Against this backdrop, the study adopted the historical/descriptive approach to explain the factors surrounding the terrorist attacks against the United States of America by Al-Qaeda, a terrorist organization. The study observed that America's close ties with many of the countries in the Islamic world is irritating to Islamic fundamentalists; America's interventionist measures in the Islamic world especially in countries like Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc, is seen as a ploy by the US to control the governments and administrations of those states, among others. The article recommended that counter terrorism norms should be enforced universally by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to check the threat of terrorism; Global and multilateral antiterrorist coalition should be created to stem the tide of terrorist attacks; Nations in the Arab world should be given more freedom to fully exercise their right of self determination, among others.

Keywords: Terrorism, global peace, Islamic fundamentalist, realism, imperial domination.

1. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is perceived by many as the number one security threat facing democratic nations today. Nearly every day, there are reports of bomb explosions or suicide bombings somewhere in the world. Terrorist groups or people responsible for these attacks claim that they are freedom fighters who seek to liberate the world from some kind of oppression depending on the ideology they follow in order to point out what exactly motivate them to engage in the act. Even though the phenomenon has existed since the beginning of recorded time, no history can keep with precision the number of lives and properties lost to terrorism. Terrorism is older than the ancient civilization of Greece (Wilkinson, 1986) and is manifested in acts of socially and politically unacceptable violence. Similarly, the concept is associated with the use of terrifying attacks as a means of coercion to achieve political, social, economic or religious objectives and its abiding characteristic is the indiscriminate use of violence against non-combatants for the purpose of gaining publicity for a group, cause or individual, mostly for reason of addressing perceived injustice against a people.

Many terrorist groups have sprung up across the globe using terrifying violence to express their grievances against their targets. Prominent among these groups have been Hezbollah, Alshabab, Al-Qaeda, to mention but a few. Most times, the principal targets of these attackers have been the developed countries of the world, especially the United States of America and her allies, which the terrorists perceive as enemies of their states. There have been series of attacks against the United

International Journal of Novel Research in Interdisciplinary Studies

Vol. 5, Issue 1, pp: (31-37), Month: January - February 2018, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

States of America and prominent among these attacks are the 1986 bombing of the La Bella discotheque in Berlin, West Germany in which about 15 American soldiers died; the 1993 WTC bombing which killed 6 and injured some 1,000 people; and the 1998 bombing of the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in which 250 people were killed and over 5,500 people were injured, etc but none was as alarming and as cataclysmic in terms of death toll and property destruction as the September 11, 2001 attacks.

This article seeks to explore the reasons behind the numerous attacks of Al-Qaeda against the United States of America and the implications of these attacks on global peace and security.

Stating the Problem:

Incidence of terrorist attacks across the globe has been very alarming. Equally, the high level of destruction of lives and property by Islamic fundamentalists as a result of their perceived grievances against countries in the international system has gone beyond human understanding. Al-Qaeda has been a notable and one of the major terrorist organizations that have had a high record of casualty rates both in terms of destruction of human lives and in the destruction of properties. Mostly, Al-Qaeda's grouse is directed at the United States of America whom they accuse of desecrating the holy lands of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. They see America as pursuing western evangelization and democratization programmes of the Islamic world. They point to the far reaching democratic changes the US has initiated in Afghanistan by sacking the Taliban led regime and replacing it with a western democratic type. Al-Qaeda sees as unacceptable such regime change and frowns at western domination on Arab soil. Al-Qaeda considers American presence in Arab land as a source of powerlessness for their States. They point to America's presence in the Arabian Peninsula as a desecration of their holy land. The terrorist organization (Al-Qaeda) seeks to expel America and her influence from the Islamic world. In furtherance to this, Al-Qaeda seeks to use violent means to resist America's incursion in the Islamic world. Islamic fundamentalists justify their violent reactions against the US by pointing to the plights of the Palestine refugees who lost their homeland when the state of Israel was established in 1948 and to the continued support of the US to Israel against Palestine in the Arab-Israeli conflict. To Al-Qaeda, the US position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict constitutes a serious source of hostility towards the United States of America.

That being the case, the position and conviction of the Islamic fundamentalists and Al-Qaeda regarding America's position in the Islamic world raises a serious concern as to the extent to which America's presence in the Islamic world constitutes a source of underdevelopment for that region or is responsible for the economic exploitation of the economic resources of that region. Put in a different way, to what extent is the presence of the United States of America responsible for the powerlessness of the States of the Islamic world? This problem raises the following questions: Can it be said that terrorism as adopted by Al-Qaeda a reaction to America's influence in Islamic world? How justifiable is the claim by Al-Qaeda that America's presence in the Islamic world constitutes a source of powerlessness for that States? What threat has terrorism posed to America and global interest? To address these problematic issues, this paper set out to with the objectives: to find out the extent to which terrorism by Al-Qaeda is a reaction to America's influence in the Islamic world; examine the claim by Al-Qaeda that America's presence in the Islamic world is responsible for the powerlessness of that States as well as determine the extent of threat posed by terrorism on America and global interest.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopted the realist theory as its theoretical framework. Realism holds that human nature is not innately good or perfectible. Man by nature is evil, sinful and power seeking. Because of the difficulty of achieving peace through lawful means, it becomes necessary to device other means for the management of power. Proponents of the realist persuasion include Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, Frederick Schuman, etc. To them, realism involves the use of power to achieve national interest, be that interest political, economic, religious, social, etc. According to Nicholas Spykman (1942), all civilized life rests in the last instance on power. Power is the ability to move men in some desired fashion through persuasion, purchase, batter or coercion. This implies that men use power including naked force to compel others to do their bidding. For Morgenthau (1978), power is man's control over the minds and actions of other men. Accordingly, politics is a struggle for power. This implies that the ability of men to secure their interests and prevail on any situation depends to a large extent on the amount of power that they apply. Viewed from this perspective, Islamic fundamentalists (Al-Qaeda) use terrorism as an instrument of power to achieve their objectives. Terrorism thus becomes an instrument that

is employed by the weak (Al-Qaeda) against the strong (the United States of America), to achieve some perceived objectives.

Terrorism: A Historical Sketch:

Terrorism as used in modern sense was born during the French Revolution, whose bloodiest phase was known as “The Terror”. During the middle of the nineteenth century and its revolutionary trend in social and scientific events, it was a common practice or strategy to use mass murder of innocent civilians to obtain political objectives. This strategy was usually adopted by frustrated political pundits whose civilized strategies were expended without achieving the required result. They usually used threat of mass murder to frighten the rulers to make concessions they would not ordinarily have made. Such murder occurred when the ruling *Jacobins* employed violence, including mass executions by *guillotine* in order to intimidate the regime’s enemies and compel obedience to the state. The number killed totalled 40,000 people and among the *guillotined* were Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (Laden, 2002).

The emergence of bombs, mines and missiles as weapons of mass destruction also aided the rising wave of terrorism in the nineteenth century. Before now, the *Sacarii*, a religious sect active in the zealot struggle in Palestine (AD 66-73) seemed to have undertaken activities which would qualify them as terrorist. The *Sacarii* would hide short daggers under their cloaks, mingle with crowds at large festivals, murder their victims, and then disappear into the panicked crowds. The most successful assassination was that of the High Priest Jonathan. Also, *Assassins*, a sect of the larger *Ismaili* sect of Muslims whose activities between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries have long stimulated the curiosities of historians which was finally suppressed by the *Mongols* developed a specific religious doctrine justifying the murder of their religious and political opponents (the *Seljugs*) whom they saw as unrighteous ones (Lacqueur, 1978).

Terrorism was extensively used by the Russian revolutionaries (1878-81) and again in the twentieth century, by radical national groups in Ireland, Macedonia, Serbia and Armenia, and by the Anarchist in France, Italy, Spain and the United States particularly in the 1890s. According to Wardlaw (1990:19):

Historically, it is probable that the most important of all the terrorist movements was the Narodnaya Volya which operated in Russia between January 1878 and March, 1881. This organization evolved a specific policy of terrorist campaign against the Tsarist authorities... terrorism was a new cost effective form of struggle which would overthrow the Tsarist tyranny... Russian terrorism was both one aspect of the formation of a revolutionary socialist party and a symptom of a general crisis in Russian society.

At that time, terrorism was ethnically a better choice than allowing the carnage that would result from a mass insurrection. It was reasoned that if innocent people died as a result of terrorist activity, it had to be accepted as an inevitable consequence of war. Such ethnic terrorism was however preferable to the slaughter which would accompany a mass struggle. Laden (2002) credited German radical democrat, Karl Heinzen, as the first to produce a full-fledged doctrine of modern terrorism. His *magnumopus* appeared just one year before the midpoint of the nineteenth century, and laid the now-familiar strategy of using mass murder of innocent civilians to achieve political objectives by frightening the ruler into making concessions they would have rejected. Terrorist activities of the twenty-first century are greatly motivated by economic interests but purportedly placed under religion and politics. As it is generally observed, the phenomenon of terrorism is “a challenge to be managed not solved” since humans must always have differences in opinion on how best things should be done. Some scholars erroneously equated the emergence of large-scale terrorism (mega terrorism) with the birth of al-Qaeda Countries like Columbia and Northern Ireland have lived through history with terror. Terrorism has been their way of venting grievance. In India, there was also a group of terrorist known as the *Thugees*. The *Thugees* literally strangulated their victims. They sacrificed mostly travellers (chosen at random) to their Hindu goddess of terror and destruction. These groups of terrorist were very notorious between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (Falk 2003:55). Before the nineteenth century, terrorism was fought on religious grounds, but the French Revolution changed all that. New Terror wars can be fought for any subject matter under the sun.

With the success of the *Zionist* terrorist group in wresting power and gaining independence for Israel from the Palestinians, more and more terrorist groups emerged. The *Zionist* terrorism against the British in Palestine, the Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the west, all contributed to the widespread of the legitimacy of the Palestinian State. Contemporary target of terrorism has always been the west especially America. The Americans have

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been the prime targets of modern day terrorism. In May 1961, an American commercial aircraft was hijacked in Puerto Rico. The plane was forced to land in Cuba and was granted asylum. Seven years later, the United States Ambassador to Guatemala was assassinated in Guatemala. The wave raged on. According to *Awake Magazine* (January 1987), "Most of the Arab terrorist groups justify their actions by pointing to the plight of the Palestinian refugees who lost their homeland, when Israel was formed in 1948".

The 1979 hostage crisis in Iran set a new terrorist standard. The United States diplomats were held by the Khomeini regime between November 1979 and January 20, 1981. In the mid 1980s, Iranian terrorist kidnapped American military and intelligence officers killing some while releasing others (Laden 2002). Earlier incidents of terrorism before the twenty-first century include, the incidence of July 22, 1968 in which twenty-one Israeli passengers and eleven crews were held hostage in Algiers by the Palestinians. The hostages were released in exchange for sixteen prisoners held in Israeli jails. Palestinian gunmen attacked another EI AI Airplane at the Athens airport killing one Israeli and wounding another. This terrorist act yielded positive objective because at the end of 1969, as Palestinian terrorism was increasing, the UN General Assembly adopted a Resolution, long sought for by the Arabs recognizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people; July 13, 1985, Arab terrorist hijacked a TWA jet full of passengers and flew it to Beirut where they murdered an American and threw his body on the tarmac; May 2 and 17, 1992, Hezbollah claimed responsibility for a blast that levelled the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 and wounding 242 others; February 25, 1996, two Palestinian suicide bombers blew up a bus in Jerusalem and a soldiers' post in the coastal city of Ashkelon, killing twenty-three Israeli, two Americans and a Palestinian and wounding more than eighty. Hamas claimed responsibility; March 3, 1996, a suicide bomber killed at least eighteen people in a Jerusalem bus and wounded ten others. Hamas again claimed responsibility; July 30, 1997, two bombers killed themselves and eighteen others at an outdoor market in Jerusalem; September 4, 1997, three explosions one after the other, killed at least four Israeli and three suicide bombers in Jerusalem's main out-door shopping mall, and in 1998, terrorist bombed the United States embassy in Kenya and Tanzania, among others (Alan, 2002).

The twenty first century witnessed an unprecedented and most devastating terrorist attacks in the history of international terrorism. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 was one of the most devastating and unprecedented terrorist attacks when the Twin Towers comprising 108 – storey and 110 – storey magnificent buildings of the US 700 million dollars World Trade Center (WTC) in Manhattan, New York accommodating about 500 international trade organizations companies, other business, government agencies and international trade organizations and the Pentagon in Washington were struck by two out of the four hijacked passenger airliners flying from Boston. Newark and Washington DC with 266 passengers on board in what appeared to be a carefully co-ordinated murderous attack aimed at reducing those edifices to rubbles. The WTC Twin Towers, which were among the highest profile buildings in the world, collapsed on themselves. Two out of four other buildings in the WTC complex (Buildings 5 and 7) also collapsed alongside the Rector Street subway station and the walkway at West Street. One airline crashed into the Pentagon while the fourth, which probably targeted the white House in Washington crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. All the passengers in the four hijacked airlines perished.

Other incidences of terrorism in the 21st century have been the July, 2005 series of explosions that ripped through the transport system in London – three in underground train coaches and one in an above – ground double Decker bus immediately the G8 Summit in Scotland, United Kingdom had announced London as the venue of the 2012 Olympic Games, 57 people were confirmed dead while 700 and 1,000 were injured (*The Guardian*, London, 8 July, 2005). An organization that called itself the secret organization of the AI Qaeda in Europe immediately posted a statement on the internet claiming responsibility for the bombings and warning the Governments of Denmark and Italy and "all crusaders– Governments" that they will receive the same punishment if they did not withdraw their troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. The same organization had claimed responsibility for the explosions that hit commuter trains in Madrid, Spain in March 2004, killing 191 people. As four other suspected Islamic extremists/bombers whose explosives failed to detonate fully on the three London subway trains and a double-decker bus on 21 July 2005 were arrested for interrogation, it was reported that three bomb blasts in the SharmEI-Sheik Sinai Peninsula holiday resort in Egypt had killed 88 people and wounded many more (*The Guardian*, 29 July, 2005) It became clear that Egypt was being punished for being an ally of the US; for agreeing to train Iraqi army and police after the 2003 US led war on Iraq; for trying Islamic militants; declaring operatives of Mujahedeen wanted; and for being the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel (*The Guardian*, 8 July, 2005).

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It is pertinent to acknowledge the views of courageous people such as President Fidel Castro of Cuba to the effect that war against global terror is un-winnable until exploitation, oppression, big power violence, humiliation, impoverishment and gross inequality – the root causes of terrorism – are banished from the face of the earth. Striking the same chord *The Guardian* (21 July 2005:16), a Nigerian Newspaper, editorialized, in part, that:

Without detracting from the horrendous nature and effects of terrorism, we all must recognize that there are individuals and groups within our human community who hold grievance that yearns for redress.

This point is, perhaps, made more expressively by Edwin Madunagu in *The Guardian* (4 August 2005:65) who opined that:

Today, terrorism is less understood than ever before and the war against terrorism is less certain of being won on the terms in which it is being fought by the international community.

The *Terrorism Guide* labels terrorism as cruellest of crimes, as if the personal suffering is not enough, it frog marches governments into actions that abandon hard earned freedoms of modern civilization. Gargantuan budgets committed to security mock those lives lost in poor countries to preventable disease such as malaria or to conflicts such as Darfur. The dark complexity of suicide attacks has exposed the inadequacies of security forces, moral philosophers, psychologists and theologians alike. Failing to take advantage of the universal revulsion of the events of September 11, 2001, the ‘war on terror’ has instead considerably magnified the global threat of terrorism.

Implications of Terrorism on American Interest and Global Peace:

The United States of America has witnessed many attempts and successful assassinations of public figures by individuals considered to be terrorists. The prevailing explanations for their actions included personal conflicts and religious delusions, such high profile assassination included the killing of John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., etc which saw members of one celebrated terrorist group convicted for carrying out a well-planned, although inept assassination attempt on an American President, (Mahan and Criset, 2008). Similarly, the suicide bombings of the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya brought U.S. attention to a terrorist tactic that other nations had learned to fear long ago. The suicide bombing of the USS Cole in October of 2000 was another in the series of incidents directed against the United States. Suicide bombing became an even more salient threat to US interest. This was so because it was the last limit of a long organizational chain that involved numerous actors. Similar attempt was made by a terrorist named Sayfullo Saipov in 2017 when he hired a van which he used in killing many pedestrians in New York, and the case of the real estate valuer turned terrorist named Stephen Paddock who killed a large number of people from his hotel window in Las Vegas attending country Music Concert, all in the United States of America.

Since the 1990s, terrorism has taken a new turn. Terrorist acts have become more lethal even as the groups responsible have become more dispersed. In the 1970s, about 17 percent of terrorist attacks killed someone whereas, in the 1990s, almost 25 percent of terrorist attacks resulted in deaths. Until 2000, the worst loss of life was the 1985 attack of an Air India in which 329 people were killed. This changed drastically on September 11, 2001 when over 3000 civilians died and \$80 billion in economic losses were incurred (Minst and Arreguin-Toft, 2014). Increasingly, terrorists have made use of a diverse array of weapons ranging from AK-47, sarin gas, shoulder fired missiles, anthrax, backpack explosives and airplanes as guided missiles have been used. The infrastructure that supports terrorism has also become sophisticated.

According to Minst and Arreguin-Toft (2014: 280-281):

It is financed through many laundering schemes and illegal criminal activities. Training camps attract not just young, single and uneducated potential terrorists, but also older, better educated individuals who are willing to commit suicide to accomplish their objectives. Terrorist groups have also made use of the internet as a recruitment tool.

The prospect of nipping terrorism in the bud is still far from being accomplished. This is so because even a State as developed as the United States of America has had difficulty in taking effective enforcement measures against terrorists. In the words of Minst and Arreguin-Toft (2014:283), “after all, the terrorists who attacked New York’s World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, learned to fly commercial Airplanes in Florida”.

By reason of terrorist attacks, the United States has become vulnerable to terrorist assaults almost on a daily basis, with unconventional weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical and biological weapons. The attacks of terrorism now

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engender grief and fear for many Americans as terrorists now target populated places like churches, night concert venues, pedestrian walk ways, airports etc. The menace has taken many lives in its prowl, injured many others and destroyed valuable properties. Other incidences of terrorist attacks against the United States of America which has greatly affected the country, includes; the bombing of the US Marine Barracks in Beirut in 1983; the 1986 bombing of the La Bella discotheque in Berlin, West Germany in which almost 15 American soldiers died, the 1993 World Trade Centre (WTC) bombing which killed 6 and injured some 1,000 people, among others. These destructions and shock waves of lost of lives and properties will take many years to recover.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Efforts at combating terrorist organizations and terrorism are still dominated by national governments. International forms of control include country to country cooperation as well as multilateral cooperation, such as through national policy agency known as Interpol, (Duncan, Jancar-Webster and Switky, 2001). Even the European Union has developed a European police force (Europol) with similar aims. The fact remains that these efforts will take a long time if not years to tackle not only organized crime but terrorism as well. In the face of the limited effectiveness of concerted international control of terrorism, the paper recommends as follows;

- i. Counterterrorism measures should include attempts to improve living conditions in less prosperous countries if the war in terrorism must be won. Many observers believe that poverty and injustice contribute to terrorism.
- ii. Consumerist capitalism and religious fundamentalism are both threats to the development of global democracy. Exporting capitalism without democracy will breed anarchy and terrorism. The only way to prevent unprecedented explosion of violence is to promote democracy around the world.
- iii. The international community should take more effective action more than the prevailing ones. A framework of stringent international rules on terrorism should be put in place. More efforts should be geared at punishing hijackers and those who protect terrorists.
- iv. States that are seen as supportive terrorists or as not taking effective enforcement measures against terrorism should be effectively sanctioned by other states.
- v. Understanding the root causes of terrorism will help immensely in combating it. This is so because military action alone will not prevent future terrorism but will only delay it.

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