

Speaking For Terrorism

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Abstract: "If inciting people to do that [9/11] is terrorism, and if killing those who kill our sons is terrorism, then let history be witness that we are terrorists..."
— Osama bin Laden.

Terrorism is a struggle between two classes, the privileged and the underprivileged, where the latter remain unheard and thus they take arms as their last resort to grab the attention of the better offs. Even after seventy years of independence the North-eastern states in India exist without the basic necessities of lives. But the problem with this 'ism' is that the terrorists attack the innocents as they are the soft targets, in order to make their problems heard. The terrorists retort that the citizens are not innocents as they are the taxpayers with whose money the ruling class goes on to exploit them. Moreover it is the citizens who elect such a corrupt Government. Thus they cannot enjoy the perks provided to them by the despotic rulers, hence they ought to die. The terrorists point out that even in wars some innocents' lives are sacrificed. This shows that they also have things to say, so instead of discarding this 'other', let us for a change hear what they have to vent out.

I. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF TERRORISM

A. TERRORISM IS A JUST WAR

If we see clearly, it would be found that a terrorist is a most selfless person who can even sacrifice his or her own life for their ideology. They are really sincere and dedicated workers who fight to achieve their goals till the last breath. Sergius Stepriak, the renowned Russian revolutionary of the 19th century remarked that, the terrorist is noble, terrible, irresistibly fascinating (uniting) the two sublimities of human grandeur – the martyr and the hero. Thus it can be presumed that terrorists are sincerely committed to the conviction of the morality of their actions – and this is the most prominent argument they offer in favour of their position. St. Thomas Aquinas forwarded three conditions for 'Just War', which are endorsed by Vincent Ferraro, as:-

- ✓ Declaration by a legitimate authority.
- ✓ Just cause, (that is to say that those attacked must deserve it) like self-defense, where hostilities are initiated as a last-resort;
- ✓ Just means, i.e., the war must not be waged by means more savage than necessary to ensure victory.

Does terrorism meet anyone of the above mentioned criteria – the question remains for us to judge. Hugo Grotius, the greatest jurist of the 17th century, maintained that just war is a war to obtain a right (on the law of war and peace). Hence just wars are those fought for 'just causes,' (like defense, recovery of property and punishment); unjust causes included the 'desire for richer land' the 'desire for freedom among a subject people', and the 'desire to rule others against their will on the pretext that it is for their own good.' Again a war becomes unjust if its ends can be attained by non belligerent means. It is generally observed that a war, which is otherwise just, becomes immoral if it is waged out of hatred.

In the modern world the former Soviet Union and some third world countries have seen the war of national liberation as a just war. Struggles to liberate colonies and dependent countries from imperial rule were claimed to be both 'just' and 'sacred' because colonial rule was seen as a fundamental denial of the principle of self determination and hence, was considered illegitimate. Here violent acts against such rule were seen as an assertion of individuals as well as of the nation's violated dignity and as a means of inspiring the masses.

Such liberation movements had to resort to all sorts of unorthodox and clandestine methods of warfare or

unconventional acts of violence (which has always been branded as terrorism by the affected governments, e.g., “Bengal terrorism” or other acts of revolt in India, which were mainly aimed against the British government or the British officers who symbolized particular aspects of colonial expression. Again, the Algerian war against France during the late 1950s, and the like, to combat colonial or racist regimes having inevitable and organized superior military power – who cannot be curbed without the use of force. Thus the methods of violence adopted by the leaders of liberation movements should not be classified as terrorist because such acts are committed to resist oppression and injustice, and in order to achieve independence and regain dignity. Now, any and every unconventional act of violence cannot be labelled as terrorism, because it can very well be a mode of guerrilla warfare or insurgency. Such forms of violence because of being founded on the right to self-determination, are legitimate. Hence we find that the justifiability of unconventional acts of violence depends on the offender’s declared objective and psychic motivation.

A war may be justified only when the responsible agents have a good intention. Thomas Aquinas in his book *Summa Theologica* stated the general principle that there must be the right intention to achieve a good to avoid an evil. If the motivation is personal gain and the objective is advancement of a reactionary political cause, the offender becomes a terrorist, as the element of morality evaporates. On the contrary, if the objective is to oppose colonialism, racism or alien domination and the motivation is to assert the principles of self determination for the people (the right of people and of the nation to self-determination was recognized as a prerequisite to the full enjoyment of all fundamental human rights by the U.N. Charter), the offender is elevated to a heroic level being engaged in a just struggle, at once altruistic and self-sacrificing; he is then, no longer a terrorist or legal offender.

Andrew Valls in his article ‘Can Terrorism Be Justified?’ in the book *Ethics In International Affairs*, has tried to justify terrorism based on the unit of ethical measurement of the just war criteria, i.e. Jus ad Bellum and Jus In Bello – as they are capable of deciding whether the violent deeds by such non state actors can be put within a particular frame of justice or not. He says that terrorism would be justified if the non-state actors fight for self-determination and nationalism to provide freedom to the citizens, if it is brought about by some legitimate authority who really think of the wellbeing of the citizens, and have the right intention to bring them out from the shackles of injustice and exploitations (instead of having selfish interests in fighting the war). It can be justified if terrorism adopted by them acts as a last resort, to make the government hear them. Again if the notion of proportionality is maintained both in the sense of balancing the means and ends, and also in the implementation of terror tactics where too many innocents should not be killed. Finally Valls says that, such a terrorism would be justified where the rate of success is high and a strict discrimination is maintained between the legitimate and illegitimate targets of attack.

These are mainly the conditions of a just war. Now let us discuss each one of them and see whether the terrorists fulfil these conditions or not. If it can then terrorism can no more be

termed as unjustified for it would then be a just war. But many would not be prepared to call it a war as it is implemented by non-state actors and mostly secretly.

The criteria of a Just War under Jus ad Bellum are:

- ✓ **SELF DETERMINATION:** As Khatchadourian points out that the UN definition of ‘just cause’ recognizes the rights of people as well as states, and in article 7 of the definition of aggression, the U.N refers to the right to self-determination, freedom and independence, as derived from the charter, of peoples forcibly deprived of that right so both morally and legally “peoples” or “nations” enjoy a right to self-determination. When that right is frustrated, such peoples have the same just cause that states have when the self-determination of their citizens is threatened.
- ✓ **LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY:** Non-state actors can also be legitimate authorities if and only if they have the right intention. Now the question arises, what is a right intention?
- ✓ **RIGHT INTENTION:** If a national group can have a just cause, and if a non-state entity can be legitimate authority to engage on behalf of that group, it seems unproblematic that those engaging in violence can be rightly motivated by that just cause. Hence, if just cause and legitimate authority can be satisfied there seems to be no reason to think that the requirement of the right intention cannot be satisfied.
- ✓ **LAST RESORT:** Terrorism is justified if it really acts as the last resort or ultimate trial of their protest.
- ✓ **PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS:** Such a probability depends on the mindset of people, i.e., whether people would continue to call state actors oppressing injustice as heroes and non-state actors doing the same as terrorists. However, Teichman in his book *Pacifism and the Just War* concludes that the historical evidence on the effectiveness of terrorism is both ambiguous and incomplete. And Baier in an essay named ‘Violent Demonstrations’ found in the book *Ethical Issues* suggests that, at the least, “the prospects for the success of a cause do not seem in the past to have been reduced by resort to unauthorized force, by violent demonstrations that cost some innocent lives. Finally Wilkins as found in John Davenport’s article ‘Just War Theory, Humanitarian Intervention, and the need for a Democratic Federation’ in the *Journal of Ethics* is found to believe that some terrorist campaigns have indeed accomplished their goal of national independence and cites Algeria and Kenya as examples.
- ✓ **PROPORTIONALITY:** This criterion helps to find out whether the overall cost of violence would over weigh the overall benefits; if so then any form of war, even terrorism is justified.

JUS IN BELLO: states how a war would be fair in all respects and hence steps to legitimise it have to be taken. The steps of Jus In Bello are:-

- ✓ **PROPORTIONALITY:** Like its counterpart in jus ad bellum, the criterion requires proportionality between the costs of an action and the benefits to be achieved; but in Jus In Bello, the requirement is applied to particular acts within the war. It forbids, conducting the war in such a way that it involves inordinate costs, those that are

disproportional to the gains. If such a proportionality is maintained then once again terrorism is justified.

- ✓ **DISCRIMINATION:** The principle of discrimination holds that in waging a war we must distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate targets of attack.

Thus Andrew Valls, as found in his book *Can Terrorism Be Justified?* states that terrorism can be justified only when violence imposed by the terrorists can be justified. This violence should be found within limits in order to be justified and, indeed, placing limits on violence is what just war is all about.

B. DEVINE AND RAFALKO'S THREE ARGUMENTS

Three arguments are considered in the article "On Terror" by P.E. Devine and R.J. Rafalko in favour of killing of innocent which was published in *The Annals (Vol.463)*.

First, the 'Economy of Scale' argument; second, 'consciousness-raising' argument; and the third, the 'collective guilt' argument.

'ECONOMY OF SCALE' ARGUMENT: When terrorism is finally adopted by the terrorists as a last resort, when all other non-violent means such as negotiation, persuasion to the government etc. go in vain, then such a terrorism is perhaps justified. Terrorism, as the third option, is justified on the ground that it is preferably the 'cheapest form of warfare' (because it involves less finance and less man power than conventional warfare) and, at the same time, it compels the government to expand a significantly large portion of its resources to prevent the unconventional acts of violence thus putting a burden of pleasure on the uncompromising government to submit to the terrorists' dictate.

'CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING' ARGUMENT: The terrorists often justify their acts of violence as the cause of 'making the public aware of institutional injustice'. Specially in underdeveloped or developing nations, where people lack literacy due to intense poverty, it is very important to make the mass realize that they are being deceived by the government, and are deprived of their constitutional rights. And those who are not politically aware, are mostly in the state of dogmatic slumber and would not even mind spending their entire lives being oppressed – as they are already satisfied with whatever little they get from the government.

The argument of 'Consciousness Raising' is borrowed from the first rebel movement in 1879 in Russia – the Narodaya Volya (The People's Will). They felt the temporary and immediate necessity of terrorism in order to raise the consciousness of the masses. The Young Russian populist Nachayev was among the first to advocate conspiratorial violence as a method of arousing and educating the masses. According to the terrorists the common populace of a country is 'lethargic' and are simply not bothered about wrong doings of the government, even in democracies where people can raise their voices if required. At this juncture the terrorists take responsibility and initiative to awaken the people to the abuses of the government by means of terrorizing them. They think that such awareness will never be achieved by any rationally acceptable method, but can be obtained only through emotional means of creating terror. This will eventually

compel people to lose faith in their own government which, in turn would help the terrorists to achieve their goal.

'COLLECTIVE-GUILT' ARGUMENT: This argument states that although terrorism is blamed to be an act which takes the lives of innocents – yet no person is actually innocent. The 9/11 incident of the crashing of world trade centre has led to the death of so many innocents – but the terrorists would retort back and say that those were tax payers of U.S. government, and with the help of these tax arms and ammunitions to destroy the Palestinian Muslims (those who have now become terrorists) were made – thus they were not innocents. The U.S. government was guilty of making such policies against them and the people living in such a government also seemed to be guilty as they were none other than a part of the government supporting it.

Burleigh Wilkins mentions the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany as the clearest and most indisputable example of collective guilt in recent history. Here of course the German people collectively are held responsible for the sufferings of the Jews, not for acts of omission (i.e., instead of looking into the injustice of the government the people are content by taking what it offers and ignore the evil doing of the government), but for what they had committed. Against such guilt, terrorism may have been born only self-defense.

People are also guilty in the eyes of the terrorists by association. Sometimes some of the high ranking officials, who work for those governments whose predecessors had committed crimes against people of that particular terrorist group, are killed. There are ample examples of killing holiday makers, travelers and others just because they contribute to the economy of the guilty government or country.

For example all individuals, institutions, groups or people who are connected with Israel in economic dealings are judged to be guilty of a crime against the Palestinians.

C. LET US NOW CONSIDER SOME OF THE OTHER INFLUENTIAL ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF TERRORISM

A. TERRORISM IS A BETTER METHOD THAN REVOLUTION OR INSURGENCY

Narodaya Volya of Russia during 1878 to 1881 was the most important of all the terrorist movements. This organization evolved a specific policy against the Tsarist authorities which, according to N. Morozov, was a new cost-effective form of struggle. In a pamphlet entitled "Terrorism and Routine" (1880), Tarnovsky defends Marxism on the ground that, the massive toll of death and sufferings are found more in revolution or insurgency.

It is ethically a better choice than allowing such a carnage. Due to this reason terrorism can be identified with a low-level conflict, and the deaths of those who die in this war on terrorism have to be accepted as inevitable consequences of war.

B. TERRORISM IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF MARXIST THEORY OF CLASS STRUGGLE

The terrorists possibly have drawn inspiration from such revolutionary anarchist methodologies of not only Marx, but also of Tucker, Bakunin and Kropotkin who believed in hospitality towards the 'coercive' state, and were determined to use violent methods to achieve their ends. They totally discarded the idea of moral obligation and contended that all men have the right, if they have the power, to kill or coerce other men and make the entire world subservient to their ends.

Both Marx and Engels believed that violence was the engine of social change. They considered violence to be a therapy which alone could psychologically renovate the working class (who are constantly) oppressed and dominated by the capitalists.

C. TERRORISM ESTABLISHES THE RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENSE

Some justify terrorism as an exercise of the right to self-defense. The terrorists go on to justify their violent application of force when they themselves get subjected to murderous attacks from their oppressors. If the terrorists do not retaliate by murder, they will be killed by the power, i.e., oppressor, which cannot be accepted under any circumstance. For example, the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis was so horrifying that the Jews had no way but to adopt terrorism to get rid of such a torture.

D. TERRORISM IS THE LAST RESORT IN DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES

For the terrorists taking up arms is perceived as the only meaningful way left to bring about the expected transformation of society, where the people have been dispossessed of their homeland (Namibia in South West Africa), or where one part of a country is occupied by a foreign power which prevents it being reunited with the country of which it is historically and actually a part (Kashmir terrorism) or where one economic class or one race systematically exploits the other class. Jean Paul Sartre and Simon de Beauvoir believe that the world is full of oppression and scarcity, and it is absurd to think that the rigid, oppressive institutions can be changed without violence. So violence against an oppressor's freedom is justifiable.

E. TERRORISM MAY BE JUSTIFIED FROM THE VIEW POINT POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY

Here we can mention the argument from political expediency in favour of terrorism – i.e., violence against people is justified because certain elements of the population need to be eliminated for the good of the state (especially in states where people live below the poverty line). Thus loss of human life is necessary for a better government, or for a better country. This is how act of terrorism gets justified to some extent.

F. TERRORISM MAY BE JUSTIFIED BY THE TERRORISTS' MORAL RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Kant believed that the right to choose autonomously without any other influence lies at the core of humanity (which follows from the principle of respect for persons) and such a right is claimed to be absolutely sovereign even by many modern thinkers. Terrorists are none other than citizens of some country – thus they also have their right to protest against the wrong-doings of the government. Hence, the terrorists' right to choose their own means to achieve their own political goal (by whatever means they deem fit) should not be denied, destroyed or limited by the ruling agent or by the society.

Thus we would be mistaken if we think that terror tactics of the terrorists is nothing but a severe damage of the use of arms. It is random and its randomness can bring an end to slavery or other forms of oppression. This is called mindless violence which, of course cannot be used in case of a Just War, as it does not observe the Jus in Bello (i.e. conditions of Just War) as in the distinction between the combatant and non-combatant, respecting the immunity of the non-combatants. But such a form of ruthless, mindless violence also speaks for itself – to which we cannot – afford to put deaf ears – at least not for a long time.

Then why do we happen to black list the notion of terrorism altogether? Is it our anxiety or fear of the unknown danger or fear of insecurity? Statistic reveals that the total number of deaths caused by road accident is higher than the total number of deaths caused by terrorism, throughout the world. But still we are not terrified by the fear of road accidents in the way we are by that of terrorism. The reason behind such a fear lies not in any objective condition, but is purely psychological. Terrorism has been negatively portrayed by the media resulting into a mass negative attention globally. If we, being rational, shift our attention from the effects to their cause, then the problem can presumably be solved. But the irony is that, people against whom terrorism is applied seems to be stronger than the perpetrators. The common men, however, are influenced by the view of the stronger and hence, no media is prepared to consider the cause of the oppressed sympathetically. The world media also speaks for the power – be it political or economical. Thus it is highly improbable that it will justly focus the cause of the powerless oppressed people which, perhaps, results into such aggressive behaviour.

If we notice carefully, we shall see that the goal of the terrorists is, perhaps, noble, honest and natural, i.e., to topple the oppressive government. But people fail to understand their cause or even fail to sympathise with them, because no one wants to entangle himself into unnecessary chaos created by the terrorists. If we agree that terrorism is an actio-reactio process, then it can be presumed that a change in the action would bring a change in the reactions too.

More importantly, we have to stop the never-ending blame game. We would accuse the terrorists for what they do, again they would accuse the government for which they are compelled to do such things and we being a part of the government, would be equally held guilty by them.

Thus instead of simply criticizing the notion of terrorism, we have also to take care of the actions of the government so

that no such group can be ever formed who would reply to the government with an equal and opposite reaction.

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