

Is the threat of
terrorism
exaggerated politics
essay



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Threat of terrorism was taken at face value after a long time when the unbelievable happened. The terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center took place in the early hours on the morning of 11th September 2001. This tragic act alone claimed the life of thousands of innocent civilians. Based on the intel received from American and various foreign intelligence agencies, America declared war on Afghanistan in 2002 followed by war on Iraq in 2003. The war on terror has spread to all parts of the world, aiming to crackdown of terrorist networks. The war on terror is being fought by our own army within our own country. Terrorist attacks have claimed thousands of innocent lives in Pakistan alone. The recent sanctions on Iran due to its Nuclear program and a mild response to North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT and continued Nuclear proliferation has led the critics doubt the objective of the so called war on terror. With the course it has taken over the past few years, an end to the war in the near future is highly unlikely.

Statement of the Problem

War on terror was initiated by then the sitting president of the United State, George W. Bush junior to bring the architects of 9/11 to justice. This war was supported

Hypothesis

We hypothesis the threat of terrorism is exaggerated for possible gains to be made.

Scope

In the course of our research we will be identifying the major players in the entire war on terror; America, al-Qaeda and other allied states. We focus on the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent invasion of Iraq in order to highlight how terrorism has made governments respond to the threat. Since the response of the threat was out of proportions to its real threat we identified the possible gains made by manipulating the threats and the major beneficiaries.

Research Question

Why and how is the threat of terrorism exaggerated?

Subsidiary Questions

What is terrorism and how it generates fear?

What role did 9/11 play in initiating the war on terror?

Was the Iraq war justified?

Gains from terrorist activities/war on terror?

Are every acts of terrorism religiously motivated

What are the affects of terrorism on society?

Literature Review

For the purpose of our research we use the book Fiasco written by Thomas Ricks to form the basis and to enhance our knowledge regarding the ongoing war on terrorism initiated by the American President George W. Bush junior.

In the book Thomas highlights the events that led to the initiation of the war on terror and the mistakes made by both civil and military bureaucracy. Due to various forces acting within the White House the outcome varied than the outcome that was actually planned. False evidence was presented to the sitting president that incriminated Iraq of possessing weapons of mass destruction and also supporting numerous terrorist groups around the world. The main idea of the author was to create awareness concerning the different interest groups acting in the world of politics to achieve their goals. and taking this myth forward we will analyze whether the threat of terrorism possess a grave threat or is it just exaggerated to serve the interest of different groups all around the world.

Another book, " Terrorism" written by Charles Townshend who is professor of International History. He explores terrorism, tracing its development from the early 18th century when terrorism was employed by the state of France. He begins with the problem of a standard definition of terrorism and maintains that it is a matter of perspective. He provides historical accounts of terrorism and sheds light on different types of terrorism that we see today such as: religious terrorism, nationalistic terrorism, state terrorism and revolutionary terrorism. The main highlight of the book is his impartial approach towards a controversial subject and the fact that he does not shy away from discussing the exaggerations when it comes to terror.

Time Frame

We have focused our study on the data available for the last 10 years since the major incidents and decisions were made in this fateful time period.

Research Methodology

We consulted articles at news websites such Dawn, The News, and the like.

To get an overview of the terror process and the mistakes committed by the U. S. government books were also referenced: Fiasco by Thomas E. Ricks and Terrorism by Charles Townshend.

Analysis of Data

Terrorism and How it Generates Fear

With the dawn of the 21st century, no phenomenon has engrossed us as much as the contested “terrorism”. It has sparked much academic and political debate around the world and yet a definitive definition remains elusive. The clichéd and notorious adage that ‘one man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter’ underlines the inherent relativism. But a general definition is necessary to continue with our research and we shall define terrorism as the ‘use of direct violence against the non-combatants to achieve both short and long run objectives’. The addition of ‘non-combatants’ is important since ‘violence’ alone is also practiced by the state in a state of war. Hence the defining feature of terrorism lies in its ability to strike fear in the hearts of the non-combatants. That in fact is what upsets people: terrorism’s propensity to psychologically challenge the masses and engulf them in a perennial state of fear.

The nefarious tactics of the terrorist such as kidnapping, indiscriminate bombing, plane hijacking and the latest addition to the terror tactics: suicide bombings, all play havoc with our sense of vulnerability and force us to retreat in a world consisting of terrorists and non-terrorists, a microcosm

devoid of nuances and colored only in black and white. The very word 'terrorism' printed in bold on national newspapers and FOX news channel props up images of bearded men wearing jackets bent on slaughtering the innocent infidel public, especially the western public. As a result, insecurity rises and drastic measures are taken, often outrageous, as was the case with the passing of the "Patriot Act" in the U. S. which arguably allowed the government to snatch away the rights of its people on a mere whim of a terrorist threat. Hence, we argue that the threat of terrorism as perceived by the non-combatants, far outweighs its actual physical scale. It therefore is more of a 'mental assault' than an 'attack on the freedom of Americans'. To elaborate on this, let's take the example of Israel, a nation which has attracted much global attention. Despite its claims of being under consistent attack from the terrorists, the fatalities resulting from terror attacks would be far too minuscule to appear on national mortality statistics. Terror therefore, works on the mind.

The human mind, unfortunately already fighting the different phobias, simply can't keep up with the innovative terror phobia and inflates its threat.

Governments react to this threat in different ways. Some set out to assuage the fears of the public, others cash on the fears to further their political agendas.

9/11

This is what has initiated the misnomered 'war on terror', a product of the Bush administration against the 'evil' terrorists lead by the 'magnanimous' U. S. lead coalition forces. 9/11 attacks had achieved precisely the objective of terror. They were not aggressions of war as Bush saw it; they were attacks

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on the minds of the people. If people weren't safe flying, or working in the skyscrapers, where were they then? 9/11 hit the bulls-eye by achieving exactly that. Little effort was made to put the threat into perspective and war was declared upon the terror. The cornered people reacted by giving the mandate to the government to eradicate the problem of terrorism by attacking them. We argue that, despite its enormities, 9/11 did not justify invasions by U. S. forces of sovereign nations and further aggravate a region marked by instability. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to analyze the circumstances of 9/11 attacks and the various conspiracy theories that abound, word must be said about the negligence on part of the national agencies that are heavily funded to keep the nation safe from belligerent mavericks like Osama bin Laden. It is now well known that CIA and FBI had long been aware of terrorist sleeper cells operating in America and that the terrorists acquired training with the agencies cognizant of them. What explains this apathy? It can be argued that the agencies inadvertently 'allowed' the terrorist to acquire training and then execute their plans. Had the identified threat been properly dealt with, we find it hard to fathom the prodigious 9/11 attacks being carried out. What logically follows from this premise is that 'terrorism', when it comes to its prevention and minimization, is not very different from say 'drugs smuggling'. Both require vast integrated networks to operate, require funding which can be monitored and can be tackled with sound intelligence networks and street smartness. One would not expect the U. S. army to bomb drug operations in Mexico. But drugs do not instill the same degree of fear as would a bomb in a subway. The bomb will most probably blow the potential danger of terrorism totally

out of proportion and hypnotize the mind so as to accept the most counter-productive of all measures to eliminate it.

Iraq War

What we see therefore is the exaggerated reign of terror, where objective deliberations on the matter are equated to with sympathizing with terror itself. A paradoxical situation arises when combating terrorism justifies utilization of measures resorted to by the terrorists themselves. We now turn towards the second Iraq War of 2003. The ostensible justification was WMD (weapons of mass destructions) and the tyrannical Saddam Hussein who also somehow had ties with al-Qaeda. The years after 9/11 were one of cosmic wars between the forces of good (U. S.) and the evil (terrorist in specific and those who opposed US policies in general). The tragedy that befell U. S. seemed to have bestowed upon it the prerogative to the invasion of a country and preemptive strike on the basis of scantiest of evidence. The White House and Pentagon seemed to had have been convinced that Saddam had not given up its nuclear ambitions and somehow miraculously acquired weapons of mass destructions and had a penchant for handing them over to the terrorists. Any political scientist would find it hard to come up with possible gains for a dictator for handing over its much coveted nuclear arsenal to a third party (al-Qaeda). The then defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld would hold press conferences where he would profess knowledge of the exact sites of WMD. Mr. Bush would describe evidence in relation to WMD in Iraq as “ sound and irrefutable”. Yet years after the invasion the Bush administration was forced to apologize for their “ mistakes” and confirm to the world that Iraq indeed had not acquired WMDs.

Let us analyze the circumstances which lead to the subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003 to further make our point. The Americans found themselves in a perpetual state of fear after the 9/11 attacks and the U. S. government had promised to bring the perpetrators to justice by any means necessary. The metamorphosis of third world country (Iraq) to a nation with WMDs and the ability and intention to fire them on the American soil is surely astonishing. Americans had bad intelligence leading to false reports (Collin Powell's presentation on the nuclear infrastructure) or they simply had the predilection to invade another country. They marshaled little international support and even internal disagreements are worth noting. Again, even if Saddam did indeed have acquired deadly weapons, was the threat of him using them against U. S. plausible and imminent? The answer is a resounding no. The U. S. media along with the Bush administration would make frequent public appearances and perturb the masses with their incessant terror speeches and in the process indoctrinating them with the notion that their world was under fire from the evil doers and a prompt action was needed. The American public or at least the majority gave into the demands of the government and gave them their tacit approval for the invasions. However, any impartial insight into the matter would reveal how minuscule the threat from Iraq had been, and being the superpower U. S. should have shown restraint and providence in dealing with an unlikely nuclear armed nation of Iraq. Diplomacy should have been allowed to play its part and international agencies, the IAEA should have been taken for its word. The conventional means to resolving such issues were sidelined and the most destructive of all were put into effect. Summing up, the invasion was unjustified on every ground and the threat of terrorism was again

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manipulated and inflated, by both its inherent nature and deliberate actions of the U. S.

Who Gains?

Almost every human activity that takes place is associated or derived by the need to gain. The threat of terrorism is exaggerated; the question that arises is why an establishment would or society would exaggerate the threat of terrorism. Taking the definition of terrorism from the previous paragraphs, we know that terrorism has devastating consequences not physically but mentally as well. The answer to the above ambiguities is that one or more internal or external groups derive gains from such activities. Though the idea of gaining from such bloody activities is preposterous but unfortunately it is true. In the following paragraphs we will see how and who has gained from terrorist activities. We can classify the gains into 2; direct and indirect gains.

Direct Gains

Direct gains are gains by parties directly involved in the act of terrorism. In order to analyze the gains by different parties due to the exaggeration of terrorism, it is imperative that we first define the parties that are directly involved and covered in the course of our research.

The parameters of our research include non-state terrorist groups such as Taliban & al-Qaeda and states themselves. We will shed light on various states; some states may gain both directly and indirectly. When referring to direct gains we will shed light on political and economic gains.

Political

Political gains can result for the government, the terrorist groups and opposition parties as well. The fact that non-terrorist groups also gains from terrorist activities is alarming and intrigues one to investigate as why, how and what possible could one gain out of these barbaric activities. After the 9/11 attacks, it was anticipated that George Bush's administration would actually lose out popularity due to his administration's incapability of preventing such attacks to happen on United States soil. In fact he became the most powerful man on the face of the earth, with virtually limitless power; both influentially and destructive. During George Bush's administration, the threat of terrorism was exaggerated, primarily due to the fact that he blamed previous administration for not taking a hard line stance against radical Islamist groups. Furthermore, he embarked on a strategy to protect the American people which eventually got him re-elected. Therefore Bush maximized from the 9/11 attacks and maximized gains to increase his influence all over the world in the name of war on terror. As far as the myth goes no country besides the United States and a couple of allies such as Pakistan gained from the war on terror. As per a few radical views, America itself orchestrated 9/11 attacks to gain control over the oil fields in the Middle East.

We discussed the direct gains for the political party in America after the 9/11 attacks, now we will shift our focus towards the threat of terrorism in Pakistan, and analyze how and who has gained at the expense of innocent lives.

Terrorist attacks (suicide bomb attacks) began in Pakistan when Musharraf extended a hand of support to the American forces in Afghanistan and allowed its law enforcement agencies to detain Pakistani citizens without any charge and hand them over to the American law enforcement agencies for questioning. As far as our analysis is concerned besides millions of dollars of debt being written off and receiving millions and millions in aid for improvement in security facilities, there were no substantial gains for Musharraf's government. However he was able to extend his tenure in office, primarily on the basis that he could not leave the country in state of chaos. Many militant groups threatened the government to create chaos in the country and will fight back if the government did not halt their support to the NATO forces. Musharraf ignore this threat, as being the Chief of Army, Musharraf was able to solidify his power for 8 years with the support of the American establishment. However the situation got out of hand because the security forces could not crack down on suicide attacks and all the blame was put on Musharraf. The opposition parties heavily criticized Musharraf's actions and took advantage of the situation and put forward their agenda.

The opposition parties along with human right activists took to the streets of Pakistan to call for end to the support provided by the government to NATO forces. The opposition parties claimed that if they were to be in office they would slam the door on the face of America, and will not support America in the war on terror. Opposition parties in Pakistan, politicized on the miseries of other people. Hence they were elected in office. The question that arises is that after making such bold claims for instance fighting for justice on the issue of missing persons and coming to peace terms with the tribal leaders,

what have they achieved and how different is the situation right now than it was under Musharraf.

More and more attacks continue to take place all over Pakistan, the coalition government has launched fresh military operations in Waziristan, drone attacks have increased in number, suicide attacks have increased number, security forces training academies are being targeted and much more. So besides taking advantage from the mishaps of the previous administration and making a political agenda out of it, what actually has this government done that is different from the previous one? Instead of solving the issue and realizing the miseries of the common man, unfortunately the change that was expected was all a propaganda to gain a vote bank so they the coalition partners could come to power and continue with the same strategy that of the previous government.

Economic

In order to analyze the economic gains of Pakistan from the threat of terrorism, we will divide economic gains into short run and long run. First we will analyze the short run economic gains with regard to the Pakistani economy. Before the war on terror and before our alliance with the U. S. A, Pakistan was on the verge of defaulting on its foreign debt and being declared a default state. After 9/11, Pakistan was considered as a strategic partner in the war against terror. As Pakistan was a neighboring country of Afghanistan, U. S army could run its military operations and could access their supplies through Pakistan. Therefore, U. S. A offered incentives such as writing of Pakistan's debts and instead giving them more funds to strengthen their armed forces. A lot of policies were relaxed with regard to the flow of <https://assignbuster.com/is-the-threat-of-terrorism-exaggerated-politics-essay/>

money; Pakistan's economy experienced an inflow of capital, hence there was an increase in economic activity, foreign investment was pouring into Pakistan solely due to the fact that Musharraf was a pro-American and he had somehow managed to build his reputation as the biggest supporter of the West. Pakistan experienced growth averaging 6% per annum. Pakistan was growing at a remarkable rate for which it received worldwide recognition.

However, the downside of the growth in GDP was that it was not a sustainable figure. Growth that was taking place in Pakistan was either in sectors which would not aid sustainable growth i. e. growth was experienced in the consumption oriented products and not in physical investment.

Due to this, our GDP was inflated because most of the investment that was coming into the country was due to the fact that a military dictator was in power who was a pro-West leader and comparatively at that point in time, the situation in Pakistan with regard to suicide attacks was not as bad as it is now and lastly, Pakistan did not have a major energy shortage.

But without any doubt, the alliance with U. S. A postponed the debt crisis which once again we face today.

Indirect Gains

Indirect gains are gains to parties that are not directly involved in the conflict but they stand to gain from the actions of other parties. However, there is a high probability that the groups that gain indirectly may be able to influence the actions of the directly involved parties.

For this part of our research we will focus on parties in America and shed some light in Pakistan and if possible on Pakistan's neighbors.

Arms Production

Since time immemorial, America has allegedly been involved in arms trade with numerous countries around the world. The alarming fact is that not all arms that are traded between America and other states are on legal contracts, there are numerous cases where America has illegally supplied arms to countries or state or non-state actors to fuel ongoing civil wars or to provoke an uprising. America's civil military bureaucracy has been able to push its agenda through the White House since time immemorial. U. S. A is one of the biggest arms dealer in the world. The White House has allocated trillions and trillions of dollars towards arms production, hence boosting profits of arms producing companies. If we pay attention to the arms production in America, one can imagine how many arms have been built or how much of the U. S annual budget has been allocated towards arms production by taking the war in Iraq, war in Afghanistan into consideration. Furthermore, the purchase of arms contracts put forward by governments all over the world including Pakistan and India. India needs arms to protect its border and to sustain the conflict in Kashmir and Pakistan needs it to sustain the war on terror and sustain the conflict with India in Kashmir. On the other hand, U. S could simple use its resources to eliminate and resolve the conflict, but unfortunately why would one want to curb the growth of local industry even if it costs lives.

United States supplied weapons to al-Qaeda to fight the Soviets, and later on, it was the United States of America who denounced al-Qaeda and its <https://assignbuster.com/is-the-threat-of-terrorism-exaggerated-politics-essay/>

operatives. It is imperative that we bear in mind that al-Qaeda was a product of American and Pakistani intelligence which today America blames Pakistan intelligence in aiding the Taliban fighters.

So in short, there is more to it that meets the eye, meaning war on terror is not simply for the sake of American national security or to take revenge of the 9/11 attacks. It is serving the purpose of various interest political and capitalist groups around the world. By pressurizing Pakistan to take firm action in the northern areas, all the aid that is received in turn of carrying out such military operations, the Pakistani government is bound to buy arms from the funds received from the American government.

Lobby

With this sub topic, we might be going a bit too far with our research and findings; unfortunately there is no evidence to believe otherwise. In the course of our research we came across the fact that no matter what Barrack Obama says in his televised speeches, the fact still remains that America is the strongest ally of Israel. Statements such as the one made by Obama in his recent speech on AIPAC forum, " A Threat to Israel is A Threat to the United States", clearly portray the strong support for Israel. American foreign policy is driven by Israeli interest groups; Israel is indirectly contributing to the destruction of law and order in the Middle East because it can not directly get involved in the conflict. Mossad's and RAW's role in Pakistan's northern areas is evident. Conducting terrorist activities and forcing the Pakistan's government to take actions against its own civilians and tribes; Civilians and tribes that stood by Pakistan to fight the two bloody wars against India.

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It surely is a bitter truth, but one should ask that with the latest technology and world's best resources at ones disposal, why cannot the allied forces capture or eliminate a radical group deprived of the luxury of technology such satellite tracking can survive the brutal force. The answer is simple, there are too many gains out of such continuing conflicts, why would someone want to end such conflicts, restore world order and lose its influence over other nations. The bitter fact is that our own government is caught up in the vicious cycle, whether intentionally or unintentionally is the question that remains unanswered. And it will be years before we would reveal the intentions of our own politicians who are responsible for crippling this country and virtually starting a civil war.

Acts of Terrorism Religiously Motivated?

The conventional understanding is mostly wrong that suicide terrorism is mainly the creation of Islamic fundamentalism. If you closely look at the series of events we can conclude that in most of the cases " religion" neither causes nor explains suicide terrorism rather common thing among the suicide attacks since 1980 is a specific strategic goals.

Not all suicide terrorists are religious. In fact, the secular Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers (LTTE) has committed more suicide attacks since the 1980s than any other group including Hamas or Islamic Jihad. LTTE carried out 168 suicide attacks causing heavy damage on economic and military targets. They are a Marxist group, a secular group, a Hindu group whose movement was not driven by any Islamic ideology rather they waged a violent campaign that sought to create Tamil Eelam, an independent state in the north and east of Sri Lanka. So it simply shows that they have a clear strategic goal.
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When we closely look at the background in which suicide attacks take place, there is always particular injustice, inequality and prejudice present that explain the decision to use the tactic. For example, Hamas, an Islamist Palestinian group, has a clearly Islamic identity. But their goal, which is to establish an Islamist state in the West Bank and Gaza, cannot be separated from the political conflict between Israel and Palestine from which it has eventually emerged.

When a suicide attack occurs there is always some group or certain organization is behind that attack. It is never an individual who is solely responsible for that act because of his personal reasons. So it is important to differentiate between the two as the individual can be committed and motivated by the religion but the entire group cannot be provoked to do such an act.

Islam is a religion of peace and harmony and it never promotes the violent and the brutal acts among his followers rather Islam strictly forbids such unlawful acts. In Islam, several things are clear:

Suicide is forbidden. “ O ye who believe! [Do not] kill yourselves, for truly Allah has been to you Most Merciful. If any do that in rancor and injustice, soon shall We cast him into the Fire...” (Qur’an 4: 29-30).

The taking of life is allowed only by way of justice (i. e. the death penalty for murder), but even then, forgiveness is better. “ Nor take life - which Allah has made sacred - except for just cause...” (17: 33).

In pre-Islamic Arabia, retaliation and mass murder was commonplace. If someone was killed, the victim's tribe would retaliate against the murderer's entire tribe. This practice was directly forbidden in the Qur'an (2: 178-179). Following this statement of law, the Qur'an says, " After this, whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave chastisement" (2: 178). No matter what wrong we perceive as being done against us, we may not lash out against an entire population of people.

Harming innocent bystanders, even in times of war, was forbidden by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This includes women, children, noncombatant bystanders, and even trees and crops. Nothing is to be harmed unless the person or thing is actively engaged in an assault against Muslims.

Muslims are being the victims in the recent aggressions against terrorism led by the western powers and they are thriving hard to prove Muslims as terrorist. It is just propaganda against the Muslims which is being assisted by several Islamist extremist who are molding Islamic teachings according to their own ways and using them against the very true essence of Islam but the question which arises is the suffering of the Muslim population justified because of these extremist minorities? By this it doesn't mean that let those extremist free and let them promote their agendas. We need to segregate them and then target them in such a way that no innocent is being harmed in the course of actions.

Affects of terrorism on Society?

Terrorism has its diverse and severe effects on the society, economy, and socio economic and on the whole on the stability of a nation. As we know that all terrorist acts involve violence or the threat of violence. Terrorists attempt not only to create panic but also to weaken confidence in the government and the political leadership of the target country. Terrorist activities have occurred since time immemorial but today the world is experiencing a global rebirth of attacks especially after the 9/11 incidence.

The effect on the economy is prominent and is devastating. It has negative impacts on all the big indicators like GDP, GNP, health indicators, income etc. also the whole structural reforms programs are no longer implemented due to this terrorism attacks. Then we have to face deteriorating trade balance and balance of payments, our exports then no more remain competent, due to which our economy is hurt very badly. Also the foreign investors hesitate to come and invest, due to a lot of instability and chaos.

And Pakistan who has been the main victim of all these attacks and bombings has to face all these effects. Terrorism has become one of the major problem for economy and people of Pakistan. Repetition of terrorist attacks on various important organization and cities has made every Pakistani very conscious about these terrorists. Suicide bombing in shopping malls, common business centers and on roads is not only affecting economy but also social and psychological status of every Pakistani. Government of Pakistan along with many international NGOs and UN Agencies trying his best to facilitate these displaced peoples with basic needs of daily life.

Attacks on the institutions like GHQ, FIA and Police training schools are
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raising question of the national security. And attacks on the school like Islamic International University in Islamabad and on the markets like that in Lahore and Peshawar, are creating terror and fear in the minds of the people. And the condition is such that they fear stepping out of the home; all these factors are adding destruction to economy of Pakistan.

Terrorism also effect the health of the people Mental health researchers are exploring the effects of terrorism on the individual and on communities. They have researched that after 9/11 especially there has been a massive increase in the mental disorders, tension and phobia. Mentally due to bombings, children's could not concentrate on the studies and so do adults in their work. And their thinking and productive capacity has been very much disturbed.

Due to terrorism government had to spend large