

Domestic and international terrorism research paper sample

[Society](#), [Terrorism](#)



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What is Terrorism?

The word “terrorism” is often heard on the television news report, read in newspapers, and even present in some of the most popular movies that are shown in the theaters, often with large explosions and a known “bad guy.” However, is this an accurate representation of the definition of terrorism? According to Munson (2008), the term “terrorism” has been around since the French Revolution, however, when the term was used during the late 1700s, it had a different meaning than it does currently. Back then, the term referred to “defending new notions of justice and democracy against an old order perceived as tyrannical and corrupt” (Munson, 2008, p. 78). The more current definition of terrorism would have to change in order to keep up with the global and societal differences that exist currently as compared to the social environment that was present during the French Revolution. The Federal Bureau of Investigation presents different definitions for terrorism, based on the individuals and location or target of the terrorist, breaking

down the definition into international, domestic, and federal crime (FBI, n. d.). An additional definition of terrorism consists of:

“ The illegal use or threatened use of force or violence; an intent to coerce societies or governments by inducing fear in their populations; typically with ideological and political motives and justifications; an “ extrasocietal” element, either “ outside” society in the case of domestic terrorism or “ foreign” in the case of international terrorism” (Tanielian & Stein, 2006, p. 689).

For the purposes of the current paper, terrorism will refer to the acts carried out by an individual or group that is meant to cause harm, influence policy, or persuade actions through force, unless otherwise stated.

International Terrorism

International terrorism often targets humanitarian issues, thus is covered, in part, by international humanitarian laws, which cover war crimes. Many of the parties that are included in the United Nations have been unable to come up with one succinct definition of international terrorism, as some lawmakers have had difficulty in deciding what exactly should be considered to be an act of terrorism (Broomhall, 2004). For example, drug trafficking was suggested to be covered under international terrorism, but due to the sheer volume of individuals who commit the crime, such an act would clog the international court system which is tasked with prosecuting international terrorism cases.

Likewise, the use of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction were suggested by India to be covered under war crimes, thus being labelled as

international terrorist activities, but that request was also turned down by the international court (Broomhall, 2004). So, if such dangerous activities are not considered as terroristic, what is? International terrorism consists of acts that are carried out by individuals who do not reside or have citizenship of the country in which the attacks are executed. Some examples of international terrorism include the taking of hostages for political gain, genocide, war crimes, and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians (Broomhall, 2004).

While international terrorism existed prior to 2001, the events that transpired on September 11, 2001 helped to serve as a wake up call for citizens within the United States and abroad about the seriousness of terroristic acts. According to Bird, Blomberg, and Hess (2008), between the years of 1968 and 2003, the number of international terrorist events peaked during the mid-1980s, with nearly 600 international terroristic incidents per year, with a decrease in activity after 1990. However, despite the decrease in activity, the number of deaths attributed to each attack has increased greatly, from between one and two per incident when the activity peaked in the mid-1980s, to nearly 10 deaths per incident in the early 2000s (Bird, Blomberg, & Hess, 2008).

So, despite the lower frequency of attacks, the events are becoming more deadly. International terrorists are targeting larger numbers of civilians with each attack, which can be seen in the hijacking and eventual crashing of the four planes that were involved in the 9/11 attacks in New York, the Pentagon, and the fourth plane which landed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. It only took 19 terrorists on a suicide mission to kill over 3,000 people and

psychologically harm scores more. Technology may be one of the factors contributing to the greater number of deaths per incident (Wright, 2011). With the invention and advancement of the internet and computer technology, several people within one region are able to discuss their disdain for a certain aspect of culture, thus allowing for the formation of terror cells which share similar ideology.

Important research into international terrorism has been gained through experiencing various attacks, with individuals within psychology, sociology, and even religious studies contributing to an increased understanding behind the motives that lie behind the actions of those individuals and groups that carry out international terrorist activities (Bird, Blomberg, & Hess, 2008). Through studying the patterns of terrorism, research has revealed that countries that are developed and have high target locations, such as the United States and parts of the Middle East, have higher rates of international terrorism (Bird, Blomberg, & Hess, 2008). Three forces behind the evolution and increased rates of international terrorism have been identified as “modernization, social facilitation, and the spread of revolutionary ideologies” (Bird, Blomberg, & Hess, 2008, p. 259). However, others have suggested instead that disillusionment with the status quo or desire to increase the economic status may be better explanations as to why the rates have increased (Blomberg, Hess, & Weerapana, 2004). No matter the underlying causes or motivating factors, the effects of international terrorism are detrimental to not only the target location, but also the allies of those affected, spreading the fear across multiple countries and continents.

Domestic Terrorism

While domestic and international terrorism share some variables and contributing factors, domestic terrorism or homegrown terrorist acts are quite different due to the fact that the perpetrators are often born and raised in the very country they end up turning against. According to Farrell and Littlefield (2012), one of the main objectives of domestic terrorism is to communicate a desired message to as many people as possible. The more violent the attack, the more likely the news and other media outlets will cover the event and spread the desired message of those who are responsible for the attack.

Domestic terrorism can occur anywhere and can take many forms; from the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 by a Kentucky-born Timothy McVeigh and the seemingly random mailing of numerous homemade bombs to individuals who were involved with the making of modern technological advancements in the United States by Illinois-born Ted Kaczynski, to the more recent domestic terrorist event that was witnessed during the Boston marathon in 2013 which was carried out by two brothers who immigrated into the United States.

While the examples provided all include an explosion or bomb of some sort, such is not always the case. Domestic terrorism can take many forms, including white collar crimes by extremist organizations and the destruction of property as seen in the actions of environmental extremists (Clancy, 2012). One of the important distinctions between international and domestic terrorism appears to be the number of attacks and the lethality of the actions taken by those who carry out the activity. According to research

compiled from examining the data from the Terrorism in Western Europe: Events Data (TWEED), when it comes to domestic terrorism, there are more attacks but fewer reports of death or injuries associated with the attacks when compared to international terrorism activity (Hinkkainen, 2013). Some of the information suggests that regardless of the country that is attacked, homegrown terrorism is thought to originate primarily from Muslim immigrant populations residing within the target countries (Hinkkainen, 2013). While many of the eventual terrorists immigrate into the host country, such as the United States in the case of the Boston marathon bombers, others are second and third generation citizens of Muslim immigrants. With the focus apparently on the Muslim culture as sources of homegrown terrorism, it is important to examine the cultural factors that may contribute to the eventual violent activities. Through studying the Fort Hood shootings in 2009 by Major Nadal Hasan, who was an active duty military psychiatrist, the cultural context can be identified in Muslim American domestic terrorists. It has been noted that in one of his military posts, Hasan was reprimanded for trying to convert several of his patients and fellow military members over to worshipping with him in his Muslim faith and he became irate when challenged about his opposition to the “ war on terror” that was implemented by George W. Bush after the attacks on 9/11 (Farrell & Littlefield, 2012). Hasan was born in the United States, but was loyal to the teachings of the Muslim faith, which ultimately created a contraction. Although the Muslim culture has been identified as one of the major contributors to the instances of domestic terrorism, the events of 9/11 changed the political environment of the United States, which resulted in

more activities being classified as domestic terrorism. According to Nuzzo (2004), actions that once were viewed as revolutionary, such as the instances of civil disobedience led by Martin Luther King Jr. which were conducted to bring about change, are now classified as potentially dangerous actions. Groups such as Anonymous could potentially be considered as domestic terrorism based on the methods of which they go about to bring both attention to and change in the political and economic system within not only the United States, but also on a global spectrum. Thus the events of 9/11 and the resulting declaration of a “ war on terror” have shaped the acceptable methods citizens can go about protesting and working for change, due to the fear of a nation that may have overreacted out of precaution.

The advancement of technology has changed the methods of which terrorists have been able to recruit citizens for the purpose of carrying out domestic attacks. College students who have been raised in the United States are able to be encouraged to commit acts of violence toward their own home country, which may not have been possible during the pre-internet era (Wright, 2011). The time it takes to radicalize college students and American citizens, particularly by the Global Salafi Jihad ideology has decreased greatly over the past decade; in the past, the process could take a few years to complete, however now the same process takes mere months (Wright, 2011).

Additionally, the age of those who become radicalized have decreased as well, with the average terrorist group members decreasing in age from 27 to 23 years.

With the speeding up of the radicalization process, the steps involved have

become rather streamlined. There are four stages of radicalization that have been identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (as cited in Wright, 2011), which consist of pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadization. During the pre-radicalization stage, individuals, primarily Muslim males are contacted during an important developmental time in their lives, where they are searching for answers and meaning in life. The pre-radicalization stage usually occurs when the individual is between the ages of 15 and 35 years, and usually involves a friendly offering of advice, support, or other form of comfort (Wright, 2011). When a conflict between one's beliefs previously held and new ideologies occur or the individual finds himself at a crossroad in life, it is likely that he will seek guidance from the individual who had offered it in the past, which is a hallmark of the self-identification stage. During the self-identification stage, members are exposed to a vast display of anti-Western propaganda, either online, in printed material, or from fellow members (Wright, 2011). The last two phases increase in the extreme nature of the views held, which ultimately lead to carrying out violent attacks on the country they called home.

Which is More Dangerous?

When it comes to determining which form of terrorism is most dangerous, it can be a daunting task. On one hand, international terrorism has been linked with lower incidences of violence when compared to domestic terrorism. However, even with less attacks, international terrorism contributes to a higher rate of both injury and death when compared to domestic terrorism. So the question arises, which way does one define danger? Is it the form of

terrorism that is associated with more deaths, damage, and injuries or the one with more attacks but a lower body count? Upon examining the differences between the two, it would appear that domestic terrorism could be deemed as the most dangerous out of the two, for a variety of reasons. Despite having a lower death and injury rate, domestic terrorism is unique in regards to the psychological trauma that usually accompanies such attacks. The continued state of readiness and heightened security which occurs with the frequent attacks associated with domestic terrorism can disrupt the activities of daily living. Additionally, the idea that those who choose to strike and attack the country in which some have been born and raised or immigrated and even assimilated into the customs and ways of the host culture, can be troublesome to fathom. With international terrorism, people at least have a concept about what the " enemy" looks like; however, such is not the case with domestic terrorism, for those who are responsible for the attacks may very well likely look like the person citizens see in the mirror. Without being able to identify who among them is a potential terrorist, the psyche of a nation can be forever damaged, wondering who will attack next.

Conclusion

The very act of terrorism is meant to instill fear; causing physical, psychological, and economical damage to the country or organization targeted. Both domestic and international terrorism can be detrimental to those who are affected by the violence, as well as the allies of the countries directly impacted. The various formats of terrorism that have occurred within the United States have taken their toll on the lives of those who have

experienced the violent attacks, and society bears the scars. The psychological impact of frequent domestic attacks has led to a weary nation, but through studying the events leading up to and the aftermath of terrorist attacks, the country is better prepared. However, despite the preparation and research, such insight may not alleviate the entire psychological trauma that is associated with not knowing who the enemy is in the case of domestic terrorism.

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