

# Is terrorism a serious threat to international and national security

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



## Introduction

The notion of 'terrorism' began to attain a great deal of relevance to the international community during the 1970s. To be sure, political organisations, such as the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Irish Republican Army, began to use violent methods for the purposes of voice out their grievances and force certain political outcomes (Gupta, 2008: 33). In the context of globalisation, it could be argued that terrorism has become a force of high magnitude, since it threatens to disrupt the viability of nation-states as well as the whole foundations of the international political system. It must be underlined that the modern manifestations of the phenomenon of terrorism exceed the scope of the propagation of violent acts by extremist groups of Islamic extract. Instead, terrorism must be examined in broader terms, to encompass the aspects of nuclear proliferation, natural disasters and the spread of epidemics (Bobbitt, 2008: 190). In order to assess to what extent terrorism constitutes a serious threat to international and national security, this essay begins by appraising the argument put forward by James and Brenda Lutz, who argue that this phenomenon constitutes a 'continuing threat to state security' (Lutz., Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 61). This essay then tackles the formulation presented by Ian Lustick, who maintains that the magnitude of the threat posed by terrorism appears to be much smaller than realised (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 66). The evaluation of both arguments will be made by referring to the ways in which the War on Terror has altered the manner in which states and the

international community as a whole is dealing with the phenomenon of terrorism.

## **Terrorism as a continuing threat to national and international security**

James and Brenda Lutz put forward the view that terrorism actualises the threat it poses to the viability of nation-states by referring to the way in which extremist movements, such as Fascism and Nazism, managed to topple the existing order of things in democratic countries, such as Italy and Germany. In addition, the tactics of terrorism was successfully implemented by the liberation movements that ridded Algeria, Jewish Palestine and Cyprus of French and British colonial rule (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 61-2). Nevertheless, the increased access to digital technologies that facilitate instantaneous communications and the wider availability of weapons of mass destruction magnify the scope of the threat posed by terrorism (Silverstone, 2007: 17). The authors also outline that the modern notion of terrorism differs from past manifestations as it can contribute to the profound alteration of the political foundations of the states that are compelled to deal with the phenomenon (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 64). It must be underlined that enhanced magnitude of the terrorist threat impels states to commit a large amount of resources to the fight against terror and; in some cases, enter into a diplomatic framework of negotiation which might result in bestowing a modicum of legitimacy to terrorist organisations (Elshtain, 2004: 96). States are forced to respond to the threat of terrorism by recalibrating their judicial systems in a way that reflects the changed nature of the crimes committed

by terrorist organisations (Napoleoni, 2004: 70). These states of affairs can in turn lead to an enhanced perception of the threat posed by extremism and inject a measure of authoritarian legalism into the democratic system of states (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 65). The threat posed by Al-Qaeda in the context of the War on Terror exemplifies the augmented threat of terrorism. To begin with, terrorist organisations affiliated to Al-Qaeda do not abide by the international legislation regarding the conduct of war. These organisations target civilians as part of their grand political strategy, geared towards creating an environment of terror in democratic societies (Fotion, 2007: 77). In addition, the War on Terror has resulted in the militarisation of the political discourse, by which the notion of the enemy is reformulated by including domestic ideologies that are hesitant to confront the phenomenon of terrorism. This situation has been outlined by the authors, who argue that the threat of terrorism compels states to react to extremist violence, as not doing so would eventually enhance the ability of terrorist organisations to inflict damage on the populations affected (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 65). These arguments seem to be quite persuasive in describing not only the threats posed by terrorist organisations, but also the dangers related to the fight against the phenomenon of extremism. In order to assess the validity of these claims, they will be parried against the opposite view regarding the nature and extent of the terrorist threat.

## **Is terrorism a continuing threat to national and international security**

Ian Lustick poses the view that even if there is an acknowledged threat of terrorism, the magnitude of the threat presented by this phenomenon is much smaller than realised (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 66). The author maintains that the enhanced 'perception of the threat' has enabled the United States to articulate clear cut moral demarcations in the context of the War in Terror, in which the 'enemy' (Islamic extremism) is portrayed as a-moral and deemed to be extirpated. Furthermore, this stance entails that Washington claims the right use of pre-emptive tactics against terrorism, even if the threat is perceived as infinitesimally small (Crawford in Rosenthal and Barry (eds.), 2009: 41). Accordingly, preventive force has been deployed by the United States in Afghanistan (2001), of Iraq (2003), as Washington claimed that those states harboured terrorist organisations in their midst (Frum and Perle, 2004: 118). Citing the small occurrence of terrorist activity, the author emphasises the fact that the United States is committing a substantial amount of resources to defend itself from a threat which is relatively small in nature and magnitude (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 67). Lustick also highlights the fact that the response to the terrorist phenomenon, marked by a visceral attitude on the part of the authorities, might serve narrow political agendas (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 69). In this context, it is important to underline that the War on Terror entails the possibility that the United States might utilise the fight against terrorism for the sake of ensuring that the process of

globalisation remains firmly tied to the American ideations of liberal democracy, the rule of law and free market economics being spread to the wider world (Chan, 2012: 72). Lustick also underlines how the media is responsible for portraying the threat of terrorism in an imbalanced way. To be sure, the mainstream media devotes more time to the coverage of news related to putative threats than to issues which affect citizens in a more visible manner. In addition, the author notes how 'threat inflation' is used as a political tool by the two parties of government in the United States, which have become accustomed to pinning the blame for the so-called pervasiveness of these threats to either the Republican or Democratic Party, as the case might be (Patterson, 2007: 38). The author argues that the augmented perception of the threat, which serves narrow political and economic interests, constitutes an additional threat to be imputed to the phenomenon of terrorism (Lutz, Lutz and Lustick in Jackson and Sinclair (eds.), 2012: 70-71). It is possible to argue that these views on the threat of terrorism relativise the claims put forward by James and Brenda Lutz. The existence of a terrorist threat has the potential to be magnified out of proportion and establish itself as an added political element to be borne in mind in the context of the war of West against Islamic extremism (Hewitt, 2008: 88). It is now incumbent upon us to draw some conclusions pertaining to the views espoused by the author and see which ones has a higher degree of validity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is possible to argue that whilst the threat of terrorism is an important phenomenon to be reckoned with in the grand political chessboard of the twenty-first century, its magnitude might not be as extensive as purported (Halper and Clarke, 2005: 73). The radical forces of terrorism that managed to induce change in the past did so for the sake of fighting for causes which were seen by many in the international spectrum as politically legitimate, as in the case of the PLO and the IRA. Whilst people condemned the methods used by these organisations, they questioned their political motivations less stringently. At the same time, since globalisation has created a convergence of ideas, there is a reduced scope for the type terrorist attacks seen in 9/11 (Held and McGrew, 2002: 119). Lustick rightly postulates that the spectrum of the threat posed by the phenomenon of terrorism has been artificially enhanced in order to serve narrow political and economic interests. Consequently, it may be posited that terrorism does not threaten the foundations of international and national security in the way depicted by James and Brenda Lutz.

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