



# International Terrorism and the Middle East: An Expository Approach

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Abstract: This paper interrogates the role of the Middle East in international terrorism and the spillovers of this on global security. The narrative traces the roots of terrorism to the Middle East, noting the volatility of the issue and susceptibility of some countries within that region to terrorism, zeroing-in on Iran as misconstruing this vice for foreign policy instrument. Essentially, the paper relied on secondary data, statistical tools backed by the analytical approach, leading to the inference that the terrorist network and activities have wider international ramifications and reverberating effects on developing countries, including Nigeria. The adoption of more proactive measures and pragmatic security-building strategies by the United Nations towards a deceleration in international terrorism were canvassed.

Key Words: International Terrorism, Global Security, Middle East

#### Introduction

Terrorism is often linked with the Middle East. This is because the region has proved to be the hotbed and fertile ground for Islamic extremism. Terrorism in the Middle East is a challenge with global implications. The early stages of

terrorism played out as nationalist movements and other worthy causes became a menace not peculiar only to the Middle East where terrorism have gained roots, but has also become a global issue.

Scholars and writers in this field have traced the roots of terrorism to

the Jewish Zealot's movement (66-73 AD) when the group known as the *sicarii*, in their attempt to drive the Romans out of Palestine used unorthodox means of violence like murder, forcing the Jews into a more fierce opposition against occupation and forcing the Romans to leave (Maskaliunaite, 2002;40).

Several other groups had before the millennium, emerged all around the world that carried out terrorist acts; however, there was a close similarity between most of the groups and majority of them were motivated by nationalist goals until they lost the true purpose of their original intent and became tagged as 'terrorists' (Shuhghart, 2005:14).

Some of the groups included:

- Narodnaya Volya, first heard of in 1878, which assassinated Tsar Alexandar II in Russia on March 1, 1881. Their aim was to replace 'propaganda of ideas' by 'propaganda of deed'.
- Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) emerged in 1954, running an anti-colonial terrorist campaign. By 1956, their strategies changed and evolved into acts of terror.
- Irgun in Israel, called the Stern Gang by the British, used the strategy of political assassinations to secure independence.
- Red Army Faction (RAF) in the 1960s engaged in bank robberies and murders as a form of revolution.

- Italian Red Brigade engaged in 14,000 terrorist attacks in 10 years under the guise of political reformations.
- The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1968, which engaged in hijacking of planes and training of groups from Japan, Jordan and Germany.
- Japanese Red Army, though brief in their existence, also engaged in plane hijacks, murders and sabotage.
- In the 1960s, the USA suffered attacks from the Weathermen, Black Panthers and the Symbionese Liberation Army.
- The list goes on to include terrorists such as the Armenian Army for the Secret Liberation of Armenia; Justice Commandoes of the Armenian Genocide (in Turkey); the ETA in Spain; the Irish Republican Army; the Black September and many others (Shuhghart, 2005: 3-36).

In the United States of America particularly, before the September 11 attacks, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) came up with a couple of recorded terrorist incidents:

 March 1999 - the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), an extremist Animal Rights group was responsible for several incidents like the incendiary bombing of vehicles belonging to the Big Apple Circus; two arson attacks in New Jersey

against Fur factories; malicious destruction and theft.

- July 1999 Benjamin Smith, member of the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC) embarked on the killing of religious and racial minorities in Chicago, Shokie, Northbrook, all in Illinois and Bloomington in Indiana
- December 25, 1999 arson was carried out by a group known as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) fighting against the production of Genetically Modified Organisms (FBI, 1999:3-6)

At a point too, the white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was regarded as a terrorist group because of its nefarious and violent acts against the black section of the American society. However, all of these developments did not come close to the activities of the Al-Oaeda group, particularly September 11, 2001 attacks. The activities of the ALF, ELF, KKK and Mr. Smith of WCOTC, could only be referred to as a 'tip of the iceberg'. The 9/11 attacks on the USA, with the masterminds being Mideast Islamist kingpins, marked a turning point in the course of terrorist movement in the world.

This paper therefore seeks to interrogate the nature of terrorism in the Middle East, which has become a global security threat. The paper discusses concepts with the view to clarifying them, identifies the dimensions of international terrorism

and its linkage to the Middle East and makes recommendation.

# **Concept of Terrorism**

Terrorism is an ambiguous concept that has been argued to mean things. However, different arguments of different scholars may help form a basis to describe the concept of terrorism. Following the events of the September 11, 2001 attacks, former President George Bush declared that the "War on Terror" was the number one priority of the United States. This "war" went ahead to eventually change the nature of their domestic, national and international policies. Tt recorded also that President Bush used the terms "terror", "terrorism" and "terrorist" thirty two times without ever defining what it meant (a source would have been useful here)

Best and Nocella (2004:1) however try to define the term as they regarded the word to be abused by all as it was "applied to actions ranging from flying fully loaded passenger planes to rescuing pigs and chickens from factory farms". They posited that, "all terrorism involves violence. but not violence is terrorism" and defined terrorism in the body of the work as "...the institutional use of physical violence directed against innocent persons – human and/or inhuman animals - to advance the religious, ideological, political, or economic purposes of individual. an organization, or state government". Their definition gives this paper a

good start as it helps to establish that the violence is directed at innocent persons, but it might as well also include targeted persons who may not be exactly "innocent" in the sense of the word.

Al-Thagafi (2008:3)defines terrorism as the use of either random violence organized or against innocent people in order to intimidate them for political reasons. This definition can be said to be limited as the definition does not explain the nature of the perpetrators of these violent acts regarded under the concept of terrorism.

United States Department of Defence (in Al-Thagafi, 2008:3) viewes terrorism as "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear: intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological". This definition, though carefully stated by the US Department of Defence, gives cause to wonder if there is any concept in existence considered as lawful violence that can be carried out by civilians in the state.

An interesting definition of terrorism given by the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (in Al-Thagafi 2008:4) goes that terrorism is:

Any act or threat of violence, whatever its motives or purposes, that occurs in the advancement of an individual or collective criminal agenda and seeking to sow panic among people, causing fear by harming them, or placing their lives, liberty or security in danger, or seeking to cause damage to the environment or to public or private installations or property or to occupying or seizing them, or seeking to jeopardize national resources

definition is Theabove *auite* detailed owing to the fact that, it seemingly describes the nature of terrorism that emanates from the Middle East region. The definition adequately captures thenature, intent and mechanisms of terrorism. This clarity is necessary in both conceptualization terrorism and engagement in counter-terrorism.  $\boldsymbol{A}$ definition of a possible problem is important in determining its combat mechanism.

Compared to the foregoing definitions, the US Department of State (in Al-Thagafi, 2008:4) defines as "premeditated, politically perpetrated motivated violence against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience". It is pertinent to note at this point that of all the foregoing definitions; only Best and Nocella (2004) noted that states also, can organize terrorist activities in their definitions.

Shuhghart (2005) elaborates the concept of terrorism to include four distinctive characteristics namely: terrorism is violence for political

effect; it is a planned, calculated and systematic act; the terrorists are not bound by established rules of warfare or codes of conduct and; terrorism is designed to have farreaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target.

Defining terrorism is not an exercise in futility as, even though there may be differences in the definitions posited by scholars, these definitions provide good stands through which reasonable progress can be made to determine pre-emptively what looks like terrorism in times to come (Cooper, 2001:882).

A very dynamic view on the concept of terrorism was advanced by Chomsky (2002) who posits thus: "It's very simple. If they do it, it's terrorism. If we do it, its counterterrorism" Chomsky's view here validates the earlier argument in this work that terrorism is nebulous and can be elusive in an attempt to grasp the concept. Terrorism, like beauty, can also be said to be in the eyes of the beholder as it is commonly said, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

# **Concept of Security**

Baldwin (1997:13) defines security as "low probability damage to acquired values". His conceptualization of security is encompassing as it does not border only on the 'presence and absence of threats', but also on the preservation of acquired values. This definition explains why the concept of

preservation of acquired values is what changes the nature of security threats that range from country to country; and how the various countries react to these threats.

A much clearer definition of security has been given by Buzan (in Stone, 2009:1) to mean "...the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change, which they see as hostile". His definition is more detailed as it breaks down the nature of 'value' as Baldwin put it and emphasized the maintenance of 'functional integrity against forces of change'. This definition is also particularly peculiar as it emphasizes the perception that states reject all forms of terrorism it tampers with their because integrity functional through unacceptable forces of change.

In recent scholarship however, the concept of security has widened in scope and form. According Nwolise (2012:14)security in contemporary usage has expanded horizontally and vertically. posited that horizontally, security has gone beyond the military economic, encompass political, environmental. social and aspects. He stressed that vertically, security has gone beyond the state to emphasise incorporate and individual, social groups, (ethnic, religious, professional), the state, and humanity at large. Thus, there is a dramatic shift in the concept of national security, to human security.

Hubert (2001:3) offers a clear distinction of human security. According to him:

In essence, human security means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats. It is a condition or state being characterized freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, their safety or even their lives... It is an alternative way of seeing the world, taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on the security of territory governments or (Hubert, 2001:3)

In view of this, George and Hilal (2013:51) opines that human security paradigm adds a new dimension to traditional security by focusing on the human being rather than the state. According to them, whereas traditional security is state-centric concerned primarily with and interstate security, the protection of borders and sovereignty, with human "non-military/nonsecurity traditional threats to security have led to the broadening of the reference security to object of individuals, non-state actors and subnational groups". They concluded that this paradigm shift has profound implications for not just inter-state relations in contemporary politics, but much more for regime survival.

# International Terrorism and the Middle East: A Review

The events of the September 11, 2001 magnified the Middle East in global politics because the terrorist attacks were perpetrated by a group that emerged from the region known as the Al-Qaeda. Traditionally,

threats to global peace and security ensued from wars and crises among regional states which thereby engaged the international system. Presently, threats to global security are considered in the context of global terrorism. The aftermath of September 11, 2001 has introduced a approach to dealing with terrorism, since global terrorism is argued to emanate from the Middle East, it is important to examine the correlation between the Middle East Region and the international terrorism issues (Barzegar, 2005:113).

As opposed to Barzegar (2005) who is of the opinion that terrorism stems Middle East, Fahmy from the (2002:28) has a different view on the issue. He averred that even if security is to be redefined to include the general threat of terrorism, post-9/11 does not necessarily reveal a security landscape for the Middle East, in the sense that terrorism threat has been part of the security regional situation for decades (Fahmy, 2002:28). This notion of his seems convincing because Shuhghart (2005) in his work made reference to the rise of Islamic terrorism dating back to the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The revolution was unexpected and led to the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran.

Consequently, Ayatollah Khomeini toppled the Shah leadership which led the Shi'a theocracy into power in Iran. This revolution paved the way for the new wave of terrorism.

Khomeini's regime inspired and assisted Shi'a terrorist groups in Iraq, Saudi, Kuwait and Lebanon, and also the Hezbollah (party of God) came into existence via this regime. This regime did not only begin to spread terrorist groups around aforementioned countries, an even greater issue arose (Shuhghart, 2005:38). "Terrorism had a new 'able and active state sponsor'", a role that Iran played throughout the 1990s (Shuhghart, 2005:38; Pillar, 2001:46).

Another factor that contributed to Islamist terrorism was the Afghan War. According to Shughart (2005: 38-39), the war "provided terrorist related skills and experience to large members of non-Afghan militants"; it launched Osama bin Laden to "terrorist prominence as entrepreneur"; inspired remaining members of the Arab World that participated in that war who suffered humiliation from the Soviet Union: and the fact that the exit of the Soviet Union Afghanistan rich in resources (both money and artillery) available for deployment in support of Islamic terrorism whenever the opportunity came by (Shuhghart, 2005:38-39). This seemingly simple emergence of Islamic terrorism has become one of the major sources of terror to various countries of the world.

Bazergar (2005:114) gives a thorough and detailed explanation of the nature of old and 'new' terrorism as propagated by the Middle East stating their major reasons and aims

that the new terrorism seeks to World achieve around the According to him, terrorism has always existed throughout the world. What is new is that terrorism has acquired an international dimension with its own specific definition, which increases its importance within the global community. Introducing a new nature and definition. September 11 undoubtedly marked a turning point in terrorist activities. Old terrorism had internal or regional dimensions, functioning in specific spatial and time domains, and had less negative the international impact on community. In contrast. terrorism acts beyond national and regional boundaries, has impact and constitutes a direct threat global peace and security. International security, threatened by wars and tensions among nations. is presently endangered unknown, by an complex, and unconventional force. This by no means suggests an easy resolution. In contrast with old terrorism, the new kind of terrorism has no individual, nationalistic, or state-sponsored characteristics. occurs in many countries and is supported by a global network. The hub of new terrorism is the Middle East, its driving force is Sunni radicalism, Islamic and representative is Al-Qaeda. Its main aims are as follows:

1. To destabilise international security;

- 2. To de-legitimise Western culture and values; and thereby,
- 3. To create a new balance of power between the West and the Islamic World.

The above views are quite detailed, informative and almost incontrovertible. A Country Report on Terrorism done by the US Department of State in (2011) states that:

Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, continues undermine international efforts to promote peace and democracy and threatens stability, especially in the Middle East and South Asia. Its use of terrorism as an instrument of policy was exemplified by the involvement of elements of the Iranian regime in the plot to assassinate the Ambassador in Washington, a conspiracy that the international community strongly condemned through a UN General Assembly resolution in November.

The above assertion validates Shuhghart's contention that Iran has played state sponsorship roles from the 1990s till date. It seems logical to infer that Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism from the above quotation, and this underscores the activities of the other terrorist networks and organizations in the Middle East. Bazergar (2005)categorically mentioned the Al-Oaeda in his work

as the "representative hub" of new terrorism in the Middle East. The Country Report on Terrorism validates that assertion and further asserts that:

Despite counterterrorism the successes in disrupting and degrading the capabilities of al-Qaeda and its affiliates. al-Oaeda and violent extremist ideology and rhetoric continued to spread in some parts of the word. For example, while not a formal al-Qaeda affiliate, elements of the group known as Boko Haram launched widespread attacks across Nigeria, including one in August against the United **Nations** headquarters which in Abuia. signalled their ambition capability to attack non-Nigerian targets (US Department of State, 2011:6)

Not only did the statement validate the fact that the Al-Qaeda terrorist group is a major proponent of the tenets of Islamic terrorism, it also established that their activities had gone beyond just the Middle East, but had spread across regions and special with reference to the developing world. It referred to the network system that the Middle East based terrorism runs on. Tables 1-3 and Figure 1 below reinforce the above arguments and present graphic illustration of the nature of terrorism Middle-East the and other flashpoints globe. around the

**Table1: Terrorism Attacks Worldwide (2013)** 

	Total		Total	Total Kidnapped/Taken
Month	Attacks	Total Killed	Wounded	Hostage
January	669	1022	2043	986
February	567	991	1840	118
March	639	1027	1881	145
April	804	1123	2533	148
May	924	1557	3448	172
June	685	1542	2326	313
July	898	1862	3151	176
August	842	1918	3683	126
September	761	2034	3296	199
October	934	1639	2702	199
November	1007	1448	2649	144
December	977	1728	3025	264
Total	9707	17891	32577	2990

Source: US Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism in 2014

**Table 2: Top Ten Terrorist Flashpoints (2013)** 

Country	Total Attacks	Total Killed	Total Wounded	Average Number Killed per Attack	Average Number Wounded per Attack
Iraq	2495	6378	14956	2.56	5.99
Pakistan	1920	2315	4989	1.21	2.6
Afghanistan	1144	3111	3717	2.72	3.25
India	622	405	717	0.65	1.15
Philippines	450	279	413	0.62	0.92
Thailand	332	131	398	0.39	1.2
Nigeria	300	1817	457	6.06	1.52
Yemen	295	291	583	0.99	1.98
Syria	212	1074	1773	5.07	8.36
Somalia	197	408	485	2.07	2.46

Source: US Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism in 2014

Table 3: Top ten perpetrator groups of terrorist attacks in 2013

	Total		Average Number
Perpetrator Group Name	Attacks	Total Killed	Killed per Attack
Taliban	641	2340	3.65
Al-Qa'ida in Iraq/Islamic			
State of Iraq and the Levant	401	1725	4.3
Boko Haram	213	1589	7.46
Maoists (India)/ Communist			
Party of India-Maoist	203	190	0.94
Al-Shabaab	195	512	2.63
Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan			
(TTP)	134	589	4.4
New People's Army (NPA)	118	88	0.75
Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula	84	177	2.11
Revolutionary Armed			
Forces of Colombia (FARC)	77	45	0.58
Bangsamoro Islamic			
Freedom Movement (BIFM)	34	23	0.68

Source: US Department of State, Country Report on Terrorism 2014

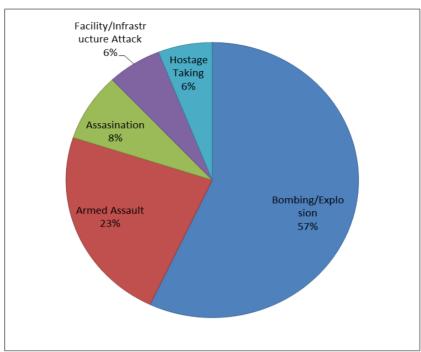


Figure 1: Tactics used in Terrorist Attacks Worldwide (2013)

Source: US Department of State, Country Report on Terrorism 2014

In Tables 1-3 and Figure 1 above, it can be deduced that over 20,000 people are casualties of terrorist attacks worldwide and these attacks (though they) occur in several countries of the world, but the target locations are the Middle East and Africa. The terrorist groups mentioned in Table 3 secure their bearing and support from the Middle East region where the new wave of terrorism seems to have originated from. They engage several modes of attack as shown in Figure 1 namely: bomb explosions, armed attacks, assassination, facility/infrastructure attack and hostage taking. These activities carried out by the terrorists have had effects not only on the

victims (mostly innocent civilians), but also on the governments of target countries.

The countries mentioned in Table 2 can be categorised as developing countries. This is one of the major reasons why the countries remain susceptible to terrorist attack. Apart from the Middle East countries involved, the other countries are disadvantaged due to challenges ranging from conflicts: weak governance; collapsed state institutions; porous borders (thus allowing the free movement of illegal and uncontrolled arms movement of people); extremism based on religious ideology; and the

radicalisation of vulnerable groups by more equipped ones. Coupled with poor socio-economic conditions in these countries, it creates a platform for fertile growth of terrorism (Kimunguyi, 2011:2-3).

terrorism year, advances, particularly in the African region. If left untamed, there is the possibility that it may transform into a fertile avenue for launching breeding larger-scale terrorist attacks around the world (Alexander, 2014:3). Nigeria, for example is the most affected African country in terms of terrorist attacks in 2013. The country is constantly terrorized by the Boko insurgents Haram (meaning "Western Education is a Sacrilege" in the local Hausa language). These attacks are significant not only because of the amount of damage done, but also due to the realization that the country is the continent's most populous. This group seeks to impose its version of strict Islamic law in the country through constant terrorist attacks. They have been involved in attacks in Mali also and noted to gain support and cooperation from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb, Hizballah and Al-Shabaab (Alexander 2014:3). They through kidnappings, operate killings, bombings and attacks on civilian and military targets in the Northern parts of Nigeria, resulting in numerous deaths. iniuries and destroyed properties. They also escape to neighbouring countries such as Cameroon. Chad and Niger to evade pressure,

establish hide-outs and engage smooth conduct of operations (US Department of State 2014:10).

The spread of terror is not only evident within the African continent. also beyond the African continent. The activities of Al-Oaeda in the Arabian Peninsula were visible in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere in Asia and the Pacific. These attacks all over the world are orchestrated mostly with the support of affiliate terrorist groups and similar motivebased terrorist groups (Alexander, 2014:4). However, it is important to identify the role that some countries play in the perpetration of terrorist attacks around the world.

Some countries have been designated sponsors of terrorism as state because they repeatedly provide support for acts of international terrorism. Such countries include: Cuba (designated as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1982); (designated as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1984): (designated as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1993); and Syria (designated as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1979). These states encourage the spread of international terrorism through funding of terrorist related acts, equipping terrorist groups with needed arms and proper training of the members of the perpetrator groups (US Department of State, 2014:228-232). Where states have not been designated as terrorist or sponsors of terrorist acts, groups certain within certain

sovereign states have been designated as terrorist groups and bounties have been put on their leaders because of the persistent violent acts calculated at collateral damage to the internal politics and external community, as well as their links to known international terror groups. Examples include Boko Haram menacing around Northeast Nigeria and Northern Cameroon and Al Shabab, perating in Somalia, Kenya and Uganda.

Among the countries involved in state sponsorship of terrorism, Iran's involvement can be seen as most significant. Iran uses terrorism as a tool of foreign policy however; this is not a recent phenomenon as it dates back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution Iran's support terrorism is with the aim furthering her national interest. It also stemmed from the clerical perception "that it has a religious duty to export its Islamic revolution and to wage, by whatever means, a struggle constant against perceived oppressor states" (Levitt, 2013:4).

The disturbing fact about Iran's support for international terrorism is not only because Iran voices support for terrorist groups, but because of the influence Iran wields in the Middle East politics, thus projecting power into Arab countries and disrupting the Middle East peace process. Iran's support for terrorism is unique because little has been done to hide it. Other countries that support international terrorism by

using proxy terrorist groups deny association with the groups like the case of Pakistan and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). This is unlike Iran which shows open support for organizations like Hezbollah, Hamas and Al-Qaeda. This is a threat to global peace, and the implication is that Iran endorses the use of violence on civilians as a proper way of achieving political goals (Manni, 2012:34-35).

#### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The data which formed the pivot of this paper, and the analysis that followed gave vent to the conclusion that the source of new terrorism is traceable to the Middle East and the effects and casualties extend beyond this region with wider ramifications and consequences on global peace. The reverberating and panoramic contort of these on developing countries deserve special attention due to their technological level and mobilization for resource surveillance and security management endeavours. However, developed countries can over time build enough security apparatus to deal with this challenge and continue with this "war on terrorism" announced by the former President, George W. Bush.

The developing countries face issues that make them vulnerable such as: proximity; political and economic instability; poverty; porous borders; civil conflicts emanating from ethnic, racial and religious alignments and ideologies; human rights infringements and; insecurity

on a large scale. Such issues make them a target for terrorist groups seeking places to establish their presence. The terrorist groups that also emerge from countries indigenously form alliances with terrorist networks for financing, support and supply of weapons used in terrorizing the populace.

The phenomenon of terrorism is one that can be reduced, but not totally eradicated. The means through which countries can curb the spread of terrorism are: intelligence gathering; political and economic stability; improved security measures; citizen reorientation with

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emphasis on curtailing all forms of religious bigotry, zealotry, fundamentalism/extremism, and collective security systems in combating terrorism.

There is need also for the international system to consider ways in which state sponsors of terrorism can be adequately dealt with on a sustainable basis. The United Nations can serve as a veritable tool in combating international terrorism through more proactive measures and pragmatic confidence-building strategies.

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