



## **Terrorism in Retrospect: From Zealots to 21st Century**

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**Abstract:** The history of terrorism is as old as the human being. In fact, it comes from an ancient practice as “a new mode of fight”. Terrorism is an ancient development not modern one but terrorizing of individuals by their fellow individuals on ethnic or political bases goes more back. In ancient times terrorism was adopted in tribal riots. Mostly it was used and is still used as an “arm of the poor”. History records the first appearance of planned terrorist act in the Middle East in first century. The Zealots initiated an organized fight against the royal authority. The Zealot faction was first and initial group to use systematic terror in written record history. Since that time terrorism continued its travel till 9/11 when Pentagon and World Trade Centre of US were targeted by terrorists which gave birth to the Global War on Terror. The main objective of this paper is to explore the history of terrorism from the first century till the 21st century in detail.

Keywords: Terrorism, Terrorists, Zealots, Al-Qaeda, War on Terror.

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### **1. Introduction**

At present the gravest issue facing the world is terrorism. The word “terrorism” was coined during the French revolution's reign of terror (1793–1794) [1]. As concerned the definition of terrorism there is no international agreement on the definition of terrorism. Different scholars have defined it in different words. It is characterized as “an unconventional use of violence and strategy of utilizing organized attacks that fall outside the laws of war for political gains”. The United States Department of Defense defines 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” while the U.S Department of States defines terrorism as a “planned, politically motivated violence against non-combatants by sub-national groups or underground state agents”. Walter Laqueur says, “Terrorism is the use or the threat of the use of violence, a strategy of war, or an approach to achieve certain targets. It intends to spread fear in the victim, that is ruthless and does not follow humanitarian rules and regulations” [2]. Yonah Alexander describes terrorism as “The use of violence against

random civilian targets in order to intimidate or to create generalized pervasive fear for the purpose of achieving political goals” [3]. The Arab League Convention for the containment of Terrorism defined it as “Any act or threat of violence, whatever its aims, that happens in the development of an individual or collective criminal agenda and trying to spread fear among individuals, creating fear by hurting them, or making their lives, freedom or security in risk and threat, or looking to bring about damage to the earth or to public or private institutions or property or occupying or seizing them, or looking to risk a national resources” (Arab League, 1998). In 2005 United Nation General Assembly's declaration defined terrorism as “Criminal acts intended to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them” [4]. There is no international uniformity among scholars and international organizations on the definition of terrorism.

Terrorism is not a new strategy, it has been used by men since ancient times. The history record of terrorism and act of terrorism is as old as the human civilization. In fact, it comes from an ancient practice as “a new mode of fight” [5]. It is clear that political violence and terrorism is an ancient development not modern one but terrorizing of individuals by their fellow individuals on ethnic or political bases goes more back. It was used as an “arm of the poor”. In ancient times terrorism was adopted in tribal riots. Nowadays it is common for opponents in a brutal clash. The most important feature of terrorism, distinguishing it from other criminal acts or conduct during armed conflict, is the motivation of terrorists by which terrorists measure their conduct. Throughout the history weak parties faced aggression by the stronger is also a type of terrorism. “The violence witnessed throughout the human history was given new name “terrorism” after French Revolution in 1779” [6]. The history of terrorism and violence go back to the first century when Sicarii (in Roman language mean dangerous men) Zealots shoot those partners who cooperated or supported Roman rule in the province of Judea. It was the 1st terrorist attack in the written history” (History of Terrorism). It is not a trend of modern age and at present it is associated by West with Muslim world, but it is not absolutely associated with Muslim world. It is recorded since 1st century and surely practiced before it.

### **1.1 The Zealots (First Century)**

History records the first appearance of planned terrorist act in the Middle East in first century. The Zealots initiated an organized fight against the royal authority. The Zealot faction was first and initial group to use systematic terror in written record. They continued an underground movement of killing of occupied Romans military personals, as well as any Jews cooperating with other Romans. The Zealots were among the four philosophical factions of Judea and largely popular among the youth. Comparatively, with other Jewish spiritual associations of that time, the Zealots were reformist; thought that they alone were responsible to Allah for freedom. They assassinated a lot of people including prominent figures. They also attacked the places and buildings utilized to store records, such as loan record documents, aimed to gain the company and loyalty of workers squeezed by debit [7]. Their intention was an inflexible faith that they could not stay faithful to Judaism while surviving under Roman rule. It was basically political and spiritual fight.

### **1.2 Assassins (11th - 12th Century)**

Likewise, the Assassins were the Shiite faction who are also identified as Nizari Ismailis. Mostly they were living in Syria and Persia (Iran) from the eleventh century till the downfall of their regime by Mongols in the thirteen centuries. Their famous leader was Hassan Sabbah. It was an organization established to confront the Saljuqs. The activists of the group acted upon the instruction of their leader either individually or in small groups to assassinate selected persons. They chose the use of terror and violence to psychological ends and attacked, among others, Christian authority, the Crusaders [7]. They assaulted their targets often in the public places aiming to spread terror [8].

### **1.3 Mongols**

The Mongols under the leadership of Genghis Khan (1162-1227) and Halaku Khan exercised organized violence and terror against general masses. In attacks on cities human heads were piled in big pyramid to terrorize them. Such tactics were used by them aimed to terrorize the opponents and create fear in their minds not to challenge the authority of Mongols next time and also spread fear among next targets. The organized use of terrorism against common people, their assets and cities were fundamental aspect of their war strategy. Only Tamer Lenk had built some fifty pyramids of human heads, each contained of thousands of human heads [7]. According to the above mention definitions of terrorism such actions against non-combatants are terrorism.

#### **1.4 French Revolution**

In the history of terrorism, the French Revolution (1789–1799) labels a new indication. It produced and gave birth to the word “terror” and “terrorism”. After revolution, the words “terrorism” and “terrorist” came into common practice. It was “state terrorism”, involved in large scale violence. During French Revolution before the use of guillotine for the first time, illegal killing as assassination of prominent officials and other aristocrats in horrific way were common. Anti-revolutionary and radicals entered “era of terror” in late 1793-1794 during which more than 15,000 people were put to death at the guillotine (The French Revolution 1789-1799). The rule of terror got its highest position when the government started executing its tactics aimed to terrorize revolutionary as enemy of state. Thus, terror become part of the revolution, initiated to eradicate the aristocracy. It had been turned out to be an instrument for crushing revolutionary force. Out of the population of 28 million, the era of terror killed 300,000 victims [7]. Later on, General Napoleon Bonaparte came back to Paris from successful missions in Egypt and Italy and led the revolution in 1799, ultimately the revolution culminated, and the country went into a 15 years era of military government.

#### **1.5 Terrorism in Modern Time**

Terrorism occurrence in modern time has many waves. David C. Rapoport has summarized four main waves of global terrorism in modern time. The first “Anarchist” wave of terrorism started in Russia in the 1880s and continued up to the 1920s, the second wave “Anti- colonial” started in the 1920s and continued up to the 1960s, the third wave “New left” started in the 1960s and prolonged up to the 1980s, and the fourth wave “religious” appeared in 1979 and exists until contemporary era [9].

The “Anarchism” is a political theory that supports the eradication of governmental machinery. The activities of the supporters of this movement assumed the shape of terrorism. Their main objective was to defeat those who were advocating and preserving governments. In order to gain their goal, Anarchists targeted different key officials and representatives and even head of states [7]. The “anti-colonial” wave of terrorism started by signing “Treaty of Versailles” to stop the World War First. It gave birth to new types of terrorist organizations and associations such as the Irish Republican Army and Jewish associations that worked against British military in the Palestine and other parts of the world. The anti-Colonial wave of terrorism was continued mostly in regions where particular political crisis was created by the colonial authorities. Moreover, in the “anti-colonial” wave of terrorism it turned as a common tradition to describe “freedom fighters” as terrorists who were fighting against colonial authorities.

The emergence of “New left’ terrorism was caused by the Vietnam conflict, which provided evidence that modern countries were vulnerable to reasonably unsophisticated arms and approaches. A lot of youth turned severely unhappy with the present system and world structure, which led to the rise of organizations like the Italian Red Brigades, Red Army Faction in the West Germany and French Action Direct. “The “new left” wave of terrorism acted some 700 hijackings, 409 global kidnapping events, 951 hostages from 1968 to 1982. High ranked officers were also assassinated including the Spanish and Jordan prime ministers and the ex-prime minister of Italy Aldo Moro and many others key figures” [10]. The religious wave of terrorism was started in 1979 when two events took place: the revolution of Iran which gave birth to Shia-Sunni conflicts and Soviet Union attack over Afghanistan. This wave also proved to be very deadly and caused a huge lost of human lives in many parts of the world. This type of terrorism is continued and there is no hope to end in near future.

### **1.6 Cold War Developments**

In the Cold War era bipolar world order changed the concept of wars, conflicts and clashes all over the world. Relatively small disagreements assume importance as showground where the superpowers could fight without jeopardizing the escalation to full fledged nuclear war. Deadly proxy wars were also fought in this era. In the immediate post war era, terrorist acts were strategic option of nationalist revolutionary leaders. All over the world successful independence movements from colonial authority took place, and several used terrorisms as a supporting approach. During this era terrorism was exercised within the framework of the campaigns and organized being military proceedings. During the Cold War era, terrorism was used in struggle for political and defense objectives. The strategy of the then USSR to back revolutionary movements throughout the world, and to spread communism and revolution to capitalist and non-communist states, gave extremists spirits to use aggression and terrorism as the means to recognize their objectives [7].

### **1.7 World War First and Second**

The world war first and second took the breath of million innocent and non-combatant people throughout the world which according to the above mention definitions were terrorism. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austrian Hungarian Empire in 1914 by the Serb nationalists was the trigger for World War First. The central powers Germany, Turkey and the Austrian Hungarian Empire etc. were on one side and on the other side were the Allied Power composed of United Kingdom, France and Russia etc. In this war air invasion, biological weapons and poisonous gases were frequently used, introduced the state terrorism. The Great Britain used chemical weapons against the Kurds in Iraq. In international conflict these techniques involving air attacks, the use of chemical weapons and explosive devices were used on larger level against non-combatant and civilian. It was the beginning of state terrorism. In World War First approximately 20 million people lost their lives [11].

Same was the case of Second World War. The Second World War was started in Europe with German attacks on Poland on September 1, 1939. Due to this aggression of Germany, France and United Kingdom proclaimed war against Germany on September 3, 1939. In this war again millions of people lost their lives. In human history this was the worst war. It was another instance of state terrorism. World witnessed World War First and Second in 20th Century as the worst cases of organized killing of non-combatants civilians to get the objective of superpower. Furthermore, the use of atomic bomb against Japan in 1945 caused huge human damage, shocking the heart and conscious of the humanity.

### **1.8 Al-Qaeda**

A new development occurred in phenomena of terrorism when Al-Qaeda emerged. Al-Qaeda, a global terrorist organization, is deemed to be the top terrorist threat to world. Al-Qaeda means "the Base" in Arabic language is a global organization established by Osama Bin Laden in the late 1980s. Al Qaeda resisted US forces presence in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim states. Fundamental objective of Al- Qaeda is to get Muslim states rid of American and Western control and hegemony and change their governments into Islamic government system. Osama Bin Laden issued second fatwa (an order on an issue of Islamic law, offered by a recognized person) in February 1998, calling on all Muslims to "murder Americans personnel both military and civilians and grab their wealth everywhere in world". Al- Qaeda has presence in 76 states of the world [12]. Al-Qaeda's objective is to disperse terror widely utilizing limited resources. Its activists target US and other western citizens, interests and assets throughout the world. It also targets those Muslim and Muslim states who are the allies of the US and the West. Its activists chose targets to be surprise for their rival. Since 1993, Al-Qaeda has claimed responsibility of many attacks that had been launched against the interests of the US and other western countries. Al-Qaeda is engaged in psychological war since its creation against its enemies. Its objectives are to establish true Islam regime in Muslim Countries, overthrow US backing regimes in the Muslim countries and fight is primary enemy i.e., US, which spread violence in disguise of jihad and gave birth to clash of civilizations between Muslim and non-Muslim world also.

### **1.9 Episode of Terrorism in 21 Century**

The biggest attack of global terrorism took place on September 11, 2001 in a series of organized attacks on the soil of America. On September 11, 2001 terrorists hijacked airlines and exploited them to launch attacks on Pentagon in Washington D.C. and the World Trade Centre towers in New York. These attacks altered the whole phenomenon of international terrorism. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks within a week United States of America responded to these attacks by launching “War on Terror” and Afghanistan was focal point because top Al-Qaeda leaders and militants used it as base camp as it was its safe haven. But the air strikes and military operations of the US led coalition in Afghanistan is yet another act of violence against the civilians because a huge number of civilians lost their lives in this war on terror. Every innocent human being that lost his/her life should be included to the list of innocent people who were killed in 9/11 attacks in Washington and New York. The US and her allies are pursuing the War against Terror without dealing with its core and root causes like poverty, social injustice, hunger, illegitimate suppression of minorities and exploitation of weaker nations by big powers etc.

In the end of 20th Century, the acts of terrorism and violence continued to happen in the world more notably after the end of cold war. It has put the world politics in the new track. In recent years world has seen the horrific warfare in Middle East, Persian Gulf and Africa in which brutality, cruelty and violence were used to terrify the opponents. Other most important terrorist assaults that took place were London subway bombings, Israelis bombing on innocent Palestine’s peoples, killing in Somalia, Africa, Congo, Iraq and most recent terrorist episode in Syria etc., suicide attacks in Mosques in Pakistan, assassination of Pakistan’s ex-Prime Minister and Pakistan People Party’s leader, Benazir Bhutto and Awami National Party’s leader and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s senior minister, Bashir Ahmad Balor?, attack on Army Public School, Peshawar on December 16, 2014 in which more than 132 children including 10 staff members were killed and car bombings and suicide attacks in major cities of Pakistan in which thousands of innocents people lost their lives, are the worst and most recent terrible examples of the terrorism in the world. Even today in various states of the world the proxy guerrilla attacks and kill guiltless and non-combatants civilians. In short, it can be firmly said that terrorism has been present throughout history but since 20th century it has assumed a new dimension which alters the whole phenomena.

## 2. Conclusion

The history of terrorism is as ancient as the human civilization. History records the first appearance of planned terrorist act in the Middle East in the first century that was done by Zealots. The Zealots initiated an organized fight against the royal authority. It was first and initial group to use systematic terror in written record. After that it was followed by Assassins of 11th and 12th Century. The modern history of terrorism was started in 1880s. It has four main waves of global terrorism in modern time. The first “Anarchist” wave of terrorism started in Russia in the 1880s and continued up to the 1920s, the second “Anti-colonial” wave started in the 1920s and continued up to the 1960s, the third “New left” wave started in the 1960s and prolonged up to the 1980s, and the fourth “religious” wave appeared in 1979 and exists until contemporary era.

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