

# New Terrorism: What Can the History of Terrorism Contribute?

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## Abstrak

*Pertanyaan mengenai apakah terorisme pada tiga dekade terakhir telah mengalami transformasi yang signifikan, merupakan salah satu isu yang memicu perdebatan dalam studi kekerasan politik dewasa ini. Di satu sisi, beberapa ahli yang mendukung adanya pendapat tentang terorisme baru mengatakan bahwa terorisme saat ini lebih berbasis agama, jauh lebih mematikan, mengalami perubahan besar dalam hal struktur organisasi, dan tidak lagi bergantung pada dukungan negara. Di sisi lain, beberapa ahli menolak ide tentang terorisme baru dan berpendapat bahwa yang ada selama ini hanyalah kontinuitas dalam aksi-aksi terorisme. Tulisan ini bertujuan mengklarifikasi perdebatan tentang 'terorisme baru' dengan melihat sejarah terorisme. Melalui sebuah investigasi historis, tulisan ini menemukan bahwa konsep terorisme baru secara tepat dapat menggambarkan karakter terorisme di masa ini. Namun demikian, dengan menelusuri beberapa peristiwa-peristiwa terorisme, tulisan ini juga menemukan bahwa karakter-karakter tersebut tidaklah sepenuhnya baru. Banyak dari ciri-ciri yang diklaim sebagai baru tersebut, ternyata memiliki banyak kesamaan dengan karakter terorisme di masa lalu.*

*Kata kunci: terorisme, terorisme baru, motif, negara, struktur organisasi.*

## Abstract

Whether or not the realm of terrorism has significantly transformed in the past three decades is one of major debates in the field of political violence today. Proponents of new terrorism argue that current terrorists are more religious inspired and lethal, depend less on state's support and have changed their nature in term of organizational structure. On the other hand, some refuse the idea of new terrorism and, instead, argue that there is only continuity regarding terrorist acts. This paper attempts to clarify the debates through a historical investigation within the history of terrorism and it reveals that characteristics brought by the concept of new terrorism are valid to describe the current status of terrorism. However, by looking at some evidences in terrorism history, this paper also found out that those features are less unique to terrorism operatives nowadays due to the fact that perpetrators' activities in the past have similar attributes.

Keywords: terrorism, new terrorism, motive, state, organizational structure.

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## INTRODUCTION

The changing realm of terrorism has been considered by terrorism analysts, politicians, as well as security experts since the 1990s. Some prominent experts worth citing include Walter Laqueur, Bruce Hoffman, John Morgan, and Ian Lesser. In his famous book *The New Terrorism*, Walter Laqueur (1999) argued clearly that "there has been a radical transformation, if not revolution, in the character of terrorism." Hoffman (1998) explained further by providing a clue that new terrorism "represents a very different and potentially greater lethal threat than the more famil-

iar 'traditional terrorist groups.'" In general, this idea reflects one particular conclusion that the pattern of terrorism in the 21st century has evolved. It bears new characteristics. These can be seen in the motivation, tactics, as well as capability of those involved including their technological knowledge and organizational structure.

However, the presence of this claim is without problem. After examining the claims of new terrorism, Isabelle Duyvesteyn (2004) for instance, concluded that it is "more continuity than change can be argued to exist." Magnus

Ranstop (2007) noted that whether or not recent terrorism, is dramatically new or it is just the evolution of past terrorism is one of major debates in terrorism research today. This paper aims to analyze the proposition of new terrorism. It attempts to clarify the debate by looking at the history of terrorism. In particular, it will use some events in the history of terrorism to test the validity of new terrorism. To do so, the paper will be divided into four parts. First, it will briefly explore what are understood as terrorism and 'new terrorism'. Secondly, it will elaborate some historical events that are commonly used behind the argument of new terrorism. Thirdly, it will check the validity of what is claimed to be new terrorism by looking at some historical events in the previous era. The fourth section will be the summary as well as the tentative conclusion.

## ANALYSES

### TERRORISM AND NEW TERRORISM

It has been acknowledged that efforts to define what is known as terrorism will just find nothing but confusion. Nonetheless, this is an important stage to build platform for the word of terrorism to be clear and understandable, particularly in its characteristics. At least there are 212 definitions of terrorism offered which was in use worldwide, ninety of them used by governments and the other by institutions (Simon, 1994: 29). Even though it seems too many, terrorism generally has some characteristics. First, terrorism is rational acts that employ violence or the threat of violence. It intends to achieve particular political purpose and secular motivation. This for instance, can be looked at Paul Wilkinson's definition (2002: 12) as he asserted "terrorism is systematic use of coercive intimidation, usually to service political ends." For the last century, terrorism acts commonly have been motivated by Marxism, separatism, ethno nationalism, and limitedly religion (Rapoport, 2003).

Moreover, as it is rational act, terrorists are still proportional in terms of their actions. Jenkins (1987) noted that "terrorist blow up things, kill people, or seize hostages. Every terrorist incident is merely a variation on these three activities." However, many of their actions usually use handfull tactics. Terrorist groups rarely use violence that inflicts large number of casualties since it can delegitimize their

effort, limiting their ability to get funding or supporters. They usually attack symbolic target including buildings, persons or vehicles such as train or airplane. What they want for their action is attention from the public in relation to their message as well as increased support for them. Walter Laqueur (2003) asserted that "it was, more often than not, 'propaganda by deed'." It is not so different compared to the conclusion of Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, and Sivan Hirsch-Hoeffler (2004) after they examined seventy-three definitions of terrorism. They assert that "terrorism is a politically motivated tactic involving the threat or use of force or violence in which the pursuit of publicity plays a significant role."

Even if they request something in return, in many cases it is likely to be negotiable. Terrorist groups frequently demand some barter for their action such as releasing their comrade, ransom for the release of hostage, or even a territory in case of ethno nationalist terrorism for instance. But still their demand is stated clearly to the public, and even sometimes it is difficult to be fulfilled, it still has possibility for the process of negotiation. In general, terrorism is a tactic that is "targeted and proportionate in scope and intensity to the practical political objective being pursued" (Simon & Benjamin, 2000: 65).

Second, nation-states were perceived widely as primary actors behind acts of terrorism. It was part of the applied strategy in the rivalry between superpowers during the cold war (Enders & Sandler, 1999). Both, either the US or the USSR, used terrorism because it constituted less danger than war but effective to cause damage and problem to the other.

Third, terrorist groups have their structure of command relatively clear. They may have small members consist of 20-30 persons to hundreds of people (Hofmann, 1998). Though it is difficult to make a generalization how the command and control structure in many terrorist groups, Zawodny (1981) argued that it seems many contemporary terrorist groups have centrifugal structure. It is where a leader at the centre and the rest will be around like a solar system.

New terrorism occurs, however, with some distinctions that make some of characteristic above outmoded. Ian Lesser (1999) believes that this new wave of terrorism "ren-

ders much previous analysis of terrorism based on established groups obsolete." First, regarding its aim, terrorist groups are no longer taking secular ideology for their motivation and inspiration but religion. Hoffman (1998) noted that it is the main characteristics of contemporary terrorism and they have "radically different values system, mechanism of legitimatization and justification, concepts of morality, and world view...."

The shifting of motivation as well as value system then affects the nature of proportionality in their action. What constrained in secular terrorist actions would be largely difficult to be applied in religious terrorist. While in secular terrorism indiscriminate violence is unacceptable, it will be different to religious terrorism. Cronin (2003) pointed out that since their struggle is full with abstract values, such as good against bad or God against devil, they tend to dehumanize any person outside of their group and perceive them as infidels. The result is that they may see indiscriminate violence toward those infidels is morally justifiable and necessary for the purpose of their struggle. As it has been recognized, "for the religious terrorist, violence is divine duty...executed in direct response to some theological demand...and justified by scripture" (Hofmann, 1988).

With intention to do destruction with massive casualties, there is consideration that another feature of new terrorism is terrorist groups will have the possibility to use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in their acts. In the past, as Laqueur (1996) explained, the using of WMD in terrorism was in doubt because terrorists had less technical knowledge as well as expertise, it will increase public anger instead of bringing benefits for their political aim and it is not the nature of terrorism to cause large casualties. However, today's terrorists are different and all of those conclusions are no longer valid to be attributed to them. Hofmann (1998) stressed that many of the constraints (both self-imposed and technical) which previously inhibited terrorists' use of WMD are eroding.

Terrorist potentiality to cause a large number of casualties by using WMD then brings into question the factor of politics in the character of terrorism. If politics can be understood as the rational action to control each other behavior in order to find equilibrium for their conflicting

interests (Lipson, 1984), there will be no clear political objective for contemporary terrorism since they are likely to be reluctant to talk on what they want to achieve and insist in eliminating what they see as the enemy. To do bargaining will be impossible as well as negotiating. Indeed, Mathew J. Morgan (2004) wrote, that it seems, "today's terrorist don't want a seat at the table, they want to destroy the table and everyone sitting at it." As a result, it is rare for new terrorists to claim their attacks or to publish messages getting attention from the public regarding their demand. Reflecting those characters above, Walter Laqueur (1999) argued briefly that "the new terrorism is different in character, aiming not at clearly defined political demands but at the destruction of society and the elimination of large sections of the population."

Secondly, new terrorists are becoming less dependent on state assistance, especially for reasons of financing and protection (Tucker, 2001). Unlike their predecessor, they do not receive training or logistical help from a state. Their innovation on tactics and capabilities are relied heavily on their network followers who can provide their own logistical need as well as develop their ability by learning from internet or other publications. In case of financial support, new terrorist groups commonly get their financial sources ranging from illegal activities such drug trafficking, internet, and credit card fraud, as well as donation from legal businessmen or wealthy sympathizers (Raphaeli, 2003).

Finally, new terrorism exhibits the shifting of organizational system as they change and develop the system to be more like business enterprise. New terrorists today have no strict organization as well as structure and operates in large cases by using the system of network. In the literature, a particular organization may be perceived as having network system if its members can run their task without having central authority or 'commander' rather than 'network core,' which the latter has only the responsibility limited to "initiate criminal activities, arbitrate dispute and provide direction" (William, 2001: 72).

Improvement on technological capabilities is likely to be the main factor behind this shifting trend in terrorism toward more 'leaderless resistance'. With such revolution, terrorists can share their experience, discuss various tac-

tics among them and coordinate their action even a single person who gives instruction. "Organs of information distribution such as newsletters, leaflets, computer etc., which are widely available to all, keep each person informed of events allowing for a planned response that will take on many variations. No one need issue an order to anyone" said American Far Right Leader, Louis Beam, in his explanation about the concept of 'leaderless resistance' applied (Beam, 1992). As a result, many amateur terrorist come out today and it causes the increased willingness to inflict large number casualties (Tucker, 2001).

#### NEW TERRORISM: SOME EVIDENCES

Though it is difficult to pinpoint what the cases would be taken to inaugurate the new perspective on terrorism trend, it seems that some experts have begun to believe that terrorism now has entered a new phase after the events of "the 1993 World Trade Center bombings in New York, and related conspiracies; the 1996 Oklahoma city bombing; the 1998 East Africa bombings; and the Tokyo sarin gas attack in 1995" (Simon & Benjamin, 2000). Al-Qaeda attack in September 2001 is the important one which then justifies the term, new terrorism. In general, it should be noted that by the late 1990s, all of the new terrorism characters were becoming obvious.

It has been considered that since the collapse of the cold war, terrorist groups based on religious motivation have risen. In many parts of the world, terrorists with secular ideological-based has decreased since 1980 while religion-based terrorism is on the increase (Gurr & Cole, 2000). From only two out of sixty-four terrorist religious based at the international level in 1980, it rose to twenty-five in 1995. Hoffman (1995) also looked further by showing that while in the decades of 1960s there was no single terrorist group which could be said to be motivated by religion, the number rose to more than thirty per cent in 1990s.

It is widely admitted that the most dangerous threats are coming from Islamist terrorist, but religion-driven terrorist groups are present in other religions as well. As Mark Juergensmeyer (2000) explained in his book, *Terror in the Mind of God*, there are similar values in Islamic terrorists with those in radical Christian and other religious funda-

mentalists. They identify themselves as the guardian of their sacred values and their struggle is part of defending their dignity. As a result, it is the effort without end and the word of lost will have no meaning. Osama bin Laden's fatwa (1998) provides an example of this tendency when he noted that it is the responsibility of muslim to fight and to kill infidels wherever they are without giving clear limitation of time (as cited in Morgan, 2004).

There are, indeed, some terrorist attacks across the regions around the world from other religious terrorist groups in the last decade. Sikh communities have produced terrorists in order to create a religious state in Punjab (Zissis, 2008). Meanwhile, Aum Shinrikyo blew up nerve gas in Tokyo subway in 1995 which 12 people were killed and 5000-6000 injured (Metraux, 1995). Few years before, Lord Liberation Army (LRA) in Uganda abducted 25,000 children since 1987 (Moller, 2006).

Christian fundamentalists have been suspected as well to offer threat of terrorism. Not like its predecessor which doing confrontation against government when state intervene with political agenda, recent Christian terrorism has willingness to do violence against government and doing terror for a particular group in the society. Timothy McVeigh detonated a bomb in Oklahoma and claimed it is part of his destiny as a patriot and Christian (Duham, 1996). The Aryan Nations group in Idaho was also widely reported of having aggressive action against the government and conducting violence toward Jewish and colored people (Kaplan, 2000). According to Jurgensmeyer (2004), some similar evidences of the presence of Christian fundamentalists are found in the UK and Ireland as well.

At the same time, as US Department of State's Pattern of Global Terrorism in 2002 revealed, the lethality of international terrorism increased dramatically since the end 1980s. The number of deaths and injured caused by terrorist acts rose from 344 in 1991 to 6693 in 1998 (as cited in Cronin, 2002). This figure worsened in 2009 as recorded from 14,971 deaths around the world because of terrorist attacks, 10,332 of them were brought by religious based terrorists (NCC Report, 2009). It included those attacks by al-Qaeda in Iraq, Sunni extremist in Somalia which killed 88 people and wounded 245 as well as Caucasus Emirate in Russia that 29 people killed in IED's incident.

All of them then validate the conclusion that today's new terrorism is more religious based and lethal.

Although they are more dangerous and lethal, evidences also show many of these terrorists have no direct relationships with a particular state to get financial backup as well as logistical support. The Tamil Elam for example, has been proven that they relied on wealthy sympathizer (Joshi, 1996) as well as legal business in global market (Fair, 2005). Similarly with al-Qaeda who is gathering its financial sources through Islamic charities as well as global legal and illegal business such as financial investment in banking system, diamond trading and arms smuggling in Africa (Basile, 2004).

Bombing in the US embassy in Kenya and Tanzania, moreover, revealed the trend that terrorists now operate in less structured and cohesive membership (Hofmann, 1999). In Asia Pacific, terrorist groups such as Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and al-Jamaah al-Islamiyah used their diaspora or network to penetrate deeply and launch terrorist attacks simultaneously in various areas (Gunaratna, 2002).

#### HEALTHY CHECKS: NEW TERRORISM

Some experts argued that the concept of new terrorism has no strong validity as some of its characters could be found in the history of its predecessor. This following discussion will analyse the preposition of new terrorism with regard to the aspects of goals, methods as well as organizational structures.

First, the supporters of new terrorism agreed that today's terrorism is motivated by religious values and goals rather than secular ideology. Hofmann (1998) asserted that "the religious imperative for terrorism is the most important characteristic of terrorist activity today." However, the phenomenon of religious based terrorist groups is not new in the history of terrorism. David Rapoport (1984) analysed that religious terrorism has existed for many centuries, ranging from the first century zealot to the 13th assassins up to 19th century.

If the analyses are going further, there is a problem regarding the effort to differentiate religious terrorism with the secular one in modern era. As Peter Neuman (2009) noted, it is mistaken "the attempt to separate 'religious'

from 'political' terrorism as if the two categories were mutually exclusive." In fact, religious words are functioned just as rhetoric to justify the using of violence for their political agenda. They who are claimed to be religious terrorists by new terrorism supporters have perceived themselves as political actors, using terrorism to achieve their political objectives. Hezbollah for instance, has two functions as a political party as well as resistance organization.

It also happened in the case of Timmothy MacVeigh which is still debatable whether it was terrorism inspired by Christian Identity or just political agenda against federal disrupts at Ruby Ridge and Waco (Quillen, 2002). With regard to the 9/11 attacks, it was a political terrorism rather than a religious one. Stephen Holmes (2005), having observed the attacks, concluded that "what hit the United States on 11 September was not religion, therefore. Instead, the 9/11 terrorist represented the pooled insurgencies of the Arab Middle East." He noted that since al-Qaeda failed to overthrow by force the governments of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, they changed the target to the 'far enemy' who claimed as the supporter of those two countries.

The nexus of having religious motivation and intention to carry out more lethal attacks are complicated even the data is seemingly showing these two variables connected. Compared to the practice of terrorism in the past, this new terrorism is argued to be more lethal and willing to inflict mass casualties without selecting target. Is it a correct argument? In 1880, the French anarchist bombed restaurant frequently during the conflict with the working class (Miller, 1995). In 1946, Zionist killed 91 and injured 45 by detonating bomb at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The Japanese Red Army's attack on the Tel Aviv airport killed 24 and wounded 80 in 1972 (Kuriyama, 1973). Willingness to do wanton destruction also has been found as well in the ring-wing terrorists' history. The Bologna railroad station bombing in 1980 killed 80 and injured 170 (Frykberg & Tepas, 1988), simultaneous truck bombing attack in Lebanon on the US and French in 1983 barracks resulted 241 dead (Burk, 1999), Pan Am tragedy by the secular regime of Colonel Qaddafi left 270 dead, and the downing of an Air India by Sikh terrorist took the life of 329 (Pettiford & Harding, 2003).

It is true that there is no evidence in history showing that particular or more terrorist groups have taken lives in one attack as large as al-Qaeda did on 9/11. Nevertheless, the term of new terrorism has been widely used since the beginning of 1990s, long before the tragedy. Examples at the literatures on new terrorism, in fact, have used events that showed no new characteristics for the terrorists' goals and the nature of lethality. Even if al-Qaeda's 9/11 has been taken as a case to justify the concept, or the beginning of new terrorism wave, further problem occurs regarding the validity of the concept. Is it valid to make a generalization about characteristics of terrorism based on one particular case? Academically it will be hard to agree.

Terrorists today are still concerned with how media publish their acts. Moreover, even though they believe that their violence is justified by God, public opinions consistently have significant effects to their agenda (Tucker, 2001). Attacks by al-Jamaah al-Islamiya in Egypt for instance, provides an example of how public support can decrease dramatically if they perceive a terrorist action to be unacceptable. That attacks killed 62 people and massive report from mass media made the public reluctant to support that organization (Takeyh, 2001).

The issue of WMD in new terrorism is complicated. As Silke observed (2007), "in the list of the 200 most destructive terrorist attacks in the past twenty years, not a single one involved WMDs." Indeed, many researches in terrorism have reported mass casualties caused by terrorist attacks using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons (CBRN) rather than WMD. In fact, some terrorist groups not only have planned to launch either chemical or biological attacks, but also done it since many years ago. The 'Order of the Rising Sun,' which had a plan to poison water supply in Chicago, were found and arrested in possession of 30-40 kilograms typhoid bacteria (Kornfeld, 2003: 446). In 1984, two members of Oregon based cult headed by Bhagwan Shree Rajness contaminated salad bars with Salmonella and poisoned 750 people (Martin, 2000). In Europe, the threat of chemical terrorism has been recorded with the finding that Germany's Red Faction Army had tried to produce in early 1980s botulinum toxin to make nerve gas (Falkenrath, 1998). PKK contaminated Turkish air force water tanks in Istanbul by using

cyanides in a lethal dosage in 1992 and the Tamil Tigers used chlorine gas to attack Sri Lankan military base camp in 1990 (Cameron, 2004).

Concerning the use of nuclear weapons in terrorist attacks, there are no evidences that terrorist has used nuclear or radiological weapon to make serious destruction despite official put attention seriously on the possibility. According to David Claridge, government often exaggerates the issue and wastes many resources (Claridge, 1999). Even Jogman (2008) predicted that in the future, the use of "chemical and biological weapons are seen as more likely than radiological and nuclear weapons." However, one should note that although it is not to say they have planned to explode nuclear bombs, terrorists have attacked some nuclear power stations in the 1980s. The ETA attacked simultaneously two nuclear reactors in Lemoniz during 1980-1981 and two separate bombings by Super Movements Anti-Nuclear caused serious damage at the nuclear plant at Golfech, France, in 1980 (Bass & Jenkins, 1983). Also the ANC sabotaged two South African nuclear sites in 1980 although both of them were in operation at that time (Laqueur, 1999).

Second, new terrorism agreed that dominantly new terrorists do not need state sponsorship. However, state, as some experts argue, consistently has role in supporting terrorism. One example is Iran's role in giving financial help for training camps in Sudan and both Iran's and Syria's support for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Morgan, 2004). Even in the case of al-Qaeda, others also believe that Afghanistan still has important part it plays in its activities as it provides bases, training camps, and a safe place for al-Qaeda's members (Strohl, 2003). Perhaps what needs to be clear at first in this argument is what state sponsorship means. New terrorism experts argued that terrorists today depend less on states to support their financial needs. But Thomas Copeland (2001: 98) explained that although terrorist groups rely on crime organizations and individual donations for their financial support, both actors commonly are in symbiotic relationships with states because they operate in state or global financial system. He argued that it is "merely a variation on state sponsorships."

Third, Paul Wilkinson (1986) noted "terrorism is inherently international in character." It means international

terrorism is not a new phenomenon in these decades as new terrorism claimed. Therefore, terrorist groups always have networks and cooperate if they have similar agenda. In 1971, the Irish navy revealed that al-Fatah helped Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) in providing arms after seizing a ship carrying arms and ammunitions (Wilkinson, 1986). Moreover, some cases have proved that terrorist groups have the ability to operate outside of their origin from three decades ago. The Japan Red Army (JRA) hijacked Japan Airlines in 1973 together with Palestinians. Also in 1974, People Front for the Liberation of Palestina (PFLP) worked together with JRA to explode Shell oil rig in Singapore (Kushner, 2003).

Loosely structure does not exclusively belong to the current terrorist groups. In the previous century, anarchist terrorists who operated in Russia and France empire and actively attacked against heads of state was a network instead of hierarchically based (Hofmann, 2001). Even in the twentieth century, some terrorist organizations used network-based structure. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is like an umbrella as it consists of different factions (Cobban, 1981). In Hezbollah, its members are less cohesive, unpredictable as well as not in strict command and control structure (Ranstorp, 1994).

## CONCLUSION

Although it is hard to pinpoint what even can be taken to support their arguments, some observers claim that the presence of 'new terrorism' became obvious with al-Qaeda attack of 9/11. Observation at three characteristics attributed to new terrorism, those are goals, terrorist-state relationships as well as organizational structure, reveals that these assessments are valid to describe current terrorism. However, by looking at some evidences in the history of terrorism, one discovers that those features are not really new since many of them have similarities rather than differences with the characteristics of terrorism in the previous era. Indeed, terrorism today has changed, particularly in terms of technology as well as tactics. But terrorism has always changed time by time in order to do adjustment with improvement of the circumstance where they operate. To sum up, only few are new with the claim of new terrorism.

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