Ramming and Stabbing: The 5th Wave of Modern Terrorism?

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The definition and the understanding of terrorism have largely been in a state of disarray since September 11, 2001, a day that marked the longest bloody day in the history of modern terrorism. To establish an understanding of modern terrorism, many scholars have attempted to explain the evolution of terrorism by pointing out some key characteristics that defined a particular cycle or period. The most notable contribution in understanding this evolution has been put forward by David Rapoport (2004). In an attempt to understand and rationalize the changes in the phenomenon of modern terrorism that the world has experienced in the last century, Rapoport classified this evolution in what he referred to as waves or cycles of terrorism (a cycle of activity in a given time period characterized by expansion and contraction phases). According to Rapoport, each wave/cycle lasted for a period of up to forty years. However, the last half a decade has seen the four waves change to include a phenomenon that can argued to be either the fifth wave or continuation of the fourth wave. The fifth cycle introduces indiscriminate stabbing and van crushing of masses thus lodging the question on whether terrorists are exploiting the two characteristics to form the fifth wave. The grievance behind the new tactics is yet to be understood.

Anarchism

According to Rapoport, anarchism formed the first wave of terrorism from 1880s to 1920s. During this phase, terrorists believed that the state was the source of societal evil and injustice. Government representatives were the main targets of acts of terror. The need to punish state representatives as revenge led to assassination of several government officials and holders of public office. Transformation in communication and transportation as well as doctrine of culture conspicuously facilitated the success of the anarchism wave. Daily newspapers and telegraphs facilitated transmission of events, which meant that an event in one country would be known in other countries within a day. This act inspired sympathies from different individuals and groups across the border leading to creation of what is commonly referred to as ‘sleeper cells’ in modern day terrorism. Mass transportation of people through the rail made emigration possible and a result, created diaspora communities abroad, who later became a key player in the politics of both the ‘new’ and ‘old’ countries. This created space in which the diaspora could fund terrorism activities both in country of origin and in the host country, as a way of fighting
injustices and societal evil orchestrated by the state. Russian doctrine on strategies for terror contributed to emergence of consecutive waves, as it became an inheritance document for successors to use, improve and transmit. Case in point, Osama Bin Laden’s training manual was a complete trickle down of Nechaev’s Revolutionary Catechism, which believed in learning from the experiences of ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’ and passing it on to generations.

**Anti-Colonial wave**

This formed the second wave of terrorism between 1920s-1960s. The Versailles Peace Treaty that made possible end of World War 1 triggered the cycle, through the need to break the empires of the defeated states, which were mostly in Europe. As a result, terrorist activities thus became key in establishing new states. Case in point, in Ireland and Israel. Key characteristic during this wave was the quest by revolutionaries to gain their own independence from western imperialists. The quest came in with the need to also radically reconstruct the existing authorities, a move that terrorist groups used to eliminate all forms of equality.

Hit and run form of attacks on troops (guerilla warfare) characterized terror attacks during this wave since the main theatrical target was the military. A new language to diffuse terrorists was coined to include revolutionary leaders and freedom fighters struggling against government terrorism. This self-description of the new language later became so appealing to the citizens that it even attracted political supporters. Domestic terrorists also sought to strengthen ties with foreign terrorist, a move that was meant to lessen the usefulness of international assets since revolutionary leaders and freedom fighters were considered national heroes. The attractive nature of the new language to refer to terrorists marked the beginning of politicization of terrorism. The role of the diaspora groups was well demarcated to include funding, supplying weapons and volunteer ship. For the first time in the history of terrorism, though not active players, women played an inactive role of messengers and scouts.

*Nice, France truck terror attack*
Leftist Wing Radicalism

The Vietnam War of 1955-1975 stimulated evolution of the third wave of terrorism. The efficacy of the Viet Cong’s primitive weapons against the advanced American technology exposed the vulnerability of the contemporary system. Groups like the Italian Red Brigade emerged as vanguards of the Third World masses and enjoyed enormous support from the Soviet in form of funding, training and weapons. Unlike in the anti-colonial wave where the role of the women was restricted to messengers and scouts, women became actively engaged as leaders and fighters. Hijackings of planes, kidnappings and taking hostages were amongst the most popular tactics that emerged during this wave. Hijackings followed realization by terrorists that some foreign landing fields were accessible hence contributing to more than seven hundred hijackings that occurred in the first three decades of this cycle. Kidnappings of targets also became apparent. With the most notable kidnapping being of the former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro by members of the Red Brigade.

The third wave also introduced the element of beheading hostages and negotiation to meet terrorists’ demands. Following the then Italian government refusal to negotiate with the Red Brigade, Moro was brutally beheaded and his body paraded on the streets. Nicaragua’s congress and the Colombia Supreme court were taken hostages and as a result, approximately 100 people were killed. The third wave also retrieved assassination of prominent political figures. Case in point, attempted assassination of Thatcher in 1979 and successful assassinations of British Ambassador to Ireland and Jordanian Prime Minister by the Palestinian Black September terrorist group.

Internationalization of targets also marked the third wave. Terrorists began targeting individuals and groups with international significance with foreign embassies being a key target. For instance, 1973 marked the beginning of these attacks when the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) attacked the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum. The Americans became a significant target, as one-third of attacks involving an international
character were American. This sparked America ‘new’ importance as a prominent target.

To secure states freedom from terror attacks, states began sponsoring terrorism while others began their cooperation efforts to counter terrorism. Punishment in form of arms embargo and sanctions were placed on states that sponsored terrorism. Case in point, the imposition of an arms embargo on Libya in 1986.

**Religious Wave**

This wave emerged in the 1990s and became the fourth cycle. Scholars after studying the three predecessor waves predicted that the wave might disappear by 2025 and another wave might emerge. The overriding nature of religion and ethnic identity contributed to emergence of this wave, with the main objective being on creating secular states. Islam was the center of corrupting the morality of the world. They (terrorists) thus saw terrorism as a necessary evil to defend their faith. Tactics used during this wave included suicide bombings, which was the deadliest tactical innovation in committing acts of terror. Another significant characteristic of the forth wave of terrorism was the decline in number of terrorist organizations. Few groups also regrouped and morphosized. For instance, the regrouping of PLO in Tunisia.

Over the decade, acts of terror based on interpretation of the scripture have been carried out in different parts of the world. Places of worship have continued to be a target of terror. Case in point, the February 16 terror attack at a Pakistani Sufi shrine killing 88 worshippers, bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samara, which ignited an all-out religious civil war in Iraq and

...this cycle. However, Christian terrorism also emerged based on the racist interpretation of the scriptures during the American “Christian identity” movement. Terrorist believed that the Western world was tarnishing and attack on Coptic Christians in Egypt highlighted the persistent targeting of religion and religious symbols. Terrorist claimed to have inspiration from their religion while carrying out terror attacks in Glasgow, Bali, London,
Religious inspirations claim then leads to question on whether eliminating all forms of religious believes would therefore eradicate all forms of religious terrorism in the world.

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Although the forty years lasting period of the fourth wave has not yet elapsed, new terror tactics are emerging thus leading to the question on whether the new theatrical innovations are the new fifth wave of terrorism, or the continuation of the fourth wave. The new wave is characterized by mass stabbing of individuals; case in point in Madrid and on London Bridge, ramming of masses on streets, indiscriminate shooting of masses and suicide bombing by individual terrorist sympathizers. This new cycle also seems to disregard one of the key principles of terrorism, which is identifying a target specific and instead, opting for any target as long as the impact itches an international audience.

Europe has been the worst hit by this new cycle, and the following examples justify the emergence of either a new wave or a continuation of the religious wave through emergence of new tactics. On March 22, 2017, 5 people were killed after the terrorist drove the car along a pavement at West Minister. Later on, May 22, a suicide attack left 22 people dead and approximately 60 injured in an Ariana Grade Concert in Manchester. On June 3, terror attack at the London Bridge left 8 dead after the van drove while hitting pedestrians. Two weeks later on June 19, a van crushed into the worshipers on Seven Sisters Road, a busy thoroughfare in Finsbury Park, north London, near a Muslim community center and a mosque, killing one and seriously injuring nine.

An attack of the same resemblance on Berliners at the Berlin Breitscheidplatz Square Christmas market left 12 people dead and at least 48 nursing serious injuries. Similar to London attacks, the truck driver steered at the merry makers along 80 meters stretch of pavement. In the worst witnessed form of the fifth way of terrorism, a truck driver, driving at approximately 70Kph rammed through the throngs of people over a long distance along the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, France. The attack that happened while people were celebrating Bastille Day left at least 84 dead and bodies strewn across the streets. In the Swedish capital of Stockholm, a bus driver drove a hi-jacked lorry into a departmental store on a crowded shopping street. The attack happened less than 21 days after the Westminster Bridge, Nice and Berlin attacks, killing 4 people and injuring 15. The latest attack in Barcelona was no different as a van was driven into pedestrian killing 13 people and injuring at least 130.

In all these attack, the Islamist group ISIS have claimed responsibility for, thus lodging the question on whether van crushing is the new adopted form of terror that the terrorist groups and individuals are exploiting and capitalizing on. For the new wave, the important aspect is mass destruction, an aspect that terrorists are employing indiscriminately regardless of race age or religion, unlike in the previous four waves.

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