Literature Review of Democracy and Counter-Terrorism

Ruqia Rehman[1]

Abstract

By reviewing the existing literature and scholarly work present on terrorism, counter-terrorism and the role of democracy as an institution and norm playing the role to thwart and eventually eradicate these tendencies from society is complex and contradictory. One the hand, there are scholars and academics who 'based on their qualitative and quantitative research' claim that democracy plays pivotal role in countering extremism and extremist tendencies in the society. They claim that the rights to choose one's rulers, free press to monitor government actions, freedom of expression, the right to vote and bring political and institutional changes through peaceful ways mitigate the hardline and extra-legal activities and tendencies less attractive and less rewarding. While opponents of this claim assert that democracy cannot play critical role in eradicating and thwarting terrorism and terrorist related acts but are in fact fertile grounds for terrorism breeding. They claim that the hallmark of democracy and democratic society like respect of individual rights, free press, and freedom of expression and the ability and capacity to run organizations make democracies easy targets and breeding grounds of terrorism.

Key words: Democracy, terrorism, liberalism, authoritarianism

Introduction

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[1] PhD Scholar, Department of DM& DS, Quetta[1].

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Liberal view of democracy

The assertion that democracy can thwart and eventually eradicate terrorism and terror related tendencies in society is hotly debated and popularized by policy makers and political analysts alike. The belief that democracy can mitigate extremist narrative and tendencies is rooted in the popular idea of democratic peace theory or (D.P.T) where it has been held that "democratic or liberal states never or very rarely go to war with each other and that they are less likely to become involved in militarized disputes among themselves is the most robust law like finding generated by the discipline of international relations" (Azar, 2005).

The logic that democratic states and societies never go to war with each other has been debated and applied for the domestic political setup of a country where scholars have argued that the presence of democratic norms and values would eventually eradicate terrorism and hardline tendencies of a society. The mechanisms and institutional setups of democracy would result in reducing extremism through leading organized extremist actors to turn towards non-violent means to express their demands and views and reduce popular support and sympathy of the masses for the issues and causes which those extremist groups champion. The theory to put simply is that "in libertarian states (those emphasizing individual freedom and civil liberties and the rights associated with a competitive and open election of leaders) exist multiple, often conflicting elites whose interests are divergent and segmented, checked and balanced" (R. J. Rummel, 1983).

The presence of open elections, free press, respect of fundamental human rights and the defined spheres of state institutions would popularize the concept of inclusion of masses in the system and would eradicate the perception of alienation in society which is one of main causes of resort to extremist tendencies and terrorist actions. The space provided by democratic norms and institutions provide the incentives for extremist non-state actors to participate in peaceful political struggle by contesting elections under the pretext of changing the ground by reaching the productive limits of violence and "militant organizations sometimes seek to adopt party politics in order

to continue pursuing their political ends or 'outcomes' goals" (Benjamin, 2014).

Democracy and violence

The absence of space for political maneuvering and policy compromise would ultimately lead people to resort to terrorism related activities and acts. Ban to participate in political decision making, the absence of free media, the choking of non-violent avenues of action and curb on freedom of expression are all the precursor for the growth of terrorism in the society. Proponents of democratic peace state that in the presence of such circumstances and factors the system "serve to delegitimize the state, alienate citizens and increase popular grievances, thus providing terrorists with a steady supply of support from among ordinary citizens" (Robert Gurr, 2010).

Transparent and fair elections in democratic society provide the electoral with legitimacy for their law-making and enforcing acts and make them the collective voice of the public and society. Having the responsibility to protect their citizens from any act of individual and collective violence is the fundamental duty of the democratically elected regimes and they are not only "entitled to engage in effective counter-terrorism measures, they are compelled to do so under their obligation to ensure minimum levels of law and order to protect their citizens" (Alison Brysk & Gershon Shafir, 2007).

There are theoretical perspectives and arguments that democracy and democratic norms and institutions play very instrumental role in thwarting and containing extremist tendencies in the society. The argument goes on by stating that because of increased opportunities provided by democratic setup to express political and social grievances, groups and individuals are more inclined to pursue their objectives non-violently and "because democracies offer avenues for interest articulation among citizens and endorse non-violent resolutions of conflict" (Schmid, 2007).

Election and democracies

Free and fair elections in democratic societies make sure that desirable political and social changes would be brought about without resorting to violence. Democratic rules and institutions enable the masses to resolve their differences by non-violent means. Voting, formation of political parties and interest groups provide the incentives to pursue one's interests peacefully rather than by violence and illegal means. By exerting influence over their rulers regarding specific issues of concern such as "when citizens have grievances against foreign targets, greater political participation under a democratic system allows them to exert more influence on their own

government so that they can seek favorable policy changes or compensation more successfully" (Li, 2005).

The conditions which may provide an incentive to common people to resort for terrorist acts like the non-responsive of government officials to genuine grievances, when other possible peaceful avenues to tackle those grievances are not available and when carrying out terrorist acts are considered legitimate are not prevalent in democratic society. The presence of conditions like freedom of speech, independent media which carry and convey the sentiments of people to the higher authorities and the presence of credible institutions like and independent judiciary are the hallmark of any democratic society and "since liberal democratic judicial systems ensure independent adjudication of legal rules, they create a fair chance for the interests at stake in each case to be properly heard in efficient but unexpansive legal outlets" (Choi, 2010).

Norms and democracy

The socialization carried out through democratic norms and institutions make the citizens to trust the fairness and impartiality of their institutions and less likely to resort to any kind of terrorist activity. The trust which citizens put on credible democratic institutions is an important part of counter-terrorism efforts by states and trust can be built upon the credibility of state institutions only through direct participation of people in governmental affairs.

The society governed through democratic norms and institutions by government with institutional and legal checks and balances elected by the popular consent of the masses will more trustworthy and credible and "establishing credible commitments require the creation of political institutions that alter the incentives of political officials so that it becomes in their interests to protect relevant citizen rights" (North, 1993).

Keeping the trust of the common people on democracy and democratic institutions in view, it is commonly understood that this trust factor would discourage resort to terrorist actions in society. The prevalence of civil liberties checks and balances on government policies and free press to inform the public about any policy debacles would guarantee the senses of ownership and responsibility in the common people because "democratic participation and elections increase the general satisfaction and political efficacy of citizen subsequently reducing grievances, thwarting terrorist recruitment and raising the public's tolerance for counterterrorist policies" (Sandler, 1995).

Opponents of democracy

On the other hand, there are scholars and academics who claim that democracy and democratic norms and institutions do not play any major role in eradicating terrorism and terrorist acts. For them, one sticking point is widespread disagreement over the precise and accepted definition of terrorism. However there exists an agreement on many of its key characteristics. Every action that consists of threat of violence or use of violence against civilians to attract and influence wider target audience in order to achieve its political objectives.

Terrorism is also called weapon of the weak as "groups that are able to obtain their desired political objectives by other means such as victory in an election, intra-elite maneuverings, military coups, bribery or civil war are much less likely to rely on terrorism as the primary means of trying to achieve their goals" (Claridge, 2007). By providing ground to extremist and terrorist groups to participate in democratic political system and free elections, it has been suggested that they will ultimately manipulate the system to advance their objectives because of the permissive environment provided by democracy and the presence of institutions which make sure the collection of credible and compelling evidences, open trial before the jury, the restricted use of torture during the interrogation, transparency and the strict observation of laws before proceeding any terrorism related case.

The totalitarian governments on the other hands are not bound by these time-consuming processes and been more willing to suppress dissident at home and abroad like "the Security Services of Nazi Germany proved to be quite capable of dealing with opponents by using such techniques. The KGB in the Soviet Union was also notoriously effective in dealing with dissidents or presumed dissidents and outbreak of terrorism were noticeably absent in the Soviet Union before its collapse" (Kagley, 2007) & (Gruyter, 2018).

Political systems in transition are provide opportunities and breeding grounds for terrorist and extremist groups to survive and proliferate. The political systems which are in transition from any other form of governance to democracy are prone to instability and may provide incentives and opportunities for terrorist groups because of weak mechanisms to deal with them. Weak intelligence capabilities, respect for civil liberties and restrictions on surveillance and security forces are the hallmarks of transitional societies as "the states formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iraqi government qualify as weaker states compared to their predecessors and also as political systems currently in transition or at least in transition in the recent past" (Yalcin, 2001). Political systems in transition are more vulnerable for extremist and violent dissidents because the grip of

old security forces and government institutions is diminished at a time when society exploit the opportunities provided by newly acquired freedom.

Media and democracy

The presence of free press in democratic societies also provides the opportunity for terrorist groups to propagate their narrative and spread their message in the masses. Media has been used by terrorist groups in carrying their messages to the wider public in ways that would ultimately incite more violence and result in wider acceptance for such groups in the society. To attract popular attention to their cause and compel the authorities to meet their demands, the terrorist groups publicize their narrative by exploiting the free press since "the presence of a free press provides opportunities for greater publicity that permits groups to reach their target audience more easily" (Eyerman, 2008).

The vulnerability of democratic society to suffer more from terrorism and terrorist related activities has been further facilitated by free press, open borders and the belief on fundamental human rights which are inalienable even under the hardest of circumstances. The increase in terrorism and terrorist related activities is more telling in Spain where "the violence by the Basque nationalists increased when a democratic system was created even though it was initially present under an authoritarian regime and that the violence continued into the twenty-first century after more than two decades of democracy" (Sandler, 1995).

Democratic societies may be more vulnerable to terrorism due to factors which might not be related to their domestic politics. Restricted security forces, respect for basic civil liberties, free press and open society may be counted as factors which make them attractive spots for dissidents who are considered terrorists in their homeland. Political dissidents may try to take asylum on the basis of claims to be persecuted in home and may carry their violent activities from the host country on the pretext of resisting oppression and marginalization.

Conditions like the "security precautions may be too great in their homeland while democratic states may be more vulnerable and at the same time offer better opportunities to gain greater publicity for terrorist attacks. Expatriate dissidents can target diplomatic personnel, trade centers, corporations or businesses or even tourists from their home countries. Thus, there may be transient attacks against foreigners in democracies that are meant for audience in the countries of origins rather than the host country" (Crenshaw, 1984).

The domestic political dynamics of democratic society may also contribute to the increase of terrorism and terrorist related activities. The existence of

fierce political competition by political parties and interest groups to dominate political agenda and policy initiatives about important issues which the society deem important cause the friction and misunderstanding which may breed political controversies.

The hostile environment where these political parties and interest groups interact sometimes lead to conflict and in turn result into condition where "terrorist activities proliferate in democratic countries because of political competition which motivates groups of various ideologies to compete with one another for limited political influence given a multitude of competing interests" (Chenoweth, 2009). The debate surrounding the terrorist and extremist exploiting the democratic system bases on the argument that it is due to the internal mechanism of democratic values and institutions which enable terrorist organizations to penetrate the democratic society and work easily.

Conclusion

The logic behind this argument is that "civil liberties embedded in democratic systems influence support for terrorism in a similar fashion to their influence on the emergence of terrorist organizations within their borders. This is mostly because democracy has a liberal attitude toward the activities of non-governmental organizations, diaspora and charity groups" (San-Akca, 2014). Another criticism which has been leveled against the democracy and democratic society is its inherent weakness and inability to fight counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism wars specially when they become protracted. The presence of free media, care of public opinion and the large cost of protracted war hinder the long-term policy and commitment which are the necessary pre-conditions for waging successful wars. This has led to the argument that democracies are not capable of waging long wars of any kind because "democratic publics are typically viewed as cost-intolerant and sensitive to the loss of their soldiers, two traits that undermine the ability of democracies to sustain protracted COIN campaigns" (Lyall, 2010). Due to the sense of securing broad base for any risky decision and the complexity of institutional setups make democratic leaders reluctant to wage costly wars.

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