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ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION

## MOTIVES OF TERRORISM

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## DRIVERS OF TERRORISM

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## **MOTIVES OF TERRORISM**

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Terrorism, apart from its form, type, or location, will not recede or break unless its causes are addressed. Terrorism is not born out of a vacuum, nor does it survive in a vacuum. It is an outcome of realistic premises, not a prelude to hidden results. The security measures taken for countering terrorism,<sup>1</sup> no matter how efficient they are, cannot do more than limit its spread, or force its perpetrators to remain dormant, or, at best, break one of its waves. Terrorism requires a different method of resistance, starting from a vision that combines science with its academic theories and reality with its practical circumstances and changes.

Hence the importance of studying the causes of terrorism. I have tried to dismantle various approaches<sup>2</sup>, some of which take a sociological dimension based on political, economic, and social backgrounds. Other approaches adopt a cultural dimension that relies on theses which investigate the nature of its cultural and civilizational components. In addition, other novel approaches, such as the sociology of religion, provide a more comprehensive explanation of human phenomena, considering their religious, political, social, and economic dimensions.

The multiplicity of these approaches reflects the complex and intertwined nature of the terrorist phenomenon. Accordingly, such approaches have devised a general framework that explains the causes of terrorism committed whether by individuals or groups. In this study, an attempt is made to illustrate this framework through disassembling its contents, namely the political, economic, social, cultural, ideological, educational, historical, personal-psychological, and media factors.



## I. Political Factors

Political factors, whether external or internal, are among the most important causes of terrorism. They include, for example, regional conflicts, absence of international justice, violation of the rights of peoples, anti-religious policies, abuse of freedom of expression, and imperialist exploitation of the resources of developing countries. They also include developments in global politics and support for specific entities at the expense of occupied countries, attacking the interests of countries and their nationals abroad, militarizing globalization, and supporting dictatorships.

From this standpoint, we cannot ignore the role played by external political factors in creating terrorism. These factors, as a whole, form a system that controls the world. A quick review of the causes invoked by terrorist organizations to justify their violent operations confirms this meaning. For this reason, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard stated that the symbolic mental connotations of the September 11 attacks revealed that the nature of the global system was the force that gave rise to the objective conditions for that sudden violent act.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, with the acceleration of the communications and technology revolution, we are now challenged by a globalized form of terrorism whose motives, characteristics, and tools combine factors emanating from internal and external environments. Although this globalized terrorism may practice its violence within domestic environments, it derives its pretexts from international issues mixed with local grievances attributed to global powers.

Globalized terrorism is not only limited to those who adopt religious ideologies or raise Islamist slogans, but rather includes terrorism stemming from deviant nationalist motives, especially from the Western Far Right, which raised issues that gained a global dimension, such as hostility to immigrants and refugees, and pathological fear of Islam and Muslims, known as Islamophobia.

Internal political factors, on the other hand, range between political oppression, absence of good governance and freedoms, spread of grievances and nepotism, institutional corruption, lack of social justice, failure of ideologies imposed by the ruling regimes against the will of the people, closure or restriction of outlets for civil and political work, failure to respond to the demands of the masses, and loss of confidence in the possibility of peaceful change.

The political gap that has arisen from the acceleration

of modernization processes at the social level and their decline on the political level<sup>4</sup> seemed as if generations that were integrated into the era of digital communications technology and that embraced convictions in support of human rights were still ruled by declining political regimes whose ideas and attitudes were more or less similar to those of the Big Brother in George Orwell's novel 1984.

This situation is similar to the status quo in the West. That is, the effectiveness of ruling regimes that are supposed to be democratic is now declining since they have lost many of their main components. Likewise, other regimes lack an unclouded vision in dealing with religion. Their policies range between banishing and invoking religion according to their interests. Some governments also pursue strict security policies that mix between an ordinary citizen and another citizen involved in terrorism.

However, if these policies apply a deliberate, random, or individual approach that leads to indignity or humiliation, especially towards already marginalized classes, through repeated random arrests merely on suspicion, this will open a back door to polarization and recruitment for the benefit of terrorist groups.<sup>5</sup>

Multiple scientific studies stressed the importance of the role played by the above-mentioned internal and external political factors in pushing towards terrorism, especially Islamist terrorism. In a study by Cheryl Benard, Islamist terrorism was assumed to have mainly resulted from the crisis that the Islamic world had been going through. This crisis resulted from being unable to achieve development and to separate from the dominant global trend as well as the failure of political experiments in which its countries were involved, such as territorial nationalism, Arab nationalism, and Islamic revolution, thus leading to feelings of frustration and anger.

In addition, the past and the present happenings of the Palestinian cause have undoubtedly constituted a crucial factor in escalating violence. The occurrences that have taken place in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq certainly served as an undeniable motive in raising the rates of Islamist violence. Two studies, one issued by Saudi Arabia and the other by an Israel studies foundation in 2006, agreed that most of the foreigners who fought in Iraq under the banner of the terrorist Al-Qaeda organization were not involved in violence before the American invasion of Iraq, and that this invasion was the turning point that led them to join this terrorist organization.<sup>6</sup>

We cannot deny that external factors served as a political motive for Islamist terrorism in the past years, but local motives remain the most important in pushing towards terrorism in general. When internal factors leading to feelings of anger remain at controllable levels,

international issues cannot automatically and solely contribute to mobilizing terrorist organizations, whether Islamist or otherwise. However, we should note that many people in the Middle East hold Western policies, even partially, responsible for internal discontent, due to their support for authoritarian regimes and their preference for stability over change.

## II. Economic Factors

Economic factors have always been considered to be direct causes of the outbreak of terrorism. This point of view considers terrorism as a reaction to imperialist policies that have taken on an economic, instead of a military, nature, or as a result of financial and economic crises. Terrorism is also attributed to other economic factors, such as the dominance of capitalist countries and major economic entities of the global economy, or to unemployment, poverty, low income, failure of economic development plans, inequalities in wealth distribution, or widening class disparities. Another point of view sees terrorism as a war waged by the poor. The emergence and spread of parasitic classes, especially in economically underdeveloped countries, and their extravagant spending patterns while others, especially young people, cannot afford the most basic needs, and the fact that the media incessantly display and advertise products and goods in provocative ways that invoke a sense of deprivation – generates negative feelings that are externalized in violence and terrorism.

In addition, the negative effects of economic globalization have constituted a catalyst for terrorism. This type of globalization has curtailed the role of governments in the economy, enabled major capitalisms and global economic and banking institutions dominated by these capitalisms, to gain greater control over the global economy, and reduced the area of state sovereignty in favor of competing economic entities.

Economic globalization has multiplied the gains of rich countries, but simultaneously created an incubating climate for terrorism. This type of globalization has given rise to a feeling of victimization due to the imbalances it has created in the structures of developing markets and its exclusion of unlimited sectors of workers from these markets. It has also weakened the ability of the private sector in these countries to stand up to multinational companies, and generally reduced the capabilities of some already poor countries in connection with public spending in several areas, including the security field.<sup>7</sup>

However, since the late 1980s, and more intensely after

the September 11 attacks, most studies have been controlled<sup>8</sup> by a strong tendency to deny the relationship between the economy and the outbreak of terrorism. This tendency often resulted from the desire of major countries to abandon their development responsibilities towards the world's poorest countries, or from the desire of economic neoliberalism, which grew and controlled international financial institutions, to deny the negative role of its policies in the eruption of terrorism.

A landmark study in this context was conducted by the American economist Alan Krueger, together with the Czech Jitka Maleckova in 2002. In this study, they concluded that “any connection between poverty and terrorism is indirect, complicated, and probably quite weak. Instead of viewing terrorism as a direct response to low market opportunities, illiteracy, or ignorance, we suggest that it is more accurately viewed as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings of indignity and frustration that have little to do with economics.”<sup>9</sup>

Based on field information, other studies, which we certainly agree with, confirm that it is not true that poverty did not play a role in connection with terrorism. Poverty served as a factor that facilitated recruitment processes and weakened the abilities of poor countries to counter terrorism at the security level. Furthermore, the inability of governments to provide basic services to their citizens makes people more prone to surrender to anyone who responds to their discontent and complaint. It even pushes them to respond to the social attractions and temptations offered by terrorist organizations.

## III. Social Factors

Social factors still play a negative role in pushing towards terrorism despite the publication of studies that shake our trust in scientific theories that connect between the deterioration of social conditions and terrorism, based on selective statistical analyses that focus on a specific circle of perpetrators of terrorist operations, but ignore other actors in other circles of terrorism.

These factors range between weak loyalty, frustration, inequality, gap between reality and aspirations, social discontent, erosion of the middle class, loss of social communication, weakness of national partnership, slums, disintegration of family and collapse of its basic roles, corruption of co-workers, alienation, lack of a sense of identity and social status, and fear and hatred of strangers.

The social environment in which individuals coexist has a significant impact in leading them to delinquency

or integrity. If the family, which is the first station in a person's life, is healthy, it will mostly produce healthy individuals, and vice versa. Likewise, university life is either a suitable environment for exchanging beneficial opinions and developing hidden talents, or a fertile ground for triggering violence and terrorism.<sup>10</sup>

Frustration also plays a fundamental role in the outbreak of violent behavior. When there are no opportunities available, feelings of oppression and fear emerge,<sup>11</sup> and the frustrated person turns into a time bomb that can explode anywhere, whether in the form of a terrorist act or any other criminal or violent behavior.

Historical experience asserts that violence is born out of the absence of social justice. If the negative effects of the wide inequalities among people<sup>12</sup> are not properly addressed, they will surely lead to psycho-social gaps that would ignite the fuel of violence within society.

Injustice that targets individuals, groups, or institutions is also a crucial factor in understanding terrorism. The desire for revenge, in response to injustice inflicted on a person or on others, could be a driving motivation for the forces of violence against others, especially against people who are perceived to be responsible for this injustice.<sup>13</sup>

Slum areas, whose people live in dilapidated, wooden, or tin structures and have no stable work, are also an important source for recruiting terrorists. The members of the slum generation are usually possessed by feelings of social injustice, hatred, and social alienation in a way that pushes them towards violent behavior, but under an ideological cover.

Another social motive for terrorism is the desire to defend collective identity as a protection of status and dignity. Likewise, the failure of development projects and the decline of the State's role in the social field both stand, even partially, for the emergence of violence and terrorism.

These social problems operate in Western environments as much as they do in Eastern ones. Islamist terrorism in Europe emerges from those societies which include dispersed and disparate gatherings of immigrants who suffer from loss of identity, self-isolation, injustice, social marginalization, indignity, and unemployment. Muslim youth in Europe are the most affected by unemployment.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, it can be said that social motives constitute a significant factor in recruiting members for terrorist organizations. They create a deteriorating social reality, thus instilling feelings of discontent and indignation, especially among the youth population. However, some governments persistently seek to omit such factors in order to exclude their responsibility for their emergence.



## IV. Cultural Factors<sup>15</sup>

Cultural factors that play a negative role in stimulating terrorism have several patterns that range from identity problems, absence of rational awareness, cultural emptiness and alienation, intellectual fanaticism, adherence to outdated values, dissemination of a culture of violence, radicalization of a doctrine of revenge, refusal to cope with and demonization of the other, and prevalence of unilateralism at the expense of multilateralism.

The integrity of the cultural environment seems clearly important, particularly if we put in mind that the response to concepts of violence grows when there is a supporting culture in the societies in which these concepts spread. Studies of media psychology illustrate that the popularity of a certain commodity does not merely depend on its advertising, but also on the presence of a culture that supports this commodity. Accordingly, the opportunities for terrorism increase in societies that are inherently violent, and in those that embrace the doctrine of revenge or promote non-peaceful principles.

Islamist terrorism, especially perpetrated by emerging generations in the West or by young people living in a Western cultural environment, is attributed to the cultural shock that they experience as a result of the Western lifestyle which has culminated under the system of globalization, and which is considered by these young people to be the last gateway to escape from the cloak of religion.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the spread of cultures supporting occultism without considering the simplest facts of reality would create an environment that is conducive to terrorist action. Likewise, cultural marginalization and a sense of cultural dependency push people who embrace unilateral visions and who experience such marginalization to be biased to their culture and to exert every possible effort to impose it by force.

On another note, the language of discourse charged with demonization and hatred of the other was the cause of the emergence of diverse types of terrorism. Examples include Islamist terrorism that raises the slogan of the "Surviving Group" (Victorious Sect) or the "Ignorance of the Other"; ethnic terrorism exercised by the Hutu tribes against the Tutsis in Rwanda, by extremist right-wing groups focusing on the white Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa,<sup>17</sup> and by Neo-Nazis and the far right in the West.

Ethnic and cultural divisions are also a good opportunity to



mobilize societies towards terrorist action, regardless of its name, slogan, or origins. These divisions often lead to the creation of ethnic or religious interests whose defense requires employing violent extremist ideas and visions. In Liberia, for example, the Mandingo Muslims were exploited, both during and after the civil war, to achieve socio-economic gains.<sup>18</sup>

However, we must pay attention in this context to the fact that the ability of culture to influence the terrorist phenomenon is not absolute, or that it operates individually, far from its surrounding political, economic, and social environment. Rather, it can be effective only within and through this environment. As Bertrand Badie says, “No cultural explanation exists for a pure state; we must take social practices into account.”<sup>19</sup>



## V. Ideological Factors<sup>20</sup>

Ideological factors undoubtedly play a particularly significant role in driving some people to embrace terrorism, no matter if they relate to religious or doctrinal, philosophical, or political, Western or Eastern, ideologies. However, the influence of these ideologies increases if they belong to religious sources and if they are located in societies more deeply immersed in religion in general.

Factors leading to terrorism mainly comprise beliefs or policies that are inherently extremist or violent; deviant interpretations of religious texts; reading these texts without understanding, or with a preconceived agenda that serves specific orientations; an imbalance in the relationship between reason and revelation in considering the principles of religions; or seeing the world with a closed mind.

Although we acknowledge the extreme importance of these ideological factors, we have noticed that their role is greatly exaggerated in a way that reduces and distances the terrorist phenomenon from other factors that have an effective role in its emergence and growth. For a long time, we have lived captive to the statement that “violence begins with ideology,” which was made by the legal thinker William Suleiman Qilada and repeated by many others after him.

Reality, however, proved that this statement is not always true. Sometimes, terrorism begins with actions, then proceeds to search for an ideology under which to disguise itself or to hide behind so that it can allegedly acquire legitimacy in front of its society. Olivier Roy, a French professor of philosophy,<sup>21</sup> expressed this idea as follows: “A human being first heads towards extremism, then searches for a suitable intellectual and ideological

content to justify and support his radicalism.”

The ideological factor may be central and superior to other factors among the leaders, commanders, and emirs of terrorist organizations. However, at the remaining organizational levels, the issue is often significantly different in a way that requires a separate assessment of each case to determine which influence has actually stirred the energies of violence within that person.

For example, as far as Islamist terrorism is concerned, we noticed that a particular pattern began to appear with the emergence of Al-Qaeda and escalated with ISIS. A number of terrorist groups emerged without an ideological and theological background. This was not the case with major organizations such as *El Gama'a El Islamiyya* (Islamic Group), which attributed itself to Islam, and Al Jihad Group in Egypt. These new organizations are rather driven to violence by forms of revenge that are later disguised under theological interpretations to bestow on themselves a semblance of legitimacy that justifies their actions. An ISIS terrorist kills and sheds blood without reading a single Islamic book, not even books that promote misleading ideologies.

Indeed, this terrorist pattern is not completely new and had its roots in the past. It is not logical to say that the old major organizations relied on integrated ideologies before committing their terrorist acts. In fact, the majority of the literature of the Islamic Group, which committed the most horrific terrorist attacks in Egypt in the 1990s before the security agencies succeeded in converting its activities towards peaceful work, in what can be described as a unique experience, was written in prisons long after the Group became involved in terrorism.

Hence, to excessively focus on the ideological factor or the misreading of religious texts as the primary and sole cause of Islamist terrorism constitutes a kind of defective reductionism. It may even hide behind it a desire to conceal the basic motives of terrorism, namely the discourse of oppression, political revenge, social motives, and sectarian and doctrinal tensions.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, exaggerated talk about the importance of renewing religious discourse to counter Islamist terrorism sometimes represents an escape from the negative reality without denying our need for such renewal, on condition that it does not affect the foundations of religion, nor empty religion of its content, or be used as a pretext for attacking religious heritage, institutions, and figures under deceptive claims falsely hiding behind freedom, rationality, and objectivity.

The increasing focus on the issue of renewing Islamic religious discourse, as promoted by some people to

question the true constants of Islam and its affirmed texts under covers hiding beneath tendencies against religion in the first place, could turn into a driving factor for the emergence of terrorism.

Worthy of note in this context is that part of the West, which adheres to scientific realism, realizes the error of exaggeration in addressing the influence of ideological or religious factors claimed by terrorists, especially in the case of Islamist terrorism. For example, in its speech at the International Conference on Terrorism, held in Riyadh in 2005, Germany declared: "Investigating the causes and roots of terrorism should not be confined to the interpretation of religious writings."

However, the above-mentioned explanations do not entirely aim to deny the role of ideological factors in the context of terrorism, but only to reject exaggeration of its role at the expense of other, more effective factors. Besides, we also believe that claims that Islamized terrorism is an exceptional phenomenon that must be viewed as such and that it has its own mechanisms of action that move in isolation from its social and political reality, based on the fact that Islamic culture has its own identity, which is isolated from the world, are not even worthy of our consideration. That is, Muslims do not live on another planet and do not belong to a different human nature. In brief, perhaps the results found by the Gallup World Polls, which indicated that ideology is not the main factor responsible for Islamist extremism, are sufficient in this regard.<sup>23</sup>



## VI. Educational Factors

Education was, is, and will remain at the top of the priorities of almost every country. It is not only an engine of progress but also an inevitable door through which to fill the gaps that ignite the fires of terrorism. In this context, education shapes the awareness of individuals and provides them with knowledge and values that are compatible with religious and national identities.

Educational systems are now confronted with several challenges, particularly in light of the growth of civil society institutions, tyranny of globalization, expansion of the cognitive space, and the intersection of systems and knowledge. For these reasons, a need has emerged for a civic education system that is concerned with providing young people with knowledge and skills that are compatible with the values of loyalty, democracy, and respect for the law and for others.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of this civic education is evident in the fact

that its loss of meaning is almost equal to ignorance in pushing towards terrorism. Negative, rigid education that does not establish a flexible mentality capable of research and deduction from a background that preserves pure legacies, combined with low education and ignorance, leads, in one degree or another, to terrorism.

The danger of education does not lie only in its absence, but also in the nature of its components and the learners' response methods. The real problem is embodied in the fact that the educational system creates traditional minds<sup>25</sup> that live in the past, or instrumental minds that adhere to procedures at the formal level without a goal, minds that employ means to serve ends without questioning the content of these ends.<sup>26</sup>

The traditional mind and the instrumental or functional mind paves the way for the emergence of the terrorist mind, which would push its owner to violence through his narrow or negative vision of his surroundings, and his response to instructions or assignments given to him without investigating their legitimacy or results.

It is known that external pressures were exerted after the September 11 bombings to introduce amendments to the educational curricula of Islamic countries under the pretext of purifying them from any ideologies in support of terrorism. A report published by the American newsmagazine *U.S. News & World Report (USNWR)*, entitled "Hearts, Minds, and Dollars," which stated, "The war of ideas and minds<sup>27</sup> is the most important element at the battlefield of the war between the Islamic world and America, backed up by the Western World."

These pressures were accompanied by internal secular media reports which call for ignoring and marginalizing religious curricula, and even for abolishing religious institutes altogether, and limiting the activities and budgets of moderate religious institutions.

In fact, such calls are marked by the absence of a sound vision, let alone the sound intentions of their proponents. Marginalizing religion from educational curricula means leaving major gaps in the minds of future generations regarding a vital issue that constitutes a basic need for them, whether we like it or not. Hence, these emerging generations will satisfy their needs depending on the easiest source available to them, whether moderate or extremist. A mind fortified with sound religion is able to reject everything that contradicts its lofty messages, while an empty, flat mind is ready to receive anything.

Marginalizing religion or ignoring some of its texts is not an effective factor in undermining terrorism. Rather, it is a key factor in responding to the violent misconceptions of terrorism. Indeed, at the level of Islamized terrorism,





ignorance of the rules of the Arabic language is among the ways of getting involved in terrorism, because such rules are a major key to understanding Islamic texts in terms of their rational message.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, those who talk about abolishing religious education, claiming that it produces terrorists, use justifications based on unscientific logic. Psychiatrist Marc Sageman, a Senior Fellow of the American Foreign Policy Research Institute, who is considered among the most important researchers who presented a numerical statistical study on the identities of Islamist terrorists, concluded that the majority of these terrorists specialized in natural sciences and that only very few of them received religious education in one form or another.<sup>29</sup>

Qadri Hanafi, professor of political psychology, tried to provide an explanation of this issue.<sup>30</sup> He argued that the preparation of students of scientific specializations does not include, throughout their years of education, a single course on logic, philosophy, history of thought, or other such topics that comprise teaching the scientific method or indicating its true origins.

Apart from this, however, we see that futile educational methods play a significant role in pushing towards violence. Education is not supposed to stuff the minds of learners with information, but rather to teach them to think. This means that the individual learns how to think in a correct, systematic way, and this will only be achieved by instilling specific values, such as interest in science and culture, acceptance of other opinions, and understanding of the relativity of earthly realities. This will produce an educated, conscious individual capable of distinguishing and addressing his problems in a correct way that does not harm his society.<sup>31</sup>



## VII. Personal Psychological Factors

Personal psychological factors also play a significant role in pushing individuals towards terrorism. The changes in psychological aspects take the form of severe illnesses or psychological disorders, whether due to genetic reasons or sudden pressures, which could be a reason for falling into the cycle of terrorism.<sup>32</sup> Many scientific studies have attributed the criminal behavior of some people to their mental, external, or psychological composition.<sup>33</sup>

A number of significant reasons in this regard include an individual's lack of ability to interact positively with unprecedented shocks such as severe illnesses or psychological fluctuations, sudden nervous pressures, or duplicity that afflicts some individuals due to prevailing societal contradictions, and to the existing gap between

the values and principles they receive and reality with all its bitterness.<sup>34</sup>

In the same context, psychological complexes play a role as well. These include, for example, acute feelings of injustice, inferiority, or marginalization. A feeling of injustice or despair may push some people to kill themselves, and even others, in order to bring about radical changes that they believe in.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, a sense of material or physical inferiority may at a certain stage turn into an acute feeling of social deficiency, due to the individual's inability to meet his life requirements, so he tries to make up for his helplessness through criminal or terrorist behavior.

The psychological fluctuations that young people experience may also lead them to the path of violence. Young people are generally the most inclined group to terrorism, due to the confusion and complexity that characterizes this stage of life, where they seek to form their identity, and to live emotional and cognitive experiences with great intensity. The failure of these ambitions and desires, whether in whole or in part, would certainly push these young people towards violence and terrorism.<sup>36</sup> More than that, a young man's mere desire to prove himself, to be distinguished, or to search for adventures where he could discover his abilities may also push him towards terrorism.

Accordingly, there is a multiplicity of personal psychological factors that contribute to the eruption of terrorism. These range between narcissism (self-love and arrogance); self- or other-directed aggression; a weak superego (control of the evil-inciting self); frustration resulting from failure to achieve goals; delusions of grandeur (an individual's false belief in his importance); delusions of persecution (an individual's belief that someone is plotting against him); and insensitivity (lack of feelings).

Destructive factors also push individuals to engage in aggressive, disruptive behavior. The German American psychologist Erich Fromm argued that with the passage of time, this behavior turns into something resembling a cult or a means to achieve ecstasy and happiness. Any individual who does not surrender to these people must be completely crushed, in line with the so-called Procrustes Complex.<sup>37</sup>

Worthy of note is that some thinkers deny the influence of these psychological motives on terrorism, for example, Jerrold Post, a specialist in political psychology and terrorism, ruled out the idea that terrorists are only individuals suffering from psychological disorders. However, other scientists believe in the opposite point of view. For instance, the English sociologist Wilson emphasized that misery and social inequality were the

main incubators of violence in the past, but that the situation has radically changed. He added that the contemporary capitalist world – with its excessive belief in democracy and freedom, and its high level of luxury, entertainment, personal awareness, and social responsibilities – leads to the loss of internal stability and the eruption of violence and terrorism.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, we believe that in our age which is teeming with challenges and pressures, any individual, whether ordinary or terrorist, suffers from psychological weaknesses that may reach or come close to the point of illness. Practical experience indicates that a considerable percentage of terrorists suffer in one way or another from some psychological defect, a weakness point, or a negative response to the facts and fluctuations of life. This does not, however, mean that they are mentally ill, even though their behavior often goes beyond the mainstream.

This betwixt-and-between state refers to individuals who are neither mentally ill nor completely healthy, and who constitute a major problem in this context, especially if they have unsafe convictions. These people cannot be committed to psychiatric institutions, nor forced to receive medical treatment, or be placed in prisons. They lead close-to-normal lives, albeit with a tinge of abnormality. At the same time, their involvement in acts of violence cannot be ruled out.

Emergency or incomplete psychological symptoms, as commonly identified, and sudden personality disorders stand out as key factors in the involvement of some people in terrorism. Likewise, mentally ill people, according to common medical standards, commit terrorist acts. Many hijacking incidents, especially in connection with airplanes, are committed by mentally ill persons or by psychopaths. Psychological and human emptiness, frustration, and despair are factors leading to terrorism, as witnessed by any individual who has experienced practical reality and lived with terrorists. The list also includes the death of conscience, destructive tendencies, and self-inflation.



## VIII. Historical Factors

Historical conflicts also have a role in pushing towards terrorism. Massacres committed by countries or groups against other countries or ethnic, national, or religious groups, which have been taking place from time immemorial, usually create deep-rooted hostilities among successive generations. This would push them to seize any available opportunity to avenge themselves and their ancestors.

Examples of historical conflicts that gave rise to violence or terrorism include, for example, the conflict between the Armenians and the Turks at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century. As a result of this conflict, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia targeted Turkish nationals and its diplomatic envoys. Examples also include the conflicts that took place between the Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, and others in more than one place; national rivalries between the Irish and the British, or between the Basques and the Spanish, or between the nationalisms that emerged after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, as is the case between the Chechens and the Russians.



## IX. Media Factors

The media undoubtedly has an enormous influence in creating and paving the way for the causes of terrorism. The media was and still is one of the most powerful weapons in the history of humanity in terms of its influence on others. Its role has increased, and its means have diversified after the amazing development that has occurred in communications and technology. The media has begun to play a role similar to, if not greater than, education, in shaping minds and consciousness.

There is an age-old relationship between the media and terrorism. Since ancient times, terrorists have deliberately selected sensitive times and places with a media impact to commit their crimes, even before the invention of the media in its advanced form and shape. Some believe that terrorism, in the final analysis, is nothing but a propaganda act.

Terrorist organizations and groups always seek to exploit the media to inflict terror, fear, and anxiety on the targeted masses by focusing on the numbers of victims, the size of material losses, and warning of an unknown future. The terrorist act does not only target the direct victim, but also seeks to deliver a message to a third party. These organizations also seek to make use of the media to obtain public support and to explain their point of view.

The interest of terrorist organizations in the media has doubled in the age of the Internet. Terrorists consider the online web as an arena of conflict, not just as a means of propaganda or information exchange, based on their belief in the so-called asymmetric warfare strategy,<sup>39</sup> which gave rise to an asymmetric media warfare that aims to use the media to reshape the arena of conflict or the battleground to obtain specific goals.

George Dietz, one of the promoters of neo-Nazism, is considered among the first to use the Internet to spread his extremist ideas. In 1983, he used the Bulletin Board systems to communicate with members and sympathizers.



One year later, in 1984, Louis Beam followed his example. Beam, who promoted the ideology of Aryan violence and was influenced by the ideas of the KKK<sup>40</sup> extremist movement created the Aryan Freedom Network website that supports his ideology.<sup>41</sup>

These two were followed by the right-wing American extremist Tom Metzger, founder of the White Aryan Resistance Movement. He established an electronic mailing group to spread his extremist ideas and communicate with his followers. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a significant increase in the number of extremist websites that spread hatred and incite terrorism.

Far-right groups were at the forefront, especially after Don Black, who belonged to the Nazi organization emanating from the KKK group in the United States of America, created the Stormfront website in 1995, which is among the websites which most incite hatred and violence.

As far as Islamist terrorism is concerned, the scene did not differ much, even though the delay in using the Internet reflected the gap in technological progress between the East and the West. Since the 1980s, Islamist terrorists have been aware of the importance of the media. This awareness was embodied in their promotion of cassette and video tapes containing materials that served their approach. At a later stage, these terrorist groups, most notably Al-Qaeda, used the Internet when they realized its importance as a new conflict arena.

ISIS, the well-known terrorist organization, went much further, as it adopted a huge and complex media system. A study conducted by the US Brookings Institute found that in the period between January 2014 and September 2016, ISIS issued approximately 845 audio and video media products, at an average rate of more than one release per day. This terrorist organization also has 29 media production outlets, some of which produce international messages and others directly address audiences in specific countries. It also uses Twitter accounts to promote messages that are designed in such a way as to primarily attract young people.<sup>42</sup>

Terrorism uses the media to convey its message, regardless of its value or legitimacy, based on the conviction that the media coverage of its activities serves as oxygen for its existence, as described by the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The media also welcomes coverage of terrorist activities because its main concern always lies in searching for dissemination and sales by responding to an innate human need, namely curiosity; that is, human beings always long to discover exciting events and run after any story to find out how and when it happened.

Therefore, the relationship between the media and terrorism is remarkably close and primarily of a psychological nature. That is, they both coexist and benefit from each other. Terrorists gain a lot from the media coverage of their activities, and the mass media also make several gains from their coverage of terrorist acts.

In this context, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that in many cases a third party interferes in the relationship between the media and terrorism, seeking to manipulate both parties or to lead either or both parties wherever it wishes. The media is sometimes pushed to focus on a particular image or to exaggerate the ugliness of a specific type of terrorism rather than other images and types.

Worthy of note is that two basic theories explain the nature of the relationship between the media and terrorism and the ultimate impact of media coverage of terrorist acts on public opinion.<sup>43</sup> First, the theory of the causal relationship between media discourse and terrorism, which holds that media coverage of terrorist activities and operations leads to their proliferation. The proponents of this theory argue for the necessity of imposing legal and preventive restrictions on mass media to prevent such coverage, claiming that resisting terrorism requires preventing its interaction with the media.

Apparently, this viewpoint addresses the relationship between the media and terrorism from a narrow angle that relies on an outdated security vision, if considered in light of the information revolution that has weakened the effectiveness of traditional government restrictions. However, the whole issue should be viewed through a comprehensive balance between the overall positive results of media freedom and its negative effects and consequences, which certainly include the benefits gained by terrorism from such freedom.

Freedom and a free media provide an opportunity for peaceful expression for all intellectual movements in a way that inevitably reduces the chances of the growth of clandestine organizations, be they moderate or extremist. Contrariwise, repression and authoritarianism create a climate conducive to the emergence of such movements, and even pushing towards adopting more negative and perhaps violent or terrorist positions. Thus, the potential benefits that terrorists may gain from the media should not be taken as a justification for restricting or undermining its freedom.

The fact that terrorism is now striking the most powerful democratic countries which give the media unlimited freedom does not refute the above-mentioned theory. In fact, the terrorist operations committed in these countries are mainly due to the absence of social justice, economic

marginalization, and duplicity in applying international standards. Even more, the freedom of media in these countries has greatly restricted the emergence of terrorist organizations, apart from their right-wing, left-wing, or Islamist affiliations.

The second theory deconstructs the nature of the relationship between the media and terrorism. It denies the existence of a causal relationship between the two sides, claiming that there is no scientific or practical evidence that the media coverage of terrorism is responsible for doubling its criminal operations. The proponents of this theory call for eliminating any restrictions on the media or any interference in its performance of its mission, whether in connection with terrorism or other issues.

These proponents further add that blocking terrorists from the media is responsible for increasing their violence. That is, when a terrorist fails to deliver his message to his target audience through the media, he perpetrates and repeats terrorist operations, uses more horrific methods, and selects places and times that enable him to inflict greater damage to make the most benefit from his violent message. To support their point of view, the advocates of this theory quote a terrorist who once said: "If by throwing flowers in public squares we can inform our target audience of our cause, we would immediately stop throwing explosives."

Apart from these theoretical debates, the status quo asserts that terrorist operations have already led most governments to impose restrictions on the media. Some governments closed the door altogether and others resorted to partial restrictions. Some governments also created the so-called counter-media or electronic brigades that respond to and question any statements using various methods.

A third team<sup>44</sup> tries to combine the two theories to express a situation that is closest to reality. The media coverage of terrorism is not necessarily or always linked to a cause-and-effect relationship, nor can we categorically separate one from the other. There is a relationship of some kind between the media and terrorism, and their interactions and outcomes are governed by the surrounding societal conditions. Media freedom cannot be understood as a cause of terrorism. Rather, its absence is most likely to be among its causes, as violence spreads more in closed societies that are not open to other opinions.

At the same time, however, we cannot overlook the point that the media coverage and treatment of terrorist issues has a significant impact on building public opinion, whether in support, sympathy, or rejection. Terrorist organizations and their supporters undoubtedly seek to benefit from the media, whether through methods they deliberately

use or through their exploitation of media mistakes or consequences that are nearly impossible to avoid.

The media, through its traditional or advanced means, contributes in one way or another to creating or preparing some of the causes of terrorism, or assists in forcing them out of their hiding places. The media conducts this task either deliberately through its activities, or unintentionally as a result of the consequences of its performance of its mission, or even through exploitation of its vast channels, potentials, and freedoms by terrorist groups.

The media is a mirror for all societies. It is the means that reflects and externalizes the political, social, cultural, and economic motives we have discussed in this study. People would consequently interact with these motives, either naturally, or in a way that pushes them towards violence and terrorism. In the latter case, the media cannot be held accountable, for it is only performing its role, even though this role may unintentionally contribute to igniting already hurt feelings.

Furthermore, if the media coverage of terrorist incidents fails to be professional and objective, it can help terrorists to gain the sympathy of some people, and even to convince such people to become part of their deviant approach, and probably to join their ranks at a later time. The media thus is required to cover these events without giving the individuals involved in them the opportunity to appear as heroes or victims, and yet without prejudice to the right of people to know the truth.

In any case, the role of the media in creating terrorism cannot be ignored. The media that creates deviant feelings and behaviors, especially among young people, certainly contributes, albeit indirectly, to supporting terrorism. Likewise, the media that is controlled by trivial figures and hypocrites who spread lies and scandals would create empty souls that could be exploited by the proponents of extremist beliefs or fatal ideologies.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the media that gives a wide scope to deviant and extremist religious or secular concepts prepares people for violence and counter-violence. They stand out as two sides of the same coin or two channels that flow into one source to feed extremists and terrorists.

The media machine that apparently and unequivocally abuses Islam and its sanctities, in violation of all moral principles, values and norms, under the pretext of freedom<sup>46</sup> or enlightenment, would spread a culture of hatred and create a state of terror among the public. It would also intensify the phenomenon of Islamophobia with all its violent repercussions.<sup>47</sup>

The influence of the Internet and other electronic means, which have been transformed by terrorist organizations into stand-alone media, has become similar, if not superior to, many official or traditional media, thus contributing to the causes of terrorism.

It should be highlighted in this context that such advanced means, together with their tools and channels



through which terrorism spreads its ideologies, can be considered as alternative or substitutive methods for the direct communication that used to occur in the past between the advocates of terrorism and their polarization circles. These methods also play other roles, particularly in recruitment, training, and financing, as well as other organizational acts of terrorism.

In general, it can safely be said that as the media is part of the problem, it is also part of the solution. It is required not only to avoid the negative aspects of the media, but also to establish an integrated, systematic vision that prevents its performance of its mission in covering and analyzing terrorist activities from becoming a kind of promotion of these activities. To achieve this purpose, the media is required to criticize, refute, and highlight the hidden aspects of terrorist agendas and plans. Worthy of note is

that a major aspect of the influence that terrorists wish to achieve depends primarily on the media.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, it is important for us to realize that terrorism will not succeed in achieving its goals permanently or continuously. Terrorism may threaten, irritate, weaken, advance, or partially win, but, in any case, it cannot go beyond these effects. Its inevitable fate will certainly be defeat and failure. However, to be able to achieve this result, we need to improve our reading of its motives and to diagnose and address its causes in such a way as to limit, if not to eradicate, their impact. In so doing, we need the assistance of established scientific principles and pure realistic experiences. This is the message and the lessons always taught and repeated by history but overlooked by its proponents or perhaps deliberately ignored out of misguided passion.

## ► End Notes

1. Fighting or combating differs from countering terrorism; the act of combating implies that we are fighting a clear enemy and that we are aware of his positions, plans, methods, and weapons. In this context, it would be appropriate to use security forces. Countering terrorism, on the other hand, is a prior stage to combating, as it is concerned with prevention before repression, and with searching for a clandestine enemy hiding behind legitimate or illegitimate manifestations (Muhammad Munis Muhib al-Din, *Modernizing Counter-Terrorism Devices and Developing Their Methods*. Riyadh: Naif University for Security Sciences, 2006, p. 113).
2. Khalil Al-Anani. *Political Islam: Phenomenon and Concept*. Cairo: International Center for Future and Strategic Studies, 2007, pp. 18 et seq.
3. Khaled Hanafi Ali. "Countering Globalized Terrorism and Building Alternative Mindsets." Cairo, *International Political Journal*, no. 217, (Theoretical Trends Supplement), Al-Ahram, July 2019, p. 3.
4. Heba Raouf Ezzat. "After the State and Before the Middle Ages." Cairo, *Al-Dimokratia Magazine*, Issue no. 58, April 2015, Al-Ahram, p. 11.
5. At a certain stage in the 1990s, terrorist figures deliberately attempted to push individuals whom they failed to recruit to be held on suspicion by the police in order to be exposed to security procedures which would break their resistance and motivate them to join these terrorist organizations.
6. Abdel Bari Atwan. *The Islamic State: Roots, Monstrosity, and the Future*. Lebanon: Dar Al-Saqi, 2015, p. 102.
7. Sarah Abdel Aziz Salem. "The Effects of Economic Globalization on Terrorist Motives." Cairo, *Al Siyassa Al Dawliya Magazine*, Issue no. 217, (Theoretical Trends Supplement), Al-Ahram, July 2017, pp. 19-20.
8. Magdy Sobhi. "On the Relationship between the Economy and Violence." Cairo, *Al-Dimokratia Magazine*, Issue no. 67, Al-Ahram, July 2017, p. 53
9. Alan B. Krueger & Jitka Maleckova. *Education, Poverty, Political Violence & Terrorism*.
10. Muhammad Al-Mutawali. *Strategic Planning in Countering International Terrorist Crimes*. Kuwait University, 2006, p. 442.
11. Khudair Yassin Al-Ghanimi. "The Phenomenon of International Terrorism." Iraq, *Ahl al-Bayt University Magazine*, Issue no. 16, p. 307.
12. Samir Morcos. "Confronting Ideologies of Violence." Cairo, *Al-Dimokratia Magazine*, Issue no. 67, Al-Ahram, 2017, p. 38.
13. Azza Hashem. "Psychological and Cognitive Characteristics: The Globalized Terrorist." Cairo, *Al Siyassa Al Dawliya Magazine*, Issue no. 217, (Theoretical Trends Supplement), Al-Ahram, July 2019, p. 25.
14. Walid Kasser Al-Zaidi. *Extremist Islamism in Europe*. Beirut: Arab Research Center, 2017, p. 33.
15. Beliefs that define the individual's identity and personality and make him part of the group to which he belongs.
16. I believe that no society can completely banish the idea of religion from its life. Realistic evidence, even in the most secular of countries, refers to examples such as the requirement that the president should belong to a specific religion or sect, or adherence to religious rituals in the inauguration of presidents and kings. The whole issue lies only in setting the society free from religious taboos in terms of behavior, but the roots of religion remain established deep within all individuals and societies.
17. Hamdi Abdel Rahman. "The Geology of Violent Extremism in Africa and the Crisis of the Mainstream Cognitive Model." Cairo, *Al-Dimokratia Magazine*, Issue no. 67, Al-Ahram, 2017, pp. 67-68.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

19. Bertrand Badie. Culture and Politics. Paris: Economica, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1993, p. 159.
20. Opinions, beliefs, and philosophies in which a people, party, or group believes.
21. Diaan Hosni. "Terrorism in the West between the Radicalism of Islam and the Islamization of Radicalism." Cairo, Al-Dimokratia Magazine, Issue no. 67, Al-Ahram, 2017, p. 64.
22. Amr Al-Shoubaki. "Transformations of Violent Groups and the Challenges of New Terrorism." Cairo, Al-Dimokratia Magazine, Issue no. 67, Al-Ahram, 2017, p. 44.
23. John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed. Who Speaks for Islam? Cairo, Dar Al-Shorouk, 2004, p. 193.
24. Shibl Badran. Civic Education. Cairo: Maktabat Al-Usra, 2009, p. 30.
25. Al-Sayyid Yassin. Reinventing Politics from Modernity to Globalization. Cairo: Maktabat Al-Usra, 2006, p. 125.
26. Abdul Wahab Al-Mesiri. Comprehensive Secularism and Partial Secularism. Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 2002, p. 134.
27. The expression "war of ideas and minds" was coined by Paul Wolfowitz, the former US Deputy Secretary of Defense, in 2002.
28. Some of the leaders of the radical Islamist group Jama'at al-Muslimin, known in the media as Takfir wal-Hijra, used to stress the fact that they had joined the Group due to their wrong understanding of the linguistic content of a prophet's hadith (tradition), and that they later abandoned the Group on the basis of the same hadith, once they became aware of its correct linguistic meaning.
29. Qadri Hanafi. "Relationship between Extremism and Terrorism." Al-Dimokratia Magazine, Issue no. 67, Al-Ahram, July 2017, pp. 34-35
30. Ibid., p. 35.
31. Hassan Bakr. Political Violence in Egypt. Cairo: Maktabat Al-Usra, 2005, p. 207.
32. Fath al-Rahman Yusuf Abd al-Rahman. Prominent Causes of the Phenomenon of Terrorism: A Sociological Analysis." SMT Center for Studies ([www.smtcenter.net](http://www.smtcenter.net)), dated March 27, 2017.
33. Al-Ghanimi, loc. cit.
34. Bakr, op. cit., p. 253.
35. A study on terrorism issued by the United Nations in 1997.
36. "Summary of Book Research" (125). Psychology of Terrorism :Individuals and Terrorist Groups. Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Center, 2017
37. The legendary Greek blacksmith who used to kidnap passersby and place them onto an iron bed of fixed length. If they were too tall for the bed, he would cut off their legs, but if they were shorter, he would stretch them until they fit. In both cases, the kidnapped people would fall victim to a specific vision. Even if they escaped death because of this incident, they would always live disfigured as a result of being subjected to obey a vision of which they are not aware.
38. Yusuf Abd al-Rahman, loc. Cit.
39. Heinz Dinter defines asymmetric warfare as operations aimed at exploiting the opponent's weaknesses without entering into a traditional conflict; that is, army versus army (Mohamed El-Guindy. Into the Labyrinth of Terrorism. Cairo: Arab Nile Group, 2020, p. 81).
40. An acronym of "Ku Klux Klan," an extremist right-wing movement with a long history dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States; it was known for its use of violence and terrorism.
41. Ibid., p. 74
42. Muhammad Kamal. "Terrorism and the Media." [www.hafryat.com](http://www.hafryat.com), dated November 21, 2017.
43. Bassiouni Hamada. "Terrorism and Media Discourse." Conference on Development, Terrorism and Security in the Middle East, Cairo University, December 2007, pp. 11 et seq.
44. Ibid., pp. 13-14
45. Those that lost their roots, identity, and cultural value.
46. The concept of freedom as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not at all compatible with the current misbehaviors against religions. Freedom in fact means that an individual has the right to do anything he wants but on condition that he does not harm others. This rule is consistent with a similar Islamic concept based on the principle of "Injury may not be met by injury." Freedom in Islam is guaranteed so long as it maintains religion and morals, but if it infringes on this obligation, it becomes an act of aggression that has to be stopped.
47. Jalaluddin Muhammad Saleh. Ideological Terrorism: Forms and Practices. Riyadh: Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, 2008, pp. 39-40.
48. A working paper entitled "The Position of Egyptian Journalists on the Issuance of the Counter-terrorism Law" presented by Al-Jumhuriya Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies.

