

## Understanding Terrorism: A Review of the Psychosocial Theories



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**Abstract** *Terrorism is a cause of uncertainty, fear, and damage for a country. Mostly represented stereotypically, terrorists are the reason for civil unrest worldwide. However, there are different approaches to describe the personality traits of a terrorist still this matter is highly debatable. This study aims to address terrorism from a psycho-social perspective. By describing the background dynamics of terrorism, the researchers extensively discussed the Social and Psychological reasons for adapting terrorism. The researchers discussed it in the light of different theories proposed by renowned psychologists and sociologists worldwide. Therefore, it is concluded that the psychological images of terrorists tend to reinforce social narratives which further lead to the creation of certain stereotyped attributions. In this regard, highlighting the adaptation of terrorism in the context of behaviorism can be of greater pertinence to effectively counteract this civil unrest.*

**Key Words:** Terrorism; Social Cognitive Approach; Behaviorism; Stereotyping; Symbolization

### Introduction

Trying to come to grips with the phenomenon of terrorism is like disentangling a complex web of multifarious factors linked through an uncertain, somewhat blurred, series of weft and woof. The image of the terrorist is usually shadowed in popular prejudices and stereotypes. Richard. E. Rubenstein stated that:

*“Historically, the figure of the black-coated anarchist with his bomb became an identity of the sinister. Since then, the image of terrorists has altered from time to time. For instance, in western countries now, terrorists someone who is an Arab, wearing headdress and carrying a rifle or a grenade. However, still, the image of a terrorist remained questionable for many of us, scaring us in the subconscious” (Rubenstein, 1987)*

Stereotypes produce powerful mental images that feed ‘perception’ and in the absence of a direct link with facts, these images reverse the logic of context. ‘Reality’ emerges from the stereotypes and not from a historical chain of events linked through a causal relationship. In reality, the terrorist may not be much different from our guy-next-door (at least to begin with). What made him into a terrorist is a question that must be asked. Why do ordinary men transform into hijackers, assassins, and suicide bombers? Is there anything that we may conveniently describe as a terrorist personality with a loosely standardized emotional, thinking, and behavioral pattern? Can we somehow trace a genuine sociological and psychological evolutionary path that

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ends in a death wish? Are political and ideological reasons valid enough to describe this evolutionary zigzag? Is a Palestinian suicide bomber any different from a Tamil belt-bomb girl? We may naturally find out that they are, as far as their ideological motives are concerned. However, would they have been any different if somehow, they were made to change places with everything else remaining constant?

The best way to start looking for answers is to dig into the social and psychological traits of a terrorist. There, under huge debris of accumulated ideological, political, religious, and national imaginings, we may still find a mound of personal frustrations and failed aspirations. Moreover, we have to draw linkages between the terrorist's person, his cause, and the process leading him toward the taking up of a particular cause. In such a chronology the worth of a terrorist's early environment, and its effect on his personality, becomes starkly visible. What cause he takes up is of equal importance, but is more like an 'effect' in a causal relationship. How does he become a terrorist, or, put in another way, what course does he follow from being a man-in-the-street to an 'evil-doer' provides the missing link without which we can never come to grips with the phenomenon of terrorism?

### **Conceptual Framework A Psychological Perspective**

One can refer to some basic socio-psychological hypotheses relevant to the shaping of a terrorist personality. One such hypothesis is the "Frustration –Aggression Model" proposed by Freud and later developed. The model highlighted the gap between rising expectations and need satisfaction throwing up the angry-young-man so readily exploited by radical groups. Similarly, the "Negative identity" hypothesis, which somewhat coincides with the Frustration-Aggression model, suggests that failed aspirations lead the terrorist into taking up a negative-identity involving a vindictive rejection of the role considered desirable by the society. (Zinchenko, 2009) Furthermore, the 'Narcissistic rage' hypothesis proposed that reality testing of the 'grandiose-self' can lead to a narcissistic defeat (injury) prompting a desire to destroy the source of that injury. Such an injury produces a failure to integrate the 'good' and the 'bad' parts of the 'self' that are instead split into the 'me' and the 'not me'. Such personalities are easily drawn to terrorist groups with an "us-versus-them" outlook.

Here this psychological discourse is based on a logical assumption. In addition to being a social animal dependent on social relationships, man is also a psychological being dependent on psychological ties. Both these paramount needs lead to a societal organization centered on groups. It is in man's interaction with these groups that a personality emerges. An individual's need for psychological ties is based on his desire to reduce uncertainty about himself "This is attributed with our need of social recognition." (Lumsden, 1983) The quest for identity is inexorably linked to his participation in and linkages with, traditional groups such as the family, the peer group, and the tribe. In a changing world where traditional groups may be falling apart, the search for identity becomes problematic. Where this search continues to hit blind alleys, the society (or the changing society) is blamed. The psychological need to identify with something--- anything--- lingers on. A natural desire to return to an earlier imagined society throws the individual into the lap of non-traditional groups who share his 'perspective'. One doesn't need a lot of imagination to deduce that most such groups are inherently prone to violence (and terrorism) being naturally disposed of, as they are, towards arresting change (or, to put it in another way, to change 'change').

Once inside these non-traditional groups, the individual is hijacked by their strict norms, disciplines, and violent objectives. Such groups survive on their cohesiveness, the desire for which engenders a 'group think'. The groupthink takes over where the individuals need to gain group conformity that is fundamentally important for solving his identity-crisis overshadows the extreme objectives of his newly found refuge. Here the rationale is invented and legitimized through a rhetorical self-justification. This is done because the individual needs the sense of belonging and the feeling of self-importance that the group-structure offers. It is also because he identifies with the goals of the group. Whether this identification with the goals of the group begins before or after one joins the group depends upon the socialization processes of the individuals and differs

on a case-by-case basis. However, inside the goals of the terrorist group become paramount for reasons discussed earlier. In many instances, the Machiavellian ends-means argument so crucial to the development of a semblance of legitimacy becomes the central focus, even of religiously motivated groups.

Therefore, all this makes it necessary to study the terrorists' 'perception' of reality involving a review of concepts such as 'belief-systems', 'discourse-communities', 'perspectives', 'narratives', and 'mindsets'. Stereotypes are one of the many sources that facilitate the development of one's perception through symbolic imagery that is processed by the cognitive processes of the mind. Cognition is the general process by which individuals come to know about and make sense of the world. Thus, to understand terrorist behavior, we need to look at what is called The Social Cognitive Theory, which theorized that an individual's mental activities as important determinants of behavior. The Social Cognitive Theory provides the necessary tools to interpret terrorist behavior. It facilitates our understanding of the development of perspectives, both the terrorist and of those who oppose them.

In Freud's view, all behavior comes out from two different and opposite instinct groups, the death and growth instinct, and the life instincts. The former pushes towards destruction and the latter enhances life. The energy of the life instincts is 'LIBIDO' which involves mainly sex and related activities. The death instincts, however, can be directed 'inward' in the form of suicide or self-destructive behavior or 'outward' in the form of aggression. Thus, in Freud's view, our actions are determined by inner forces and impulses, often operating below the level of consciousness.

The Social Learning Theory (SLT) and the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) step in to resolve the deadlock. These suggest that behavior is molded by internal cognitive processes that not only valuable experience but also interact 'expectantly' with the future that has yet not come to pass. Human action thus assumes a natural subjectivity without which, it is impossible to formulate a relationship between the past and the future. We suggest putting 'terrorism' in this context and deriving a framework for a model of terrorism that already exists (hegemony versus counter-hegemony) but one which lacks a theoretical skeleton. Within such a framework, we hope to conclude that terrorism can never be explained appropriately either as an ideological outburst or as naked Freudism. Moreover, the 'balancing-act' has to be balanced itself by reducing the confusion that such an endeavor will naturally bring forth.

### The Social Cognitive Theory

The SLT (Social Learning Theory) stemmed from the SCT (Social Cognitive Theory), its background is rich and can be dated back to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the beginning, the SLT work was published at the start of 1960 by Albert Bandura. He later through his *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* book launched the SCT officially.

The origin of this theory was in the psychology discipline and the psychologists and behavioral laid its foundation, which is a combination of the theories of psychology explaining "why animals and people behave the way that they do".

### Overview of the Current SLT Perspective

Now, there are many sub-theories based on the principles of social learning. A unidirectional and direct pathway between response and stimulus is supported by strict behaviorism and it represents the behavior of humans as the simplest reactions to external stimulus. According to SLT, between response and stimulus, there is a mediator that places the control of individuals over behavioral response towards stimuli.

- The punishment or reward consequences affect the likelihood that a human will repeat the same behavior in a specific situation. This principle is also shared by classical behaviorists.
- People not only learn from the activities; they are participating but also through observing other people also known as vicarious learning.

- Individuals are most likely to model behavior observed by others they identify with. Identification with others is a function of the degree to which a person is perceived to be similar to one's self, in addition to the degree of emotional attachment that is felt toward an individual. ([Bandura, 1986](#)).

The Social Learning Theory of Bandura mostly focuses on cognitive concepts. It focuses on how adults and children operate cognitively on their experiences of society and then how their development and behavior is influenced. Bandura changes the name of SLT to SCT (Social Cognitive Theory) in 1986. It was due to the description he was defending since the 1960s. ([Bandura, 1986](#)) The change was also an effort to differentiate himself from the behaviorist approach.

## Overview of the Social Cognitive Theory

This theory explains the behavior of humans as reciprocal, dynamic, and triadic interaction of personal environment, behavior, and factors. The social cognitive theory upholds the behaviorist notion that response consequences mediate behavior, it contends that behavior is largely regulated antecedently through cognitive processes. Besides, the SCT posits that most behavior is learned vicariously. The strong emphasis of SLT on someone's cognition shows that the mind is an active force that constructs a person's expectations, values-based behavior, and reality and imposes structure on his action. The reality of a person is formed by the interaction of cognition and environment through reciprocity and feedback.

## Key Constructs

### Reciprocal Determinism

The Social Cognitive Theory explains behavior in terms of a triadic, dynamic, and reciprocal interaction of the environment, personal factors, and behavior. The person-behavior interaction involves the bi-directional influences of one's thoughts, emotions, and biological properties, and one's actions. For example, a person's expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and intentions give shape and direction to behavior. However, the behavior that is carried out will then affect one's thoughts and emotions. A bi-directional interaction also occurs between the environment and personal characteristics. In this process, human expectations, beliefs, and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social influences and physical structures within the environment. These social influences can convey information and activate emotional reactions through such factors as modeling, instruction, and social persuasion.

Inherent within the notion of reciprocal determinism is the concept that people can influence their destiny, while at the same time recognizing that people are not free agents of their own will. Within this SCT perspective, humans are characterized in terms of five basic and unique capabilities: symbolizing, vicarious, forethought, self-regulatory, self-reflective.

([Bandura, 1986](#)) These capabilities provide humans with cognitive means by which to determine behavior.

### Symbolizing Capability

According to Bandura symbols are the thought's mechanism. Human being for their experiences and give meaning through the combination of symbols like words and images. Humans can also store knowledge in their memory for future behavioral guidance through the capability of forming symbols.

The mechanism of solving cognitive problems and foresight actions engagement are also possible through symbols. It is through *foresight* that one can think through the consequences of behavior without actually performing the behavior.

### Vicarious Capability

This process shows that the human learns from the observation of others as well as from direct

experience. “*Observational learning* allows one to develop an idea of how a new behavior is formed without actually performing the behavior oneself”. ([Bandura, 1986](#))

### Self-Regulatory Capability

Self-regulation is an internal control mechanism that governs what behavior is performed. Self-regulation is extremely important because it allows the gradual substitution of internal controls for external controls of behavior.

Self-regulation occurs through the interplay of self-produced and external sources of influence, including motivational standards and social and moral standards. Through evaluative *self-reactions* (such as self-approval or self-reprimand) internalized morals and standards can regulate conduct. For example, if a person internalizes the notion that stealing is bad, then he will impose self-sanctions to keep his conduct in line with this internal standard.

### Self-Reflective Capability

Self-reflection enables people to analyze their experiences, think about their thought processes, and alter their thinking accordingly. One of the most important types of self-reflection is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a type of self-reflective thought that affects one's behavior. According to the SCT, people develop perceptions about their abilities and characteristics that subsequently guide their behavior by determining what a person tries to achieve and how much effort they will put into their performance.

### The Memory of Terrorism: Conflicting Images and Competing Realities

The idea that individuals selectively interact with the environment is crucial to our understanding of the development of a ‘perspective’ our view of the world, of ourselves, of others, and our relations with others. Central to the development of perspectives is man's cognitive capability of symbolizing. The SCT theorizes that human beings store information in their minds through symbols that epitomize certain values. Symbolizing also facilitates individuals to engage in foresightful behavior where ‘expectancy’, rather than actual outcomes, has more worth. By extension, we can say that a suicide bomber expects not to die (the logical outcome of suicide) but rather to live forever in a world that would be quite different than the one which has given him so much misery, both materially and socially. However, for him to take such a decision would be impossible without repetitive ‘feedback’, usually from a ‘significant other’ people whose person and ideas one respect. These ‘significant others may vary from one's parents to peers, to the traditional ‘Maulvi’ in a rural setup, to a revolutionary hero. Beyond that, individuals can be mobilized to act by other ‘less significant others’ who, by transfer, identify their ideas and teachings with real ‘significant others’ dugout from history. The suicide bomber is convinced of fighting a ‘just war’ against an infidel (or an infidel state or society) for which he ‘expects’ a handsome reward.

The terrorist's perspective about the world is not the same as civil society or governments do. Their strategies and response towards government policies are determined with the help of their belief system. Terrorist's actions are not based on objective reality but the subjective interpretations of the world. The variables of their belief system consist of their internal dynamics of their clandestine groups, cultural traditions, social and political environments. Even if these variables have objective roots, their selective admixture gives rise to a subjectivity that produces an individual reality ‘outside’ of contemporary society; a reality opposed to constitutionalism, cultural erosion, economic scarcity, religious bankruptcy, and imperialist hegemony. The subjectivity lies in their desire to return to a utopian condition that seeks to deconstruct history with irrational interpretations of events. But then again, this is what we call perspective. The people involved in terrorism may not act rationally although their convictions look delusional or irrational for society. As far as he is concerned, his interpretation of reality-his perspective- is more objective than all other alternative perspectives.

In this way, the terrorist sees the whole world through the narrow eyes of their ideology, whether it be Islamic fundamentalism, nationalism, anarchism, Leninism, or Marxism. Each ideology is ridden with symbolic imagery that facilitates the internalization process as the mind, according to the social cognitive theory, stores information that way. ([Rubenstein, 1987](#)).

If we refer to terrorism as politically motivated, we may be able to explain a large number of terrorist actions around the globe from the Middle East to Africa, to Latin America. But how are we going to explain Al-Qaida whose global mission against 'western imperialism' is as real as the rubble of the 'twin towers'. The mission transcends the political logic of the nation-state and engineers a discourse Huntington would be too happy to recommend. Islamic fundamentalism, as opposed to Islamism, has a history of disinterestedness for genuinely political discourse, focusing instead on the glory of Islam. Islamic fundamentalists believe that they are the very symbol of Islam rather than an individual and of the good life it offers as a belief system. Notice the first thing a 'Tablighi' will tell his audience: "the age of the prophets is over, now it is 'our' duty to spread the message of Allah". He does not act simply as an individual but as a modern-day messenger. He is not just another Muslim but a 'missionary' with the self-assumed task of spreading the word that comes from the Heavens and with which he has closer ties than the rest of humanity. He is not just an individual but the very symbol of a way of life. Similar psychology is at work in the case of, for instance, the finished product that we call the Al-Qaida terrorist. He is assured of paradise, just like the 'Tablighi' who engages in a 'passive jihad' by spreading the message. He hastens towards that end, sometimes by taking his own life, in an 'active jihad' against the infidel. He is convinced of not dying -- the expected outcome overrides logical outcomes. Symbols never die. Instead, they become legendary images eulogized in popular discourse, ensuring greatness for the 'martyr' in this world and the next. Just as he never forgot his heroes, so will posterity naturally remember him. The traditional cost-benefit analysis does not work here, for the fundamentalist 'terrorist' has only his material 'life' to trade for everlasting glory-- a thought that satiates both his material love for greatness as well as his altruistic religious appetite.

For many in the Muslim world, the good life was that which was taught in the classroom -- the desert; the Muslim armies on horseback; the caliph in Medina, Baghdad, and Constantinople; Umar R.A, Ali R.A, Khalid-bin-Walid, Tariq-bin-Ziyad; Gabriel descending with the divine text; MUHAMMAD (PBUH) in Hira; the 'good' defeating the 'bad' at Badr; the triumphant entry into Mecca; the conquest of Persia, Byzantium, Egypt and Spain; Saladin, Umar Mukhtar, and Tipu Sultan. These images are then juxtaposed with others less gratifying -- Western armies conquering Muslim lands; the Mughal empire crumbling; the Caliph being dispossessed in Turkey; traditional texts replaced with Europeans textbooks; the slums of Cairo; the ruins of Beirut; Israeli army in Jerusalem; American troops in Arabia; western industrial models uprooting Muslim populations; western media eroding traditional cultures and lifestyles; the bombing of Tripoli, Baghdad, and Afghanistan; and the list of images go on and on to taint collective Muslim memory.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism has been interpreted in several ways. Some regard it as a reaction to the failure of nationalist regimes that replaced the colonial masters. Others regard it as an expression of discontent emanating from unequal economic development following west-type imitative industrial policies. Still, others regard it as a consequence of the pseudo-secular drive of nationalist governments. A few see it as a form of nativism naturally encapsulated in an Islamic vocabulary as the displaced traditional cultures, tribal as they were, had strong affinities with an Islamic heritage. Most of these causes, however, as few analysts rightly believe, describe the rise of Islamism -- an essentially political discourse that seeks to center the role of Islam in the 'modern state'. Islamism, in other words, compromised on the traditional Islamic political concept of the Ummah. Whatever the jargon, it sought an Islamic state within the contemporary reality of the nation-state system. Such 'nationalization' of Islam left a void in the traditional Islamic discourse centered on the Ummah. ([Sayyid, 1997](#))

The dismemberment of the Caliphate inflamed the desire to 're-imagine' the Ummah. Until then, the Ummah somehow existed in the embodiment of the Caliph, howsoever weak and howsoever inexplicable his institutional identity was in the era of nationalism. He was still the

symbol of an Ummah long lost and buried under the sands of time. Nonetheless, the discourse of Islamism was inherently incapable of clearly articulating the Ummah, preoccupied as it was with an Islamic discourse whose realistic aspirations were tied to the concept of an Islamic state (as opposed to an extra-national Ummah). Islamic fundamentalism, on the other hand, had a discourse, which was similar to that of Islamism but whose priorities were different. From the very onset, it was an a-political movement preoccupied with the private lives of individuals that composed the nation of Islam. When the needs of time forced the movement to temporarily shun its political apathy, the movement chose to go with the status-quo and not against it. Islamism, on the other hand, was genuinely a political movement and was genuinely anti-status quo. It was the failure of Islamism to fill the void left by the fall of the caliphate, that allowed Islamic fundamentalist movements to assume a role they had never aspired for. It led to what Olivier Roy terms neo-fundamentalism. (Roy, 1994) Neo-fundamentalism became a political force, only by accident. The rise of the Taliban is one good example (Rashid, 2000). Beyond that, in the shape of Al-Qaida, it assumed the global mission of re-imagining the historical legacy of the Ummah.

### Terrorism: Hegemony Versus Counter-Hegemony

In a 1979 talk “American Media and Foreign Policy” Noam Chomsky said that ‘any society which is sufficiently powerful to be an active agent in international affairs will develop a system of beliefs and doctrines of a quasi-theological character’ and a state-religion that will perform the function of disguising the ‘motivation that lies behind actions in the international arena’. This, he opined, is substantiated by the historical record:

The British Empire had its White Man’s Burden. The French empire had its civilizing mission, and the United States’ imperial system has had its system of doctrines which all have to do with the unique benevolence of the United States, its unique role as the only society in world history that does not act on the material interests of ruling groups but rather out of commitments to abstract ideals such as freedom, Wilsonian Ideals, and so on. (Chomsky, 1987)

America’s ‘War on Terrorism’ has evoked the same Wilsonian ‘system of doctrines’ as the one evoked during WWI, WWII, and the Cold War. The United States is again pitted against an ‘evil’ force that seeks to undermine its benevolent ideals-- liberty, equality, fraternity.

Here is how one author describes the image of the Native Americans as it is usually portrayed in Western movies:

*“White canvas-covered wagons roll forward in a column. White men, in their horses, rise easily up and down the lines of wagons.... The wagons circle. Fires are built, guards set. From within this warm and secure circle, at the center of the plains, the white men (white cameras) stare out. There, in the enveloping darkness, on the peripheries of human existence, at dawn or dusk, hooting or screeching, from nowhere, like maggots, swarming, naked, painted, burning and killing, for no reason, like animals they would come. The men touch their gun handles... with good cover and better machines.... They will simply mow them down. Wipe them out. Nothing human is involved. It’s a matter of self-defense, no more. Extermination can be the only answer.”* (Engelhardt, 1987)

Such a paradigm, Engelhardt further writes, “forces us to flip history on its head, it makes the intruder exchange places in our eyes with the one intruded upon. It is an Indian in these films that must invade, intrude, break in upon the circle – a circle that contains all those whom the films have already certified as human”. The viewer identifies with those in the circle, an identification which is further cemented when, through clever camera angles, the audience is moved behind the barrel of the “white man’s” gun. It is from this position that he “receives a picture history of western colonialism and imperialism”. He naturally feels no sympathy for the enemy as they fall before his fire. “Within this cinematic structure, the opportunity for such sympathy simply ceases to exist. Such an approach not only transforms invasion into an act of self-defense, but it also prepares the audience for the acceptance of genocide”. (Lazere, 1987)

On September 11, the very same circle was broken. This time the American audience did not need a film although there had been many involving the Arab (or the Islamic) terrorist to accept the genocide that followed in Afghanistan or which may, yet again, happen in Iraq. And whatever reservations there are in the minds of the few are readily dispelled by a simple theory: "We may not always be right, but we are human. By any standards, they are not". Not even the extreme measures adopted by the 'suicide bombers' evoke any serious reflection on their professed aims or objectives 'They' kill themselves not because they strongly believe in something but simply because they have no regard for human life.

*"For those of us still wondering why the Palestinian suicide bomber does not arouse the same sympathies that we (Muslims) experience – on a human level, at least -- the above imagery may have some clues. The Palestinian is not human. He has the same inhuman 'inexplicable desire for death, disorder, and destruction". His inhumanity has something to do with his non-whiteness. He deserves extermination. It is that much better that he took his own life. He should have never broken the 'circle': Such a systematic abuse of the minds of the American audience by American institutions and Media is reflected in Lieutenant Colley's trial plea after the My lai massacre: "nobody ever told us they were human". (Carey, 1987)*

No wonder, Hollywood movies couldn't signify his presence on the big screen. He is somewhere out there but beyond the pale of civilization. He is outside the 'circle' that is threatened by his inhuman presence. The circle has to be protected to save civilization. Extermination becomes self-defense. Notice the proliferation of alien-attack movies in recent times. Humanity (often portrayed as white men) always bounces back and saves the world. In the context of the American media, we can identify this with the same 'breaking the circle' and 'protecting the circle' mentality. On another level, we can also interpret this as signifying US leadership in the world. On yet another level, we can read from it the desire to promote the very same system of doctrines that Chomsky has identified in several of his works. (Chomsky, 1989)

Another convention built by the media is to show that no matter how much the white race is divided amongst itself, it always poses a 'United front' against other societies and civilizations. The Yankees and the confederates uniting to fight off an Indian attack, American and European generals uniting to repulse the aliens from another galaxy (here, the absence of non-white leaders and generals is significant). This type of portrayal has two racial lessons expected by the audience. Firstly, the presence of non-human beings and incomprehensible bring out "what is human in every man". The West theoretically marks the fraternity, equality, and individual dignity to focus on the expense of alien beings. Secondly, the implicit statement that "in a pinch, and white is a step up from the rest of the world".

"They may be rapists, murderers, and mother-snatchers, but they are ours." (Engelhardt, 1987) Thus, when the westerner sees a terrorist conspiring to destroy humanity and civilization (his humanity and civilization) his automatic reaction would be to castigate the Arab, though the terrorist may be a nonwhite in a suit and a tie. The news-media, through repetitive broadcasting (which is its need), further strengthens these images, reinforcing the stereotype that the west has known for ages. Some apologists may hold that the news-media has to engineer 'sensationalism' to continue as a viable profit-making organization. However, sensationalism can only be allowed within the parameters of the ideals of those who own it and the stereotypes of those (the western audiences) whose support they require to continue functioning as a viable entity.

Having said all that, one still has to find a paradigm to fit both the Huntington model and that of the nation-state. Only such a paradigm can explain the modern-day crusading Islamic fundamentalist terrorism and western racial biases on the one hand, and the US-Saudi partnership on the other. That is a difficult task for the simple reason that it seeks to combine. The nation-state is still the focal point of international affairs. Even during the height of the cold war, America propped up regimes and organizations with opposite ideological leanings as it was in the interest of the American nation. It continues to hold strong ties with countries like Saudi Arabia at the height of its 'crusade' against Islamic fundamentalism. Further, most terrorism that occurs around the globe is nationalist, no matter how outwardly Islamic it might profess to be. For the most part,



most Islamic resurgence movements in the past twenty-three years have adapted themselves to the logic of the nation-state. Al-Qaida is an anomaly in the sense that it poses a global (extra-national) challenge to a hegemonic power that naturally thinks globally itself. Aspirations of global hegemony were there before. What was missing was a global challenge, based not on the logic of national interests but as a global extra-national counter-force. The hopeless weakness of that counterforce does not mitigate its importance.

Human beings, in the present era, think on two levels. They think both nationally and civilizational. For instance, we in Pakistan would like the 'Muslims' of Afghanistan or Iraq to succeed against the 'Non-Muslims' of the West (chiefly the US), but we would also want Pakistan to preserve its identity, albeit at the expense of an alliance with the United States. This is a difficult thing to prove. Belief systems are not passive ideals divorced from the real world. Each belief system intrinsically engineers an assertive discourse. It is this assertiveness that drives it into conflict with other belief systems. A belief system may talk of 'peace' (or freedom and liberty), yet it will always seek to assert that 'peace' (or freedom and liberty) over others. Belief systems, howsoever peaceful in content, have a missionary zeal that automatically translates into an 'us' versus 'them' discourse. To say that every belief system is essentially 'hegemonistic' will not be that far off the mark. There are belief systems that, at one particular time, enjoy hegemony in real terms and there are belief systems that do not enjoy that hegemony but seeks to assert themselves none the same. In other words, it is not ideals that drive history but rather the desire to impose them on others. Ideals are passive ideas; belief systems are an expression of the same. Ideals form a vocabulary, belief systems a discourse. Ideals orientate, belief systems motivate. The difference is that between thought and expression, passivity and activity.

## Conclusion

We have tried to explain terrorism a-politically through psychological and sociological concepts. We have seen how images create their reality and how they feed the development of perspectives. Images portray narratives in symbol-forms explaining perspectives and strengthening the bonds amongst individuals within the same belief system. We tried to suggest that there is a difference between ideals (passive ideas) and belief systems (that form active discourses). On one level, the difference is one of orientation and motivation. We aimed to find out whether expectancy (the anticipated outcome of actions) is regulated more by personal incentives by social orientation. In other words, does orientation automatically leads to action or does motivation have its dynamics. If orientation and motivation are synonymous, then terrorism becomes a natural extension of cultural orientations and opens up debates like the clash of civilizations and nationalist aspirations. Both Al-Qaida and 'say' Hamas can then be explained through one of these paradigms. In other words, we can categorize terrorism(s). Such a categorization presupposes a similarity between orientation and motivation where the latter becomes a natural extension of the former. This gives terrorism an 'external' definition emanating from social dynamics, where the individual intention is seen to derive from an 'outer' reality – clash of civilizations, nationalism, ideology, etc.

Such a scheme fragments the terrorist phenomenon into many brackets. Central to this thinking is our academic quest for contextualizing reality. Context is indeed important, but can't we develop a singular context as opposed to many. We have aimed to do exactly that. As a starting point, we have to mark a distinction between orientation and motivation. We tried to do that by studying the most ultimate terrorist phenomenon – suicide bombing. Does the terrorist orientation (including all his high ideals) provide enough mental strength to force him into taking his own life? It indeed can but not in the way we all would like to believe. Ideals, by themselves, cannot motivate a person. They are passive. What motivates him is his belief that ideas need to be asserted on others; that his ideals are in clash with that of others. Ideals create a 'passive we'; the belief that they need to be expressed through assertiveness creates an "active we". For the 'we' to be active, it has to activate a sense of personal gain – salvation, paradise, eternal bliss, etc.

On another level, ideals express assertiveness by clashing with those of 'others'. In this sphere, it either seeks to create hegemony or break the existing hegemony of other ideals. No belief

system is complete without a discourse that seeks to spread its distinctive way of life. This is the very essence of human motivation. If we accept that every belief system has a 'missionary streak', as they certainly do, then it becomes easier to move out of the traditional categorization of terrorism into this category or that. To put it differently, it will then become easier for us not to explain terrorism as a civilizational or national mission. In essence, it will show terrorism in its true and primitive (though I hate to use this word) form - a desire to create or break hegemony.

To describe 'terrorism' (and the war against terrorism) in this way has the advantage of bypassing both the Huntingtonian model (which cannot explain nationalist terrorism) and the model of the nation-state (which cannot explain the global crusading mission of, say, Al-Qaida). The best way around this problem is to explain the terrorist phenomenon in terms of hegemony versus counter-hegemony. It may be tempting to translate this into the West versus Islam (or the rest) thesis, but that has its difficulties, not the least of which is its partial explanation of reality. So, we will stick with the 'hegemony' hypothesis. Hegemony has its own needs. The desire to sustain it through proactive policies is one of them. A concomitant requirement is to de-humanize one's enemies (counter-hegemonies). Every belief system does that - neither Islamic fundamentalism nor western imperialism is innocent of that. 'Our' deals are better; 'their' ideals are inferior. It is 'our' destiny to succeed. No belief system ever tries to coexist no matter how much it professes that aim in popular discourse. It always tries to dominate, enslave and dehumanize the 'other'. In some discourses 'enslavement' would mean 'conversion' of others to one's belief system; In others, it would simply mean 'subjugation'. In either case, the 'hegemony model' appropriately explains reality.

Ideals, in short, are important inputs in conditioning thoughts, emotions, and expressions. Yet, these inputs have to pass through cognitive processes that try to make sense of them. It is here that the individual takes over. The 'output' may conform with the ideals of the society but these ideals, once they pass through the cognitive process, become the personal property of each individual. There is a personal stake involved in promoting the 'we'. And it is here that ideals become active, assertive, and hegemonistic. In other words, ideals are the passive starting point on the road that ends on hegemonistic mindsets with a crusading zeal where the best of ideals are transformed into motivational tools for hegemony.

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