

Can the Concept of Terrorism Be Understood Objectively?

Arfin Sudirman, Nuning Kurniasih

Abstract

This article examines the discourses of the term politically-driven terrorism and how it can be defined objectively. By using library research, this paper argues that it is necessary for those who study on terrorism to add the word global in terrorism concept to describe the pattern of transnational terrorist movements and ideology. This transnational movement indicates that the threat of terrorism does not only cross-national borders but also the actors are no longer bound by the ideology of a particular country but purely a transnational ideology that may not have been realized but only aspired by the leader of his/her group instead. The ease of international migration and information dissemination through globalization has been exploited by these terrorist groups to spread their extreme ideology and violence movement not only in the US, UK, European Union, middle east region but also in Indonesia. Thus, the politically-driven concept of terrorism on the basis of the origin of the actor, both geographically and religiously, in the form of US led-Global War against Terrorism is an oversimplified concept and irrelevant to understand the underlying cause of terrorism objectively.

Keywords: terrorism, transnationalism, ideology, globalization, objective threat

Introduction

The terrorist attack to the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. on September 11th, 2001 was

Arfin Sudirman, Nuning Kurniasih. Can the Concept of Terrorism Be Understood Objectively? *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 12, no. 4: 35-47.

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considered as one of the deadliest non-military attacks in the 21st century. It claimed approximately 3000 people died with 40 people perished on the plane that was hijacked and crashed in Pennsylvania. The attack was the largest terrorist attack in history that occurred in US domestic territory. Subsequently, the world was divided as sovereign countries had diverse responses that took place on the powerful state in the world^{1,2}.

The US took immediate response by conducting counteroffensive efforts against a global terrorist group that responsible for the 9/11 attack. One of them was listed in the National Security Strategy 2002 (NSS 2002) or known as the Bush doctrine that consists of two aspects: Firstly; a new approach in the winning idea of the war on terror by spreading the values of democracy to the rest of the world especially in Arab Muslim countries; Secondly, the policy of preemptive war, which lead to preventive action-strike before being attacked — through military operations^{3,4}. This doctrine replaces military doctrine United States of deterrence that had been used since the Cold War era. The Bush Administration considers the strategy of deterrence is not sufficient against the intangible enemy. A year after the war in Afghanistan, the Bush doctrine of the preemptive strike was officially mentioned in the White Paper of National Security Strategy 2002^{3,5,6,7}.

However, in the years that follow the 9/11, terrorism became the new threat for global security. Not only it happened in New York, but it also happened globally as we witnessed how UK, Spain, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and numerous countries in the Middle East suffered the same threats with the US. The terrorist act that occurred in those countries has similar pattern and motivation: religious-based ideological movement that is performed by an organized and violent act against the western symbol, regardless the location of the attack and the background of the perpetrator.

As a result, there are no single approaches that carried out by the states in combating terrorism threat. The US may use heavily on military forces and perceive terrorism act as a threat to national sovereignty, while Indonesia may employ police forces and perceive terrorism act as a criminal act. In terms of collective security in the regional security level, the complexity of combating terrorism become more significant. As stated by Oldřich⁸ the lack of shared threat perception among EU members in the fight against terrorism is due to several factors such as historical background, ongoing scholarly debates in perceiving

terrorism, demographic trends and the absence of terrorist threat assessment. Therefore, this article is aimed to examine the trend of terrorism act and analyze the discourses of the term terrorism that tend to be politically-driven and how it can be defined objectively.

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Theoretical Review

According to Goldstein⁹, terrorism is an action in the form of threats of violence committed by a certain group to create an atmosphere of fear and danger with the intention to attract the attention of all elements of society both at a national or international level which has political goals. That is, the political interests of the group are expected to be heard and get the attention of the public and the government by doing organized violence. Terrorism refers to politically motivated violence that operates across borders by civilian or symbols of government authority or the state as a target. Terrorism means an activity that causes psychological pressure and fear of the government and society. Globally, the types of terrorism can be divided into terrorism committed by non-state actors where the action is done on their own initiative without the pressure or support from any party. Then the second type is *sponsored state terrorism* as practiced by Hamas and Hezbollah, supported by Iran. However, the phenomenon of global terrorism is not a new issue if we look at the events in the Middle East, Europe, South Asia and the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. The researcher used the definition of terrorism proposed by Goldstein⁹ as a basic guide on the characteristics of terrorism such as patterns of activity, motivation, and classification according to the prospective study of International Relationship. This definition is used so that researcher can see the development of local terrorism movement, regional to the global level.

In general, terrorism is an attempt to influence the level of fear through the threat both verbally or real action. Terrorists attempt by acts of violence, to manipulate fear in achieving strategic objectives for political purposes. Terrorism can be categorized into national and international terror based on the scale of the action. National terror is terror aimed at the parties that exist in a certain territory and state power. International terror is terror directed against any other country outside the nation or state region inhabited by terrorists¹⁰. The definition of terrorism proposed by Kegley and Wittkopf¹⁰ also shows the same pattern with the definition proposed by Gold-

stein⁹. Both are seen from the perspective of the study of International Relations.

By definition also, according to Katona¹¹, the discourses on terrorism has been widely argued by academics, politicians, security experts and journalists. Some people focus on organizational methods and operations while others emphasize the motivations and characteristics/modus operandi of acts of terrorism. To this day there is no consensual definition of terrorism because of differences in perceiving terrorism threat itself. But according to him, the characteristics of terrorism minimal have three important elements: firstly, violence primarily addressed to civil society; the second is the motivation in which the objectives are politically charged such as replacing the legitimate government regime, changing the power of society, changing the economic order and also for religious purposes. Thirdly, the target. Usually the target of civil society or even in the form of government symbols. These three things distinguish between acts of terrorism and open war or civil rebellion. The reason this article uses the definition that is put forward by Peter Katona¹¹ is similar as the two previous reasons.

This article argues that both Goldstein⁹, Kegley and Witkopp¹⁰ and Katona¹¹ provides a basic definition of the main characteristics of terrorism concept. This has been the result of the difficulty that faced by the sovereign government, especially the law enforcers and military forces in combating the threats of terrorism: the abstract and intangible form of terrorism, or put it this way: whether it's a military threat against the sovereign state (if so, who is the leader and where are they?) or just a mere criminal act? Therefore, the definitions that need to be put forward objectively are very important to be cited for this article to have a solid basis on the definition and classification of terrorism in the world.

Those definitions will also help another researcher in searching for data that is relevant to the characteristics of the global terrorist movement in the world. As Jelínek¹² discussed that there are two issues relating with the contemporary terrorism namely the growing trend of integration between international terrorism with organized crime as sociological problem and secondly the term of "foreign terrorist fighters" that could potentially promote radical and violence ideology upon their return to the origin country that eventually threatens national and regional security. Those two issues can be considered as a variety of threat perception in perceiving terrorism act depends on the characteristic of the ideology and the movement.

Strategically, according to Neumann and Smith¹³ terrorism is intended as a strategy to create the disorientation in society. Terrorist attacks are conducted to show that the government is no longer able to guarantee the security for its citizens. By doing this, the terror group trying to separate the government from society and aims to alter stability and security to make panic, confusion and widespread chaos. Besides that, the other purpose is not only to discredit the government as a security guarantor but also to confuse the public. After the community became disbelieved with the government's ability and then separated from their ties to the government, the terror group now has an opportunity to reconstruct collective identities and societal preferences as they wish after disorientation, terrorism is expected to provoke the state to conduct repressive feedback and ultimately further alienate society so that the terrorist group can achieve legitimacy.

Terrorism is the peak of the *violence*, "*terrorism is the apex of violence*". It could be violence without terror, but no terror without violence. Terrorism is not similar to intimidation or sabotage. Targets of intimidation and sabotage are generally immediate, whereas terrorism is not. Victims of acts of Terrorism are often innocent people. The terrorists intend to create a sensation for the public to pay attention to what they stand for. Terror action is not the same as vandalism, whose motive damages physical objects. Terror is different from the mafia. Mafia action emphasizes the "*Omerta*" or shuts up, as the oath. *Omerta* is an extreme form of loyalty and solidarity groups in the face of other parties, especially the ruling.

In contrast to Yakuza or Costa Nostra mafia that emphasizes the code of *omerta*, the modern terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, MILF, and Jamaah Islamiyah are instead often issuing statements and demands. They want to attract the attention of the public and use the mass media to voice the message of their struggle. However, later, terrorists increasingly require a large investment in its global activities, so that they do not like to claim his actions, in order to make efforts to raise funds for their activities hiddenly¹³.

However, terror or Terrorism does not always identical with violence or suicide bombing method. As argued by Narozhna and Knight¹⁴, violence or suicide terrorism does not imply irrationality of the actor but rather a rational calculation planned by the organizations and leaders conducting this tactic. Terrorism act by using suicide bombing must not understood and perceived heavily on political and

securitized agenda but also deeper societal sources on why and how the suicide bombing is very common in terrorism act. Therefore, suicide terrorism must be interpreted contextually by taking the political complexity, material, economic, structural gap, and other social factors into account. Once the definitions and characteristics of terrorism are described by some International Relations experts, in the following paragraphs this article will explain the history of development or the evolution of global terrorism movement ranging from the characteristics of ancient terrorism movements which is still national to modern, which has demonstrated the transnational characteristics.

Discussion

The history of Terrorism has been evolved since the past centuries, marked by a form of pure crime of murder and threats aimed at achieving certain goals. Its development begins in the form of fanaticism of the creed that then turns into murder, whether done individually or by a group against a ruler considered a tyrant. The killing of these individuals can already be said to be a pure form of Terrorism with reference to the history of modern Terrorism. Although the term of Terror and Terrorism started to be popular in the 18th century, the phenomenon is not new¹³.

Periodically, Weinberg and Eunbank¹⁵, divide the evolution of global terrorism movement into four waves: (1) *Modern Terrorism* which arose in times of World War I and World War II; (2) *Anticolonialism and Nationalism* are emerging as the face of the occupation spontaneous resistance, especially in the period after World War II; (3) *The Age of Terrorism Begins*, which arose as a result of post-war economic recovery marked by the process of industrialization and development of modern technology in the 1960s; (4) *The New Terrorism* characterized by the Iranian revolution of 1979 which led to radical movements for non-state based on religion.

The first wave of modern terrorism has been identified by Weinberg and Eunbank¹⁵ is terrorism that is not based on religious fanaticism, but rather leads to the logic that is a crime to use science in the manufacture of weapons and the action of attack. The concept they used is “small groups could now kill large number”. Modern terrorism can be found starting from the end of the 19th century perched in the middle of the 20th century. Modern terrorism is known as political terrorism. This modern terrorism is known to the public thanks to the perfor-

mance of the mass media of Europe and North America at the time of World War I (1914-1918) broke out, they preached to the public about the terrible conspiracy of terrorist secrets that is to destroy a government and destroy all forms of authority. This ultimately created public fear of all forms of threat from terrorists, especially the threat of bombings and the assassination of famous political figures such as the Italian King Umberto in Monza. Terrorist threats are growing faster and more complex as civilization and technology progress.

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Still, according to Weinberg and Eunbak¹⁵, a wave of global terrorism appeared particularly since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the emergence of the Taliban who managed to expel Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the important thing is the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In this phase, the ideology of religion serves as a consolidating force of parties who wanted to fight for identity and existence after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war. Soviet defeated in Afghanistan inspired new struggles and strengthen the growing religious tension existed a fundamentalism movement against the hegemony of American power who singly dominated and controlled the world according to the wishes and interests of America itself. From this, it can be concluded that the main thing that distinguishes terrorist group by the fourth generation of previous generations is that the group did not hesitate to make civilians (*non-combatants*) as the target of violence.

For example, the Iranian Revolution in Lebanon which have an impact on the rise of Islam into the political sector, the suicide bombings by terrorist groups on religious grounds such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka and the rebellion that took place in Chechnya, and the organization of Al-Qaeda under the leadership of Osama bin Laden who thought that the United States and its allies was weaker than the Soviet Union and had a fear in dealing with holy warriors such as the Taliban. The main indicator of global terrorism is Al-Qaeda's attack on 9/11 which then fueled violence is similar across the world, including in Indonesia.

Today, most international political and security experts may agree that terrorism has become a real threat to global security in the 21st century. Although some scholars may still debate this claim: does terrorism promotes counter-hegemonic movement committed by a non-state actor? Or is it just a violence act (either committed by a non-state actor or supported by sovereign state) to create an atmosphere or a fear of terror/uncertainty as for their goal?¹⁶

The events of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror imposed by the US as a retaliation to the threat of terrorism indicates the difficulty to understand the term of terrorism comprehensively. The lack of common threat perception or shared-knowledge on the concept of terrorism creates a politically-driven and subjective definition of terrorism, and as a result, the unilateral military campaign of the US-led Global War on Terror was inevitable at that time¹⁷. Terrorism emerges as a symbol of society's hatred marginalized by US hegemony. This collapsing world emerges as a result of the accumulation of global imbalances that terrorists' group might claim as their motives are caused by US domination in all aspects of life. US foreign policy that tends to hostile have double standards in supporting authoritarian regimes in their favor (as if having *common values*) while on the other hand suppressing regime that is not in line with US interests, poverty, and global inequality is rated as a trigger of terrorism¹⁸.

According to Lutz and Lutz¹⁹, the search of consensual definitions of global terrorism is seeking with a policy-oriented output. They claim that attacks by terrorist groups-as marginalized groups-aim to achieve their political goals against the domination of a hegemon state. When their political interest is constantly ignored by the sovereign states, violent tactics is the only resolution as we saw in 9/11 event. However, the cause of acts of terrorism sometimes varies depending on the purpose and ideology of their struggle. One of the most significant factors is their inability to face the dominance and political pressure of superpowers like the US. The feelings of frustration and the inability of an individual or a group to make a change of the fact that the US is very dominant hegemonic-power could result in the act of violence. This phenomenon was sometimes exploited by the state in the form of state-supported-terrorism (as happened in Libya and North Korea) with the same political purpose. Therefore, the key to tackle violence by terrorist groups begins with the fulfillment of security at the individual level (and not at the unit/country level).

The difficulties faced by policymakers when faced with the threat of terrorism are the intangible form of terrorism itself so the subjectivity of the policymakers in determining what and who is the real terrorism that threatens security is inevitable. This subjective factor that often raises the conceptual debate between the community (elements of civil society, academia, and mass media) with the government. One thing that might distinguish terrorists from independence fighter is the way

they launch a random attack with political goals and has no sympathy from the public. But one thing is clear, terrorism is an intangible threat that needs to be identified objectively so that it can be addressed proportionally²⁰.

According to Kiras²¹, the concept of global terrorism emerged in the 21st century where the expansion of the movement, both the idea of radicalism, actor, methods of movement, bomb-making techniques, logistics, and action, has spread throughout the world without barriers borders. This happens as a result of advances in technology and information. For example, actors of 9/11 in the US were students of the Middle East which establish communication with Islamic leaders in the Middle East and the US. In Indonesia, the terrorist leaders are Malaysian citizens who have radical ideologies from Afghanistan. If *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or Aceh Independent Movement (GAM) commit acts of terrorism in Indonesia is related to the separatist movement and does not spread beyond national borders. While acts of terrorism in Bali, Indonesia in 2002 conducted by the Malaysian citizens with regard to the conflict in Palestine and has a chain of command from Afghanistan. Therefore, it is called global terrorism because the threat of terrorism no longer sees the origin of the actor, the location of the action and the source of its ideology.

According to Kiras²¹, there are three factors that turn terrorism into a global issue. Firstly, the development of air transport in which the flow of goods, capital and human faster because of the progress of communication technology and information and the increasingly affordable transportation costs between countries. Secondly, the shared ideology and interests around the world in countering a hegemonic state. Globalization also contributes on things that are immaterial such as ideas that form a network of society to facilitate the community groups and build communication with each individual that eventually leads to certain public opinion and bond or loyalty outside their nationality. For example, such as raising the sympathy and solidarity and to encourage cooperation to establish a common or transnational state. Thirdly, is a television and media coverage such as cable TV and internet in broadcasting the "Theater of Terrorism" uncensored and worldwide. Television has reached far coverage of terrorism act. Coverage of live news or video streaming that portray the detail of the events could potentially trigger acts of terrorism (such as the oppression in Palestine and Iraq), or act of terrorism itself can be easily accessed by anyone directly.

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Based on those above it can be understood that the threat of terrorism can no longer be geographically and religiously restricted because its movement has become an integral part of globalization. Advances in science and technology, access to transportation and movement of people, goods, and ideas no longer know the obstacles in the form of state territorial boundaries that terrorism was a global phenomenon as facilitated by globalization itself. Thus, to put the terminology of Global in Terrorism is the way that terrorism is an objective threat because the phase of the movement of terrorism is currently at the stage of globalization.

For example, in Indonesia, the influence of global terrorism based on religion can be seen from a study conducted by Al Chaidar²². According to him, the entry of global terrorism in Indonesia cannot be removed from the role of "Alumni Afghan" which is a special name to describe a number of people in Indonesia who have fought or want to get training in Afghanistan - an Islamic state in Central Asia - during the period of the 1980s to the mid-1990s. They were Muslim activists from various elements of the Muslim movement in Indonesia who, with their own initiative or collectively, helped the Afghan Muslim struggle while fighting against the Soviet Union between 1980-1990. They entered the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, precisely in Peshawar before been entering the battlefield (Jihad). But there were many stages through which these Mujahideen pass before they go down in the battlefield. There were several Mujahideen who entered training camps in training packages. There was also a direct student jihad University led by Asy-Syahid Abdullah Azzam, the rest following a brief training between 3 to 6 months. After the Afghan jihad completed at that time, marked by the destruction and the decline of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, the mujahideen were trained and fought back to the homeland of Indonesia; these are called the Afghan Alumni or Veteran.

Those who perform Jihad, which originated from Indonesia, mostly from among the group Darul Islam or Indonesia Islamic State or *Negara Islam Indonesia* (NII) from factions fi-sabilillah, one of them was Imam Samudra. These men brought a modest provision to conduct Jihad on the international scene in order to fight against infidels. Communists or Communism is considered by Muslims as simplistic is a cogency that godless and this is called *Kuffar* (the anti-God or infidels, denies the existence of God, have a god but Allah). Meanwhile, the people who were moved to help the Afghan warriors in driving out

the Soviet troops were called Mujahideen, who were formed based on the belief that they were fighting in the way of Allah or Jihad. Jihadists called Mujahid and in the plural-called Mujahideen²². Therefore, acts of terrorism that occurred after 9/11 in Indonesia is difficult to be separated by a factor of events that occurred abroad particularly the middle east conflict.

In addition, the significance use of the term global terrorism in this article was to define the differences with domestic terrorism-such as separatist GAM and *Operasi Papua Merdeka* or Papua Independence Movement (OPM)-emerging in Indonesia, especially after the events of 9/11 and the Bali Bombing in 2002. According to Widjajanto²³, global terrorism can be characterized through four perspectives: (1) strategy of asymmetric conflict where there is a significant power imbalance of actors involved in the war so that it can use indirect strategy and attack; (2) terrorism as a form of crimes against humanity that must be resolved by involving international law; (3) the accessibility of terrorist actors to the proliferation of weapons and WMD technology in the form of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons and; (4). Seeing the pattern of international terrorism has turned into three main typologies: religious militancy, idolism, and ethnonationalism as occurred in the continent of Asia, Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East and the Soviet.

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Conclusion

To conclude, it is necessary for all researcher that interested to study on Terrorism to add the word global to terrorism to describe the pattern of transnational terrorist movements. This transnational movement indicates that the threat of terrorism does not only cross-national borders but also the actors are no longer bound by the ideology of a particular country but purely a transnational ideology that may not have been realized but only aspired by the leader of his/her group instead. The ease of international migration and information dissemination through globalization has been exploited by these terrorist groups to spread their extreme ideology and violence movement not only in the US, UK, European Union, middle east region but also in Indonesia. Thus, the politically-driven concept of terrorism on the basis of the origin of the actor, both geographically and religiously, in the form of US led-Global War against Terrorism is an oversimplified concept and irrelevant to understand the underlying cause of terrorism objectively.

Notes

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