

Terrorism: A Crime or Duty?

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Abstract

Terrorism is a major issue in todays world. The general public will argue that these people are crazed lunatics who are disobeying the rules of the world, and doing so in a very destructive matter. Terrorists, however will argue that they are simply obeying themselves and what they believe in. Disobedience to authority is the basis on which our country was founded and in many cases it is a platform which a radicalized group will use in order to push their agenda. Studies in this research paper will give insight on the thinking of terrorists and whether or not they believe what they are doing is right or wrong. Violence, may be the only answer for these individuals, because it is what they are told by their higher powers and while we may think that these lunatics are rebels, in fact they believe they are saving the world and bringing injustices to light.

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Terrorism, Islamic Extremism, to be more specific is a major global issues in today's world. Terrorist's thrive on scaring the public and acting on politically motivated violence and even killing people in order to instil their will upon society. When a terrorist commits a violent crime against people, they are committing a violent crime against society and the very values we as humans hold dear to ourselves. However, when these people are committing crimes they are both disobeying social norms and the rules of global authority, but in turn are also obeying the values and beliefs that they are willing to die for. To the naked eye, terrorists are inhumane and illogical lunatics who carry out violent attacks for the sake of religion, but to disqualify them as such would be doing an injustice to the world. There are many layers to terrorism and in order to fight it we must peel those layers and understand the psyche of the terrorists mind.

Literature Review

Obedience to authority can be measured in different lights, what may be obedient to one person may be the complete opposite to another. Obedience itself is a touchy subject and has many layers which we need to peel in order to understand what it means to disobey authority. Fromm (1981) reminds us that humanity exists only because of acts of disobedience to authority, and that in order to disobey one must obey their own principles, otherwise they are not acting on convictions but rather on emotions. Fromm (1981) maintains that there are two different types of obedience's: "autonomous, and heteronomous" (p.19). Fromm (1981) insists that the former is the sense of self, in that every individual chooses to obey their own convictions and that is what makes them who they are. Rather than obeying, this kind of obedience falls more along the lines

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of doing what we believe is best for ourselves and following our own conscience to make decisions. The latter is following the orders of an authoritarian figure or someone other than yourself, Fromm (1981) claims that heteronomous obedience is equal to submission in that regardless of one's reason, or conviction, they blindly follow the rules laid out for them. Fromm (1981) then complicates the matter even further by stating that within each person is a "humanistic conscience and an authoritarian conscience" (p.19). We can think of it as an angel and a devil on our shoulder, the angel (humanistic conscience) steers us in the right direction, and is the voice in our head that helps us determine right from wrong. The devil (authoritarian conscience) is the voice in our head that will tell us to override our positive convictions in order to please our own ego. For example, if someone was to say something hurtful to a person, the humanistic conscience might tell them to brush it off and keep on with their day, because that is the right thing to do. However, at that moment an authoritarian ego may kick in and decide that instead of leaving the situation alone they should do something hurtful back to that person.

Basic human rights suggest that no man should take another mans life, in a civil society, people follow this right, and obey authority by not killing anyone. However, if that same person, is told by their higher power that it is ok to kill, then that person after killing may be able to justify himself, as he was obeying an authority which he held dearer to him than the social norms of society. Although this may be true, Fromm (1981) argues that obedience can lead to the "end of human history" (p.18). The connection I can make from this is, that if terrorist choose to obey their leaders and gain enough territory to carry out attacks they can destroy the world as we know it. Fromm (1981) maintains that "man has continued to evolve by acts of disobedience" (p.17). So then what if we put ourselves into the shoes of one of these terrorists, it is very

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possible that they believe they are saving humanity, and revolutionizing the world in a positive way. To them they are doing everything right, they are obeying their leaders, and carrying out acts of justice, but to the rest of the world, what they are doing is an act of tyranny and outright hatred towards humanity.

Fromm (1981) reminds us that “A person can become free through acts of disobedience by learning to say no to power” (p.21). The same can be linked to the ideology of a martyr of Islamic extremism. Moghaddam (2005) emphasizes that “a terrorist is made and not born”, and the path to becoming a terrorist is like climbing up a staircase, Moghaddam calls that staircase “The Staircase to Terrorism” (p.161). Like the recruits of Isis, most men and woman start off as normal functional citizens of their society, but then some kind of social injustice or deprivation leads them to look into how they can solve the unfair treatment they have received, Moghaddam calls this the first floor of terrorism.

Moghaddam (2005) reminds us that, “Individuals who reach the second floor but still perceive grave injustices experience anger and frustration, and in some circumstances they are influenced by leaders to displace their aggression onto an enemy” (p.161). What this means in the context of my argument is that, when we have a frustrated individual dealing with a power they are unhappy following, they can become easy bait for terrorist groups. These groups can use disobedience as a medium to convince these individuals that by carrying out violent attacks and disobeying the latter these individuals can become “free”. For instance, Post (2010) demonstrates that “In ethnic/nationalist conflicts, hatred has been transmitted generationally, and the psychopolitics of hatred are deeply rooted” (p.15). What this means is that if, for instance, a father lost his son because of an aerial attack by a foreign country, that fathers feelings of

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resentment and anger can fuel an agenda to teach those around him to hate the country that did this to him. This kind of anger can also make him vulnerable and willing to join a terrorist organization to carry out attacks on the “enemy”. But Fromm (1981) reminds us that acting out on emotions of anger and hatred, is simply rebelling and doing so will not advance humanity. It is important for terrorists to realize this because what they stand for will not be heard if they choose to act out solely on anger and hatred towards others.

In Post’s interview with terrorist Razuq, we learn that his initial political awareness of terrorism ideology came from the very mosque that he would do his daily prayers in. They pushed a political agenda onto him and asked Razuq to join religious classes, and in these classes he was taught that the enemy had effectively pushed his people out of Palestine. Post (2010) maintained that, Razuq was taught that the enemy was like a “cancer inside the body that was threatening his very existence” (p.20). Razuq went on to tell Post that “the Koran and my religious studies were the tools that shaped my political consciousness” (p.20). This meant that Razuq was influenced by religious authorities to carry out acts of violence in the name of g-d, this is a severe act of obedience in that, Razuq, and his family were very religious and to them g-d came first. Razuq believed he was following the will of his higher power when he committed attacks against humanity, but the world will argue that his convictions are not justifiable.

There is no humane world in which it is ok to kill in the name of g-d. Hoveyda (2002) maintains that “The leaders of Hezbollah, Hamas, Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups claim to represent true Islam” (p.277). Then by definition, someone like Razuq cannot understand anything but acts of aggression. To him they are completely rationalized and normal, if he wants to be a true Muslim he must follow in the footsteps of his leaders. Fromm (1981) dissects this

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topic and claims that regardless of the power which we are obedient to “it is always an institution, or men, who use force in one form or another and fraudulently claim omniscience and omnipotence (p.21). This kind of humanistic conscience approach to authority goes to show that a terrorist like Razuq is under the spell of authority, he could not escape it because in disobeying one system of authority, he is submitting to the almighty power that guides him and whether that power is claiming omniscience or omnipotence is irrelevant.

These terrorist leaders, push disobedience to authority as a means to become closer with g-d. Post (2010) claims that “It is widely assumed that terrorists who kill innocents for a cause and are willing to give their lives for that cause are crazed fanatics. But in fact, terrorism scholars have concluded that as individual’s terrorists are psychologically normal” (p.20). In the eyes of the public these terrorists are crazed animals that rebel against the modern world and only want pain and suffrage. But to these terrorists, we are the real cause of their pain and suffrage, and only through violence and disobedience will they be able to break free from the chains of injustice, and create a world in which everyone follows their agenda. As Fromm (1981) stated “My obedience makes me part of the power and hence I feel strong. I can make no error, since it decides for me; I cannot be alone, because it watches over me; I cannot commit a sin, because it does not let me do so, and even if I do sin, the punishment is only the way of returning to the almighty power” (p.21).

Research

- 1) Are you a Male or a Female?
- 2) Age? 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 55+

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- 3) What is your religion?
- 4) Are you religious? Yes No
- 5) Does your religion impact the decision you make and why?
- 6) Do you believe in fighting for what you believe in?
- 7) Is there more of a chance you may do something if it is instilled by a higher authority and why?
- 8) If you were paid a lot of money to do something, even if it was the wrong thing to do would you do it and why?
- 9) When you make decisions do you first consider the people around you, or just do what you believe needs to be done? Why or why not?

Methodology

In order to conduct my research on why people might choose to become radicalized, and carry out attacks, and disobey authority in doing so, I handed out a survey to 10 random individuals asking basic questions on autonomous vs. heteronomous conscience decisions. These questions were also aimed at understanding if authority plays a role in people's decision making. By surveying different people, I tried to see if I would be able to make a conclusion on whether terrorists believe they are disobeying authority or following authority.

Results

My survey included six males and four female subjects ranging from eighteen to thirty-five years of age. As far as religion goes there was a mix of different backgrounds including Jewish,

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Muslim, and Christian. Sixty percent of the individuals claimed to be religious and said that their beliefs played a role in how they determined certain decisions in life. Every single subject believed that it was their duty to fight for what they believe in. On the subject concerning getting paid a lot of money to do something that was wrong, I found that everyone was willing to do something for a cost, but were hesitant on answering at first. Then when asked why, no one had any reasonable explanation. Seventy percent of the subjects answered that they would be more likely to do something if it was instilled by an authoritarian figure because these were rules they had to follow which bared consequences if they weren't. However, the remaining thirty percent said that it depended what the authority was trying to make them do. My last question was tricky, there was no one straight answer, everyone basically answered that it depended on the situation, whether it was life or death, or what the consequences of their decisions would be.

Implications

This research solidifies the idea that terrorists will carry out violent attacks if their higher power tells them that it is the right thing to do. What we take as authority in our world is starkly different from the authoritarian figure of a terrorist. It is also important to note that for the right price anyone might be willing to carry out a number of different illegal, or negative acts that may harm others. These findings are important because they show us that people are willing to obey authority no matter what their religion is, but will also disobey authority if that power is responsible for some kind of wrong doing or if a lucrative opportunity presents itself. More so, people aren't willing to admit to following their own convictions before the thought of how it may effect others. Although my research answers some of the general motives of people, it is

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limited by the amount of people I surveyed and about the open-endedness of the questions. In order to conduct more efficient research, it would be a better approach to seek out individuals who have been wronged by their authorities and what the meaning of obedience is to those individuals.

All in Sum

Through the research I conducted I was able to conclude that since terrorists are “normal people” just like us that they must think like us too. In maintaining that theory it is clear that terrorists are willing to do just about anything for the right price. Religion has to play a major factor in the decision making of a terrorist’s mind, that was maintained not only by my research but also during the interview with Post and Razuq. Most importantly however is that everyone is willing to fight for what they believe in, this means that if a terrorist believes he/she needs to carry out a violent attack for the betterment of his people then he/she will do whatever it takes to fight for their beliefs.

What my research did not conclude is that people make decisions based solely on religion and that there are a number of different factors that go into whether someone will disobey authority or not, and because of this it is not right for us to single out Muslim people as the terrorists of the world. One must first consider all the different factors that may turn someone into a terrorist, religion alone cannot determine this. I believe people should be less worried about blaming terrorist acts solely on a specific religion and take a step back and consider why someone may choose to disobey authority and whether disobeying authority has anything to do

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with religion at all. We may never know exactly why such violent and catastrophic attacks occur, but if we want to stand a chance at lowering the rate of these attacks then we must stop singling out religion as the one reason why these attacks happen. Although we know for certain that terrorism is inhumane the question on whether terrorism is a crime, or duty, is still left unsaid.

References

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