

What are the fundamental attributes that differentiate religious terrorism from other drivers of terrorism such as nationalism and ideology?

Generally speaking, terrorism is a means to an end, a strategy adopted by an individual or a group to achieve a desired goal. This means that the various drivers of terrorism have certain common aspects. However, the different drivers of terrorism can also be separated by fundamental differences which stem from the very nature of what goal the terrorists are trying to achieve. In the case of religious terrorism, the goal is the defense of the faith (Martin, p.29). As such, religious terrorists justify their actions by claiming that “an otherworldly power has sanctioned-and commanded” these terrorist actions (Martin, p.127). This divine justification and indeed endorsement, is particular to religious terrorism. Religious terrorists also usually turn to holy texts to justify their actions. There are plenty of examples within various religious texts of violence in the name of religion. Religious terrorists can now use this as a justification for their violent acts in the name of religion. They can use the religious texts as a recruiting tool to gather more people to their cause. After all, it is all but impossible to challenge the authority and the legitimacy of religious texts, especially among the faithful.

Other drivers of terrorism such as nationalism or ideology do not have divine attributes. In other words, they are grounded in something much more recognisable to other members of society. These are, respectively, a state for a certain ethnic group or the governance of a state by a certain political ideology. This is an important difference because there can be no debate about whether a certain ethnic group has a state or not. The state either exists, free of foreign or colonial control, or it doesn't. The same applies with regard to ideological terrorism. On the other hand, it is much more abstract and subjective whether a certain group is presenting a danger to the faith religious terrorists are claiming to defend. The issue becomes even more

problematic when considering the divine mandate to carry out terrorist acts. The belief of religious terrorists that they are carrying out the will of a divine power gives them the singularly unique ability to justify the suffering of any victim of their actions, including, sometimes, innocent members of their own faith. This is seen in the willingness of religious terrorists to target the innocent members of their opponents' society. One such example can be the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which targeted civilians going about their everyday lives, far away from the conflict zone. It goes without saying that these and other so-called 'soft targets' are chosen because they are a symbol of the enemy the terrorists oppose. It is also necessary to point out that terrorists motivated by religion are not the only terrorists that can rationalize attacking innocent civilians which have nothing to do with their goal except for the fact that they are connected to the entity the terrorists are fighting against.

Religious terrorists also believe that they will be rewarded for their actions in defence of the faith after they die. This reward usually takes the form of a guarantee to reach paradise after death (Martin, p.133). This is a longstanding attribute of religious terrorism and religious violence in general. It applies to several religious practices. Indeed, the medieval Christian Crusaders believed that they could get remission for their sins for joining the Crusades. The same applies in Muslim tradition with regards to the Assassins (Martin, p.133). It is an attribute that has been carried on to the present day. Other forms of terrorism such as nationalist or ideological do not offer guarantees of rewards to those who participate.

Religious terrorists who are fighting for their faith believe it to be "the one true faith" (Martin, p.27). This has the consequence of placing all other religious beliefs in the category of potential threats. This uncompromising position leaves little room for negotiation or coexistence. Furthermore, if a religious terrorist group believes that their actions are sanctioned

by a divine power, they have no reason to try to negotiate with their enemy. It is very difficult, not to say impossible, to convince someone who believes they are acting on orders from a divine power to stop what they are doing. On the other hand, nationalist and ideologically motivated terrorism do not have this characteristic categorical position. Some non-religious terrorist groups or individuals within a group might adhere to this categorical position but, as previously stated, it is not a defining characteristic of their type of terrorism as it is for religious terrorism. This means that it might be easier to negotiate with non-religious terrorists. For example, as we have seen in Lesson 3, State Terrorism Part 3, the IRA, a group which sought to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, agreed to a ceasefire and continued its campaign through non-violent means. As previously mentioned, there are some members of the group which were not content to end their campaign of violent struggle and so splinter groups were formed. These splinter groups are the RIRA and the CIRA (3.3.3 State Terrorism Part 3, slide 7). A similar situation can be seen with regards to the Basque terrorist group known as ETA who were in conflict with the Spanish government. The group relinquished its weapons and explosives and became a disarmed organization (3.3.3 State Terrorism Part 3, slide 9). This allows for more open and honest negotiation between opposing factions without the threat of violence and reprisals from either side. As previously mentioned, it is also worth noting that there are some non-religious terrorist groups which share the uncompromising characteristic of religious terrorist groups. For example, the LTTE in Sri Lanka as well as their opponents in the government were unwilling to negotiate a peace deal (3.3.3 State Terrorism Part 3, slide 13). In cases such as these, the only way to resolve the conflict is for one side to impose its will on the other through force, as was the case in Sri Lanka with the defeat of the LTTE by the government (3.3.3 State Terrorism Part 3, slide 14).

In conclusion, religious terrorism has some fundamental attributes which set it apart from other drivers of terrorism. These include the belief in a mandate from an otherworldly power to carry out their violent attacks. Religious terrorists also make use of religious texts as both a justification for their actions and as a recruiting tool. Religious terrorists have an abstract goal which allows them to frame just about anyone they like as a target. Religious terrorists also believe they are carrying out a divine mandate. As such, they have no regard for who might be a victim of their attacks. They also believe that they will be rewarded, usually by being guaranteed access to paradise, for their participation in terrorist actions in the defence of the faith. Religious terrorists are frequently unwilling to negotiate or move to non-violent means because they are acting on the instructions of a divine power and they are defending the 'one true faith'.