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A disengaged Terrorist may not be De-radicalised: Exploring the Missing Links

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationships between terrorist disengagement and de-radicalisation by examining the dynamics of terrorism and terrorist radicalisation. Against the background that not all terrorists are radicalised and not all disengaged terrorists are de-radicalised, this paper brings to fore the urgent need to re-examine the nature of terrorist disengagement and de-radicalisation in Nigeria, particularly, and Africa in general. It is the position of this paper that rather than treating terrorists as "outcasts" worthy of punishment, they should be treated as helpless individuals in need of rehabilitation. More so, the government at all levels, should incorporate genuine programmes of de-radicalisation that ensures a change of perceived self-identity and skilful reintegration for the disengaged terrorists. In addition to ensuring that the citizens have sense of belonging and meaningful participation in the government of the day, it is hoped that terrorism will be reduced to the barest minimum if not eradicated completely.

Keywords: terrorism; terrorist disengagement; radicalisation; de-radicalisation; rehabilitation.

Introduction

It can be argued that there is a modest agreement in the literature about defining terrorism as a form of political struggle although there is not a consensus (Zamir, 2013). But there is another question about the definition then: what distinguishes terrorism from other forms of violence? Is terrorism, guerilla warfare, criminal violence or psychopathological motives the same? Tillema (2002) suggests that the purposes behind these acts are not identical: while a terrorist seeks symbolic political effect, guerilla warfare aims to weaken the security forces. Or, for example, criminals may look for material gains while the psychopath may have no comprehensible reason. One of the accepted ways of distinguishing terrorism from other forms of violence is the deliberate and systematic use of coercive intimidation (Wilkinson & Stewart, 1987, Horgan &Altier, 2012).

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Terrorists terrify people to force them to do what they want. This means that terrorists aim to create fear among a wider audience than the targets themselves. So terrorists actually do not ask something specific from their victims, but terrorize these people – kill, injure, destroy their property – to create the environment in which they can ask for political changes, usually from governments (Bueno de Mesquita, 2000). Therefore, a description of terrorism must include the actors in a terrorist act. According to this definition, there are at least five participators in the process of terror. Primary actors are the terrorists of course who exercise violence. Second, the immediate victims are those who unwillingly become a part of the process. Third, there is the society, or wider audience that terrorists aim to intimidate. Fourth, the neutral parts of the society as bystanders. The fifth part involves international actors, or international community and its opinion (Wilkinson & Stewart 1987;Parker, 2007; Geltzer, 2012).

Although the capability of terrorist groups to launch cross border attacks akin to 9/11 seem largely been dismantled, the threat of terrorism remains. The last few years has seen a significant shift in the size of engagement; from complex international terrorism plots, to an increase in localised, home-grown, focused attacks which clearly illustrate their ability and willingness to adapt. The spread of Boko Haram Terrorists in West Africa is a clear illustration of this ability (Falode, 2016).More so, recent attacks by suspected herdsmen in Benue State of Nigeria indicate a rise in "lone-wolf" terrorists which target people and casualties. These types of attacks are inherently harder to intercept by over-stretched security forces who seem to be battling with insider-betrayal (Anyadike, 2013). This highlights the evolving nature of terrorism and the risks faced by modern governments as they grapple with the technological challenges of the time.

Related to terrorism is radicalization which entails socialisation to violence from several angles (Silke, 2005; Ranstorp, 2010; Horgan &Altier, 2012). One School of thought explores

mainly how so-called vulnerable individuals are socialized ideologically and psychologically by recruiters of terrorist organizations, ending up as killers or even suicide bombers. Another School stresses more how young individuals looking for adventure and worthy cause seek out terrorist organization by themselves or act in line with them or on their behalf in search for personal fulfilment and acceptance by violent extreme organizations. Sometimes, the radicalizing individual is not becoming a "one wolf" terrorists but radicalises as part of "a bunch of guys" who shares common experiences (like feeling alienated in a diaspora situation). The relationship between radicalism, radicalisation and terrorism is a complex one. Horgan (2010) noted correctly that 'the relationship between radicalisation and terrorism is poorly understood – not every radical becomes a terrorist and not every terrorist holds radical views. It is also important to distinguish between terrorism as a political doctrine and terrorism as an act of political violence. Terrorist political crimes are in a way remarkably similar to war crimes as both involve, at their core, deliberate attacks on civilians and/or the taking of hostages. However, attempts to define acts of terrorism as 'peacetime equivalents of war crimes have so far not received widespread support. Borum (2011) stresses that radicalization on its own cannot do justice to why people resort to violent means to fulfill individual or group needs. Borum highlights that it is the perceived causal link between radicalization and terrorism that is most crucial and in fact it is the 'involvement in terrorism' aspect that propels radicalization into Counter Terrorism viewpoint (Borum, 2011).

Compared to what can now only be described as exhaustive efforts to understand radicalization, de-radicalization studies on the other hand are rarer and fewer in number (Horgan, 2008). Horgan points out that this subject is somewhat of a 'poor relation' to radicalization studies, as there seems to be overwhelming preoccupation with uncovering the process of radicalization (Horgan, 2008).Horgan (2010), defined de-radicalization as programmes that are generally

directed against individuals who have become radical with the aim of reintegrating them into society or at least dissuading them from violence. De-radicalization appears to be even more of a contested concept that radicalization (Birt, 2009). At the most basic level, de-radicalization can be crudely seen in Neumann's language as what occurs to not make the bomb go off, but as is self-evident, this would be too simplistic and misleading.

Demant, Slootman, Buijs, and Tillie (2008) distinguish between three different types of motives that play a role in de-radicalisation. These are normative, affective and continuance based and are essentially detailing lack of ideological appeal, social/organisational inadequacy and real life circumstances. Crucial to their research and used in a concluding statement context, they outline the rejection of violence, unachievable future outcomes, changes in a person's viewpoint, disappointment in the movement and practical life circumstances as common features of the de-radicalization process (Demant et al., 2008). Demant et al. go on to describe community loyalty, lack of alternatives and inner barriers as hindrances in this de-radicalization process but also state that a 'significant other' can also trigger the process in certain situations (Demant et al, 2008) from which a definition of de-radicalization is proposed on a collective and individual level as 'this process of becoming less radical applies to both behaviour and beliefs. With regard to behaviour, this primarily involves the cessation of violent actions. With regards to beliefs, this involves an increase in confidence in the system, a desire to once more become part of society, and the rejection of non-democratic means' (Demant et al., 2008).

In popular understanding, de-radicalisation is often assumed to be the same as disengagement from a terrorist group and its ideology. De-radicalization is a complex process and involves addressing the psychological state and makeup of the individuals involved in terrorism and those who are moving along the terrorist trajectory. Disengagement from terrorism is also an

option but unlike de-radicalization it is behavioural only. Disengagement involves either the abandonment of violence, or abandonment of a group that is advocating or actively involved in violence, but entails no real and enduring change of mind and heart (Ashour, 2008; Horgan, 2008; Seckhard, 2007). Disengagement sometimes occurs through intimidation. For those who are afraid of law enforcement the thrill of being involved in a terror cell can fade in the face of potential incarceration. These individuals may disengage from the group simply as a result of intimidation while continuing to hold extremist views and continuing to be vulnerable to easy reactivation for a terrorist attack – by virtue of continued contact with, but minimal activity within a terrorist cell. For some disengagement occurs with arrest and imprisonment although the actors may still be highly extremist in their mindset and even "infect" many others while in prison: recruiting for the group and perhaps even directing terrorist activities on the outside from prison as they wait out their sentence (Speckhard, Jacuch & Vanrompay, 2012).

Altier, Thoroughgood, and Horgan (2014) define disengagement as the process of ceasing terrorist activity. Rather than one finite step, they suggest disengagement is a dynamic process resulting in a shift to a new role (and identity) outside of the organization. However, the term de-radicalisation refers primarily to a cognitive rejection of certain values, attitudes and views – in other words, a change of mind. While one is inclined to think that de- radicalisation comes first and disengagement – behavioural distancing from the violent terrorist modus operandi - comes afterwards, this is not necessarily so. Horgan and Bjørgo (2009) have argued convincingly that there is no clear evidence to suggest that disengagement from terrorism may bring with it de-radicalisation, nor (and perhaps more controversially) is there clear evidence to support the argument that de-radicalisation is a necessary accompaniment to disengagement (Moghadam,2009). It appears that most ex-terrorists have not so much changed their cognitive

framework than their actual behaviour. In other words, disengagement without de-radicalisation might be the rule rather than the exception. John Horgan, having conducted dozens of interviews with former terrorists since 2006, concluded that while almost all of the interviewees could be described as disengaged, not a single one of them could be said to be de-radicalised (Horgan, 2010). This is the point even the Government of Nigeria is missing.

The present study is set to theoretically highlight the dynamism of terrorism by examining the relationships between terrorism, radicalization, terrorist disengagement and de-radicalisation of terrorists. In this regards the seemly unyielding terrorist movement would be given a creative logical connectedness to the psychology of the actors. Hopefully, this would throw more light on the strengths of terrorists and the possible means of its extinction.

Theoretical frameworks

The first and still dominant explanation of terrorism explores mainly how presumably 'vulnerable' individuals in the West (often second and third generation Muslim immigrants or Middle Eastern students) are socialised ideologically and psychologically by terrorist propaganda and/or recruiters of terrorist organisations (Guidere & Morgan, 2007).The second approach stresses more what is going on in the enabling environment – the radical milieu – or, more narrowly, in an underground organisation which offers those willing to join the thrills of adventure and the comfort of comradeship within a brotherhood (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2012). The third level of analysis deals, among other things, with government actions at home and abroad and society's relationship with members of minorities, especially diaspora migrants, who are caught between two cultures, leading some to rebel against the very society that hosts them (Waldmann, 2009). Mark Sedgwick argues that, so long as the circumstances that produce Islamist radicals'

declared grievances are not taken into account, it is inevitable that the Islamist radical will often appear as a 'rebel without a cause' (Sedgwick, 2010).

A sophisticated model is the Staircase Model developed by Moghadam (2009) for Islamic communities in both Western and non-Western societies. He uses the metaphor of a narrowing staircase leading step-by-step to the top of a building, having a ground floor and five higher floors to represent each phase in the radicalisation process that, at the top floor, ends in an act of terrorism. The ground floor, inhabited by more than one billion Muslims worldwide, stands for a cognitive analysis of the structural circumstances in which the individual Muslim finds him- or herself. Here, the individual asks him- or herself questions like 'am I being treated fairly?' The individual begins to interpret an ascribed causality to what he or she deems unjust. According to Moghaddam, most people find themselves on this 'foundational level'. Some individuals who are very dissatisfied move up to the first floor in search for a change in their situation. On the first floor, one finds individuals who are actively seeking to remedy those circumstances they perceive to be unjust. Some of them might find that paths to individual upward social mobility are blocked, that their voices of protest are silenced and that there is no access to participation in decision-making. They tend to move up to the second floor, where these individuals are directed toward external targets for displacement of aggression. He or she begins to place blame for injustice on out-groups such as Israel and the US. Some are radicalised in mosques and other meeting places of Muslims and move to the third floor on the staircase to terrorism. This phase involves a moral disengagement from society and a moral engagement within the nascent terrorist organisation. Within this phase, values are constructed which rationalise the use of violence by the terrorists while simultaneously decrying the moral authority of the incumbent regime. A smaller group moves up the narrowing staircase to the fourth floor,

where the legitimacy of terrorist organisations is accepted more strongly. Here the attitude is: you are either with us or against us. They begin to be incorporated into the organisational and value structures of terrorist organisations. Some are recruited to take the last steps on the staircase and commit acts of terrorism when reaching the top fifth floor (Moghadam, 2009).

There is a growing body of literature that claims that over-reaction to terrorism causes more terrorism (e.g. Silke, 2005; Parker, 2007; Geltzer, 2012). Since there are so few rigorous evaluation studies, it is difficult to verify this. However, it does seem that many acts of terrorism are motivated by revenge for acts of repression, injustice and humiliation and that a tit-for-tat process can evolve after a while. A difficult problem here is: what is an appropriate reaction and what is an over-reaction by governments? It is well known that repressive over-reaction sometimes has worked, for example in Argentina. The price paid in innocent lives for such response, however, was horrendous in Argentina in the late 1970s and also Guatemala in the 1980s, where it reached catastrophic near-genocidal proportions. There were cases such as in Peru in the fight against Shining Path or in Algeria in the 1990s in the fight against the Groupe Islamique Armé, where the governmental 'cure' to terrorism was as bad as, if not worse than the 'disease' of terrorism itself. In general, a proportionate response based on a minimal use of force appears to be wiser. The deterrent effect of overwhelming force is often over-estimated. Deterrence is unlikely to work in cases where terrorists have no known address, are not afraid of becoming martyrs and when there is no clear state-sponsor behind the terrorists to hit back to (Wenger & Wilner, 2012).

The democratic, rule of law-based state has to find a balance between freedom and security. In which direction the balance is weighing depends on the level of the terrorist threat, something that is not always easy to assess. However, in the end, there cannot be freedom without

security; and people are, if it comes to a hard choice, generally opting for 'security first' over liberty. If the state overreacts to terrorist provocations and becomes very repressive and aggressive, it often produces additional mobilisation on the other side despite the fact that the escalation potential on the government side is so much greater than the one of terrorist groups. It is by now widely accepted that the US and United Kingdom's (UK) invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent horror pictures from the Abu Ghraib prison documented by the American guards themselves, have contributed greatly to both radicalisation and recruitment for al-Qaeda. Some critics even claim that the state's (over-) reaction to terrorism is in itself a major cause of terrorism (Silke, 2005; Parker, 2012). However, we need more rigorous evaluation studies to make definitive assessments.

Rusbult's Investment Model

This model (Rusbult, 1983) distinguishes between two components associated with individual involvement with an entity (whether terrorism or not): satisfaction and commitment. Satisfaction reflects how positively one evaluates the target entity (e.g., a job, relationship, group). The model suggests satisfaction increases to the extent that the entity provides high rewards and low costs, which surpass one's expectations, or comparison level.

Satisfaction is important because it increases commitment (Rusbult, 1983). Commitment refers to the probability that one remains in a job, relationship, group, or organization and feels psychologically bound to it (Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). Low satisfaction, however, does not ensure low commitment. Commitment is a more complex, multifaceted concept given it is shaped by two additional variables: alternative quality and investment size (Farrell &Rusbult,1981). The investment model suggests commitment increases when people perceive pooralternatives to involvement and have invested heavily in involvement. Investments may be intrinsic (i.e.,

resources invested such as time, energy, money) or extrinsic (i.e., resources tied to involvement, including friends, material objects, memories).Thus, terrorists who derive high rewards (e.g., sense of achievement, social bonds) and low costs (e.g., little intragroup conflict, few perceived threats) from their role, which exceed their expectations for that role, are likely to be highly satisfied. Higher satisfaction increases commitment to one's group. Low satisfaction, however, may not result in exit given commitment (or the probability of exit) is also a function of the quality of alternatives (e.g., stable employment, a supportive family, marriage opportunities) and investments, or sunk costs, in the organization (e.g., close friendships, time and energy, perceived threats for exiting).

Importantly, the investment model incorporates the role of emotions in sustaining or terminating involvement (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). High emotional costs associated with involvement may generate dissatisfaction and precipitate exit, whereas positive emotions may create rewards or affective bonds, which increase satisfaction and sustain involvement. For example, the negative emotions a suicide bomber experiences when seeing a young child just prior to detonation may increase the costs associated with involvement (perhaps, instantaneously), generate dissatisfaction, and lead to disengagement (c.f. Speckhard, 2013) even though he or she may continue to believe in the group's underlying ideology or cause.

Rusbult's model has several advantages that make it applicable to understanding individual disengagement decisions across social roles, including the terrorist role. First, unlike stage models, which assume people move sequentially through a series of distinct phases before exiting, the investment model offers a more flexible approach that recognizes the complexities underlying human decision-making. Second, the model is well regarded by psychologists and enjoys a rich research tradition, with a number of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies supporting its core

tenets (Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012; Le & Agnew, 2003). The model was tested initially in the context of interpersonal relationships, including romantic relationships (e.g., Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1986), friendships (e.g., Rusbult, 1980), and abusive or non-voluntary relationships (Rusbult & Martz, 1995).

However, recent work demonstrates its applicability in non-relational domains (Le & Agnew, 2003), including work organizations (e.g., Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988); music, sports, or hobbies (e.g., Koslowsky & Kluger, 1986; Raedeke, 1997; Carpenter & Coleman, 1998); colleges or schools (e.g., Geyer, Brannon, & Shearon, 1987); and even the war on terror (e.g., Agnew et al. 2007). A meta-analysis by Le and Agnew (2003) of 52 studies, totaling 11,582 participants, found strong support for the investment model. Satisfaction, alternative quality, and comparison level explaining more than two-thirds of the variation in their measure of commitment, which was strongly associated with documented stay/leave behavior. Tests of the model revealed individual differences (e.g., need for cognition, self-esteem) played no role or only a very minor role in influencing the likelihood of exit (Rusbult et al., 1998).

A key weakness of Rusbult's model is that, in isolation, it offers insight into one's likelihood of exit at a given point, or window, in time. Using the model alone, it is difficult to discern the dynamic ways in which events over the life course interact to shape decisions to leave. Further, the model says little about how individuals leave or what the exit process, in contrast to the exit decision, entails.

Altier, Thoroughgood, and Horgan (2014) highlights the utility of a multi-disciplinary approach in lending new insights to the study of terrorist disengagement and found evidence of the key components of Rusbult's model in the literature on desistance, disaffiliation, and turnover. Rusbult's investment model succinctly captures *why* the likelihood of disengagement changes over

time, while still allowing for individual and temporal differences. For example, differences may exist in how much satisfaction one obtains from involvement and why (e.g., ideological commitment, social bonds, penchant for violence), the alternatives available, and the investments incurred. Thus, the investment model moves beyond the push/pull framework and explains why certain pushes and pulls cause some individuals to disengage from terrorism, but not others. An ideologically motivated terrorist satisfied with involvement, for instance, is less likely to be persuaded to leave by amnesty, financial incentives, or new opportunities than a deeply dissatisfied individual or one whose satisfaction with membership hinges on opportunistic gains. The model also elucidates why pushes and pulls may be more or less effective in precipitating disengagement at certain points during an individual's life course as satisfaction, alternatives, and investments vary. Thus, the model accounts for normal aging-related changes in roles and goals (e.g., desire to have a family), burnout, or the ability to make calculated decisions, which are highlighted in the literature on desistance and disaffiliation from NRMs and may apply in the terrorist context.

Importantly, with regard to terrorism, the investment model could allow researchers to consider how variation at the macro-level in, for instance, state features and policies, interact with group- and individual-level characteristics to influence the likelihood of disengagement at the aggregate level. Certain state policies to combat terrorism, for instance, may increase the costs associated with membership (e.g., death, imprisonment). At the same time, repressive policies may make individuals more likely to support violence in the pursuit of their aims (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994). Variation in popular support for the cause or organization may shape the rewards obtained from membership (e.g., honor, social status). Economic development, educational opportunities, and amnesty may increase the quality of alternatives available to individuals deeply dissatisfied with involvement. Further, differences across groups in the factors driving membership, internal

relations, leadership, and the investments required, which influence the probability of exit or the factors likely to encourage exit, can be captured by the investment model.

Terrorism Disengagement and De-Radicalization: The Relationships

Terrorism disengagement has been the yearning of an average world leader who, in search of peace, may likely go to war. No doubt, to quench to the immediate fear of molestation and death meted upon innocent citizens, the best is to disengage the terrorists by disengaging their groups. Unfortunately, terrorists re-group and strike! Like the saying goes, "to heal a symptom is not the best, but to heal the root cause". A disengaged terrorist may or may not be de-radicalised. This is a simple truth. In Nigeria and most countries of the world, efforts of governments are yet to be geared towards de-radicalisation. Moreover, de-radicalisation is a process that is more psychological than it is physically engaging. Those who have been in detention camps, however, seems to be regarded more as captives worthy of punishment than as helpless people in need of rehabilitation.

This paper argues that terrorism will go on as long as de-radicalisation is not given a high regards in the war against terrorism. On the issue of Boko Haram for example, it is pertinent to note that destroying their camps in Sambisa forest and disengaging them from the act do not necessarily translate to the "defeat" of Boko Haram. When they are disengaged or captured and imprisoned, what next? Moreover, disengagement from one terrorist group may provide another opportunity to join or create another group. The fact that some of these detained Boko Haram Terrorists were allegedly released as swap to the Kidnapped Chibok girls tell a story of how unserious or even naïve the Nigerian government is on de-radicalisation. This could be the loophole through which case of Boko Haram terrorism still linger. I, therefore, argue that when terrorists are disengaged without being de-radicalized, they are still radicals. Moreover, when we

understand that not all terrorists are radicals, we may being to look at some of the opportunities our environment offers for terrorism.

Conclusion/Recommendation

A major obstacle to understanding terrorist disengagement is that existing research remains devoid of conceptual clarity. The synonymous and inconsistent use of the terms “disengagement” (i.e., cessation of terrorist behavior) and “de-radicalization”(i.e., elimination of one’s belief in a violent, extremist ideology) is one indicator [e.g., Kruglanski et al. (2013:560)]. As Horgan and Altier (2012) noted, not all individuals who engage in terrorism are radical and not all individuals who disengage are “de-radicalized” upon their departure. The study of disengagement also poses methodological challenges. Given that most terrorists operate in secret, representative samples are difficult to obtain, as are measures of key variables over time. Prior work demonstrates the feasibility of approaching small samples of “former” terrorists (Horgan, 2009). However, aside from the absence of a control group of individuals who remain engaged in terrorism, many former terrorists may conceal their involvement and those willing to talk with researchers may differ systematically from those who remain silent. Further, former terrorists may use their accounts to pursue political goals; sensationalize events; or justify prior behaviors to governments, constituencies, and themselves (Cordes, 1987).

Terrorism is affects both the government and the citizens. Most terrorist are radicals while some are not. For those radicalized and recruited into t organisations, disengagement from terrorism may not mean de-radicalisation. For this reason, terrorism has come to stay. But is it important to know that those terrorists who are not radicalised could be products of frustrating environment; people only need to meet their heart desires to quit and de-radicalise. To this end, there is need for government at all levels to observe the following:

1. Captured Members of terrorist groups should be treated as helpless individuals in need of rehabilitation, and none of them should be released without being totally de-radicalised.

2. De-radicalisation should be included in government programmes especially as it concerns youth development.

3. Government must ensure that those disengaged are not only de-radicalised but are also made to change their perceived self-identities and roles as citizens of the country.

4. Government should be more transparent and be proactive in engaging the citizens as real stake holders so as to have a good sense of belonging with meaningful participation in their governments.

5. Reactions of government towards terrorism should be more of research for insight rather than war to destroy.

6. A sophisticated programme of de-radicalisation and skilful reintegration should be put in place to check the stigmatization, "unacceptable" self-concept and unhealthy self-esteem.

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