

JUSTICE AS A DE-RADICALIZATION TOOL IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

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Abstract

This research argued that an effective de-radicalization process must be justice based. By implication, justice must be the anchor or driver of every form of de-radicalization process. It also argued that the terrorists' major tool for the recruitment of new members had always been anchored on perceived sense of injustice. By the same logic, the absence of injustice will serve as a major blow to strategic recruitment pattern of terrorists. In this conceptual analysis, the paper posits that though de-radicalization is a better option in the fight against terrorism when compared with kinetic approach (use of force), but de-radicalization in itself will be ineffectual when it is not rooted in justice. Using philosophical method of analysis the paper argued that in the fight against terrorism, de-radicalization and justice are inseparable. Finally, it concludes that the reason for the success of de-radicalization in some areas and its colossal failure in other areas is the presence and absence of justice.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, De-radicalization, Justice, Marginalization, Terrorism,

Introduction

Our contemporary society is bedeviled by a serious threat which one cannot easily ignore. No matter one's ethnicity, religion or social status the problems or challenges posed by terrorists' activities cannot be overlooked. It seems there is a concerted effort from all quarters to either totally eliminate or diminish to the barest minimum the activities of the terrorists. De-radicalization has continued to be seen as a potent force in the fight against terrorism. But when we take a statistical look at the progression of terrorists' activities *vis a vis* effort at de-radicalization, one is forced to question the potency of de-radicalization as a method in the fight against terrorism. The Global Terrorism Index (2023) states that after the substantial fall in terrorism between 2015 and 2019, there was a resurgence in the last three years. In fact, the report posits that terrorist attacks became more deadly in 2022, killing on the average of 1.7 people per attack in 2022 compared to 1.3 deaths per attack in 2021 (GTI, 2023, 4).

Progress in the fight against terrorism has been a case of back and forth movement. There is no sustained progression in this direction even with lots of efforts at de-radicalizing these terrorists. The Global Terrorism Index (2023) statistical analysis to a large extent substantiates this position. This points us to the core of our argument: for every act of terrorism there is always an implicit sense of injustice from the terrorists' perspective which could be justified or unjustified. One can argue that the terrorist has this sense of injustice against his/her person, community, ethnicity or religion, hence the terrorist action to a large extent is geared towards righting the wrongs. The aforesaid view is quite debatable depending on which side of the

divide a person is (terrorist or non-terrorist). Whether the terrorist action is morally or legally right is a question of further philosophical debate. The popular aphorism that ‘one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’ throws more light to it. Our focus in this paper is on how justice can help in de-radicalization of terrorists. Is it possible to have a de-radicalization process that is not anchored on justice? In other words, de-radicalization ought to begin with justice and also sustained by justice as anything contrary will amount to effort in futility.

This paper considers the basis, the springboard or the rationale behind terrorists’ activities. We shall also explore the concept of de-radicalization and the place of justice in the de-radicalization process. Finally, we would argue that a lasting de-radicalization is the one that is anchored on justice. Justice in this sense is not just justice as seen by the de-radicalizing agent, rather a consensual justice which is acceptable by both parties (the radicalized and the de-radicalizing agents). Duyile writing on the prelude to the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria argues that what is today known as Boko Haram insurgency has a very long history which goes as far back as the 19th century. For him, Boko Haram is a continuation of jihadist movement which was led by Uthman Dan Fodio (2023, 123). He (Duyile) pointed out that Dan Fodio’s initial purpose was to establish a purer form of Islam in what he considered a predominantly corrupt and decadent society (2023, 123). We can further infer from this position that implicitly, one who is seeking for the establishment of a purer form of Islam to a large extent could be said to be fighting a just cause, at least from the person’s perspective. The question lies on the justifiability of such method or approach. Let us consider the basis of terrorists’ activities.

The Basis of Terrorists Activities

For a proper understanding of the basis of terrorists’ activities or actions, there is need for us to establish who a terrorist is or what terrorism is. What is the definition of terrorism, and who is a terrorist? The question of definition has constituted a major challenge to the discourse on terrorism. Terrorism is a multi-disciplinary concept embedded in a lot of controversies once the question of its definition arises. The quest for its definition has been on for over half a century, yet there is still no international consensus about its exact meaning (Schmid, 2023, 2). For Schmid, there are 5 different approaches in defining the meaning of terrorism. First, by focusing on the history of terrorism; second, by focusing on the psychology of terror; third, by focusing on forms of political violence other than terrorist violence; fourth, by focusing on the terrorist act and finally by focusing on the terrorists (2023, 5). He (Schmid) argued that approaching the concept through these 5 key areas will give one a clue to what terrorism is all about. For our purpose in this paper, we shall consider the definition of terrorism from Schmid’s second approach, which is the psychology of terror.

The psychology of terror will help us establish the basis of terrorist activities. On the psychology of terror, Schmid opined that a key difference between terrorism and other forms of political violence is that the victim of the violence is generally not the ultimate target of the terrorist threat (2023, 6). This implies that, the victims of terrorists’ activities were only but

means to an end. The ultimate goal of terrorist activities is to instill fear. From the aforementioned, one can differentiate between a terrorist act and other acts of violence. Logically, terrorism can be seen as any act of terror with the intention to instill fear. Hence, random acts of violence without the intention to instill fear cannot be classified as terrorist act. The argument here is that fear is a major tool in the hand of the terrorists. Fear is what will coerce or force the main target to react towards what the terrorists desire. On this note, it is important to state that, the defining element in the concept of terrorism is the idea that violence is used as an instrument of fear, and fear serves as a tool of coercion towards the demands of the terrorists.

Having established the point above, we shall focus on the basis of terrorists' actions. Martinez *et al* deducing from Hobbesian idea of the origin of the civil society argued that the use of violence in a modern state is exclusive to the state (2022, 1). Hence, the use of violence by any group or individual in a modern state lacks legitimacy and cannot be justified. The basis of this argument is the fact that, in Hobbesian concept of civil society, it was individuals in the state that voluntarily relinquished their powers to the leviathan. By surrendering their powers or their ability to use force to the Leviathan, they empowered the Leviathan to use such power on their behalf. It automatically becomes illegal for them to use such power again. By this argument, the use of violence becomes exclusive to the state. But the other side of the argument is that those who relinquished their powers did so that in return they will gain protection from the Leviathan. In other words, the Leviathan was to use the power in their interest. Our question will be, what happens when the powers of the leviathan is not actually derived from the people in the first instance? Again, what if that sense of protection is denied certain group of people? Is it possible for them to withdraw the power which they had earlier relinquished to the Leviathan? Power once relinquished to the leviathan, is it irreversible and irretrievable? On the first question, a sense of injustice is created in the mind of the people, and it will be difficult for the leviathan to gain the peoples loyalty. On the second question if 'protection' which is the reason the people relinquished their power to the leviathan is denied, then there is every likelihood that the people will withdraw such power. If the power emanates from the people, it implies that the people can withdraw such power. Power once relinquished is not irreversible and irretrievable. The people can chose to relinquish such power to another leviathan in the form of freedom fighter. Hence the popular saying, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

Martinez *et al* writing on the justification of terrorism mentioned three factors that could lead to terrorism. The factors for them are, the push, the pull and the personal factors. The push factors has to do with state repression, relative deprivation, poverty and injustice. The pull factor on the other hand is associated with consumption of propaganda, cultural congruence, perceived efficacy, and morality of a group. On the personal factors we have individual characteristics; certain individuals by their very nature either through nurture or by some other factors are more vulnerable to radicalization (2022, 2). At this point, it is becoming clearer

what could be seen as the basis of some terrorist activities. And we can infer that not every terrorist activity that is criminalized, is morally wrong, if we take into cognizance the concept of justice. We are more interested in dealing with how to handle terrorist activities that are product of state injustice. As such, our effort is to see the extent justice induced de-radicalization can help to progressively sustain de-radicalization. Let us therefore explore the concept of de-radicalization.

The concept of De-radicalization

What is de-radicalization? There are various conceptions of de-radicalization, the variations in the conceptions have led to more problems when considered from a philosophical perspective. Just as there are many conceptions of de-radicalization, there is also the problem of what constitutes a successful de-radicalization as there is no consensus with regards to what constitutes a successful de-radicalization. In the view of Popp, G. *et al*, de-radicalization is an attitudinal shift from supporting violence as a means for achieving political or ideological goals. For them, de-radicalization stresses attitudinal and psychological change. Here, attempts are made to change the mindset, sympathies and attitudes of an individual (2020, 4). For J. G. Morgan de-radicalization is “the social and psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement and engagement in violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity” (2009, 153). Reinares, F. writing on exit from terrorism opined that “deradicalization emphasizes an attitudinal change. It implies that he or she no longer condones terrorism and does not justify the individual and collective actors using such types of violence” (2011, 780).

A good understanding of the concept of de-radicalization begins with a proper understanding of the concept of radicalization. It is unarguably obvious that the same element which is capable of radicalizing individuals when withdrawn has the same potency to de-radicalize. Winter and Feixas (2019, 2) listed some factors that can lead to the radicalization of individuals. For them, the factors include; economic deprivation, state of uncertainty about the self and the world, existential anxiety, experienced prejudice, and perceived exclusion from an in-group, sense of alienation and threats to one’s collective identity as a result of globalization. These factors in most cases are what instigates the emotions of anger and hatred, which will finally culminate to violent approach. The Niger Delta Militants situation in Nigeria is a clear example. A situation where the indigenous people of Niger Delta are alienated from the resources which are drilled from their communities. This sense of alienation was what led the youths of these areas to take up arms. A sincere process of de-radicalizing these youths begins with addressing the initial cause of their radicalization. The same goes to various terrorists activities. People are ready to cause mayhem in the society insofar as they have nothing to lose in such a society. That is to say, a sense of exclusion or alienation or possibly a sense of hopelessness can trigger the process of radicalization. There are other factors (religion and culture) which possibly can lead to radicalization, but our focus in this paper is mainly on those factors which are caused

by injustice and our argument is; for a lasting de-radicalization, injustice must be replaced with justice. The de-radicalization process must be anchored on justice.

The Concept of Justice

The concept of justice is complex and multifaceted. Justice is often understood as fairness; ensuring that individuals receive what they deserve based on their actions and circumstances. There is also the moral dimension to justice, where justice is linked to moral principles and values such as: equality, impartiality, and respect for rights and dignity. Again, justice is also associated with the legal system. It aims at upholding the rule of law and protecting the rights of citizens. In this sense justice is adherence to the rule of law. We also have distributive justice, retributive justice, restorative justice, social justice, global justice etcetera. It will be difficult to accommodate all these perspectives of justice in this paper. For our purpose, since we are concerned with a social political problem, we shall be looking at social justice and distributive justice in relation to social contract.

The idea of social justice is about creating a society that values and respects the dignity and human rights of all individuals, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. How we arrive at those rights, is also a matter of serious concern. Social Contractarians like: Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Rawls have given logical basis on the emergence of civil society. Scholars like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Michael Sandel, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum have all propounded on the concept of justice. John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government* argues for natural rights and social contract. Locke believed that individuals have inherent rights to life, liberty and property, which are inalienable and universal. In the state of nature, he argued that individuals are free and equal, but also vulnerable to violence and instability. For Locke, individuals enter into a social contract to establish a government, which protects their natural rights and maintains order (1980, xvii). Hence, he argued that the primary purpose of government is to protect life, liberty and property. Justice for him is ensuring that individuals receive what they deserve based on their action and contribution.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses* argued that the society is based on an implicit contract between individuals, where they trade some personal freedoms for protection and security. He believed that humans are inherently good in their natural state, but society and civilization corrupt them. He proposed that the collective will of the people, rather than individual interests should guide political decision-making. Justice for him is achieved when the general will (collective will) of the people is prioritized over individual interest. Immanuel Kant in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* theorized on the concept of justice. Kant's concept of justice is rooted in his moral and political philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of individual rights, dignity, and the rule of law. Justice for him is based on the moral law, which is universal, absolute, and applies to all rational beings. He advocated for universal principle of justice applicable to all individuals, regardless of their particular interest or circumstances.

Another scholar who theorized on the concept of justice is John Rawls in his book *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls proposes a thought experiment in which individuals choose principles of justice from behind a ‘veil of ignorance’ unaware of their personal characteristics, social status, or future opportunities. He argues that individuals in the original position would choose two principles: “greatest equal liberty principle” and “difference principle”. On the former, each person has an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. On the later, social and economic inequalities (if there must inequality) are arranged to benefit the least advantaged members of the society.

For Rawls’ contemporary Robert Nozick in his work *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), he argues that any distribution of holdings is just if it arises from just distribution through legitimate means. He emphasizes on the importance of individual rights that cannot be violated even if it would lead to a more equal distribution of wealth. A modern day political philosopher Michael Sandel in his work *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to do?* (2009) argued extensively on the concept of justice. His argument was against the idea of the greater good. For him individual rights should not be sacrificed for the greater good, and that the principles of justice should not be based on any particular vision of the good life.

Amartya Sen in his work titled *The Idea of Justice* (2009) rejected the idea that economic rights must come before political rights. He focuses on entitlement as a key aspect of justice. His argument is that reason, justice and liberty are part of the common heritage of humanity. His focus was on human capabilities and the importance of addressing human freedoms and dignity. The list of scholars who have written on the concept of justice are unending. There are facts we can deduce from the scholars we have considered so far. The individual right; this right when surrendered to the state is to serve the interest of the individual. The need for a just and fair society, for peace and progress in the society. Anything contrary to just and fair society is an open call for anarchy. Almost all the social contracrarians have argued on the concept of justice. One can deduce from their argument that justice is what sustains and creates stability in a civil society. It was the absence of such stability in the first instance that led to the social contract that culminated to the emergence of civil society. The absence of justice by default will amount to a return to the state of nature. The activities of the terrorists have clearer shown a return to the state of nature. It is therefore logical to argue that the missing link is justice. Let us consider how justice can help in de-radicalization process.

Justice as a de-radicalizing tool

We have been able to establish that factors which are capable of leading to radicalization when withdrawn can as well lead to de-radicalization. One basic fact about these factors is that they are products of injustice. This clearly explains why the popular aphorism that ‘one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’ continues to hold sway. Demant F. and De Graat B. writing on how to counter radical narratives of the terrorists argue that “the Jihadists need stories of injustice and repression to convince themselves and others of the legitimacy of the battle and to keep their supporters motivated and loyal” (2010, 409). They further argued that

radicalization is reversible insofar as the government was able to counter the terrorists' narratives. For them, government can contribute in the de-radicalization process by being aware of the injustice stories disseminated by these terrorists and confronting these narratives with better or neutralizing stories. Our question will be; what if these stories by the terrorists are facts? What if the people actually experienced what the agents of radicalization are telling them? One will discover that whatever counter narrative presented by the government can only aggravate the situation, considering the fact that the people are witnesses to the injustice.

Those who are victims of government injustice are aware of their situation. Such injustice only gives room for terrorist opportunists to capitalize on them to inspire people to violent behavior. Nigeria Biafra War is a good example. Currently in Nigeria there is a mass followership of Nnamdi Kanu's Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Despite government proscription of the group and various counter narratives about the group, they have continued to spread throughout Nigeria and beyond. The sense of exclusion from the common wealth of Nigeria felt by young people of Igbo extraction has to a large extent made IPOB movement appealing. The crux of our argument is that the use of force or military might can achieve little or no result in the fight against terrorism if the springboard of such terrorist activity is injustice. Whatever success gained by the government can only be momentary or temporal. So long as the injustice which aggravates it is not dealt with, the radicalizing process will continue to appeal to the oppress people. Every effort at de-radicalization in the absence of justice will only be a mere charade.

Onapajo & Ozden (2020) observed the social injustice that led to Boko Haram radicalization thus: "There is an environment of rising frustrations and absolute distrust for the Nigeria state over the years following reports of massive elite corruption, social injustice, exploitation of the masses, and failure to deliver dividends of democracy". This sense of frustration and distrust formed the basis for the radicalization of members of Boko Haram. It boils down to a state of injustice created by the elites of the society. And if one genuinely wants to address this challenge (extremism radicalization) through the process of de-radicalization, one must first address the sense of frustration that paves way to radicalization, substituting it with a sense of hope and also replace the distrust on government with a sense of trust. If these elements which are products of injustice are not addressed it will be difficult to achieve a genuine de-radicalization.

Badru and Owolabi (2022) opine that "the philosophy of de-radicalization is based on the need to totally change the minds of extremists from their parochial radical focus to a more pragmatic and positive focus about the state and the society". Our question will be; how can the state achieve this? With what is the state going to change the mind of these extremists? To these questions, we propose justice, an inclusive kind of justice. The same way injustice has been a major factor in the radicalization process, in the same vein, justice serves as a reversal tool. The idea of justice which we propose is not abstract, rather a pragmatic kind of justice which will be acceptable to the extremists. This kind of justice must counter or address their (the extremists) sense of injustice. Justice in this context will serve two purposes: first, it will serve

as a de-radicalizing tool to already radicalized members of the society and second, it will render the process of radicalization unattractive to soft targets of radicalizing agents. At this point, we will like to argue that any organization that is not capable of recruiting new members will definitely run into extinction going by the law of succession. With an inclusive sense of justice, the process of radicalization is reduced or slowed and made unattractive to would be targets. Those already on the other side of the divide i.e. already radicalized elements will see no further reason to continue with their extremism.

Conclusion

Terrorism is multifaceted, our effort in this paper is not to achieve a holistic approach to the problem of terrorism. Our effort is geared towards establishing the place of justice in de-radicalization process. Our argument is that a sincere process of de-radicalization must be anchored on the principles of justice. Justice in this sense must be consensual, not just justice from the perspective of the de-radicalizing agent, rather the radical or extremist who is to be de-radicalized must perceive a sense of justice in the entire process. This goes a long way in saying, that there is every possibility that we can have a de-radicalizing process that is not based on justice. Such de-radicalizing process only achieve momentary success. But for a lasting de-radicalization, justice must be central. From human instinctual perspective, it is natural for human beings to seek for a peaceful society. The desire to create conflict becomes an option to the one who has nothing to gain from the peaceful society.

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