Ideology and Insight into the Psyche of a Terrorist

A J B Jaini

Asymmetric warfare has become a major problem of the world today, specially of democratic societies like India. Modern terrorist phenomena are characterised by their highly 'international' nature. While every asymmetric conflict is affected to some extent by the overall international environment, most terrorist activities now have international connections and ramifications, which manifest themselves in varied forms. Despite efforts of governments to combat it, the total volume of asymmetric warfare is not only on the increase but is also getting 'bloodier' by the day.

Unfortunately, the very 'concept' of terrorism has been treated differently by various states, authors, intellectuals and thinkers who ascribe different meanings and connotations to it. This has further resulted in lack of understanding as to what 'terrorism' is all about. Ironically, today, we have a situation where we have more 'experts' on the subject than 'realists'!

Democratic people are inclined to believe that asymmetric warfare is one of the symptoms of the various malaise of our times – some would say, "caused by displacement of established values, advent of extreme materialism, erosion of religious faith, declining living standards, poverty, social inequalities and injustice."Some believe that asymmetric conflict comprises essentially senseless and mindless acts, perpetrated by individuals and groups who are psychologically disturbed or mentally indoctrinated. Assumptions such as these would not only be erroneous but indeed a simple 'off the cuff' brushaside explanation of a phenomenon which is basically more complex.

There is also uncertainty about the extent of what is meant by 'asymmetric' and terrorist acts. Can all acts of violence be condemned as

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terrorist acts? If that be so, then, the question arises: are all revolutionary movements to be uniformly condemned? After all, one man's 'nationalism ' can be 'terrorism' for another. Can those who fight against oppressive regimes be branded as terrorists? Additionally, there is also the problem and difficulty of drawing a clear distinction between state terrorism, factional terrorism and international terrorism. We have been coining many terms, one after another, to describe different forms of violence, but have failed to find any answers for it. Confused due to the uncertainty about 'why' and 'what' contributes or constitutes this kind of 'asymmetric warfare,' states and the international community find themselves unprepared to cope with this so-called 'new violence'. Consequently, this has directly affected remedies possible at various levels.

Globalisation has been accompanied by widely accepted international rules to cope with economic and commercial dimensions. However, similar mechanisms are absent, or still evolving, when it comes to dealing with asymmetric warfare and emergence of non-state players. Due to support provided by various regimes and nations to terrorist organisations, efforts, so far, to form any common strategy, in the form of agreements or international laws, have met with little success. It is only now, with the spreading violence that most states are coming around to accept the necessity of international cooperation in one form or the other. (The United States was oblivious to Indian protests against terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) till they were themselves attacked on 9/11; what followed was "the international war against terror" and the "coalition of the willing.")

The Anatomy of Asymmetric Warfare

Many believe that terrorism is a new phenomenon. But nothing could be further from the truth. A study of history shows that terrorism is an age old phenomenon. As far back as the first century, the Jewish Siearii and Zealot movements employed irregular means of warfare against the Romans. Perhaps the first clear example of any movement employing asymmetric means as a major weapon was the "Assassin Sect" of the11th and 12th centuries in the Middle East. In fact, the words 'assassin' and 'assassination' came from the actions of this sect.[1]

The 19th century saw asymmetric warfare come into its own. Instances of terrorism during this period are far too many to recount. Suffice to mention a few, just to illustrate that asymmetric conflict is essentially not a modern invention :

(a) **1890:** Armenians in Turkey pioneered taking of hostages.

(b) **1895:** Armenian revolutionaries seized banks in Constantinople.

(c) **1897:** Large number of bombings in London. Many were killed.

(d) **1905-10:** Terrorism prevailed in the Balkans, Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia before World War 1.

(e) Even in India, bands of Pindaries used murder tactics for personal gains in the days of Lord Bentinck.

Terrorist Ideology

Asymmetry is an ideology by itself. It is not that terrorist acts were committed at random, or without any ideological base. Intellectual writings on terrorism began in the early 19th century, profoundly affecting the terrorists'

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modus operandi and their acts – leading to the *modus operandi* they follow even today. It is, therefore, necessary to briefly look into these ideologies, which have influenced the terrorist's mind as it operates in the current environment.

(a) The earliest author of terrorist thought was Wilhelm, a German socialist in 1808. But the concept of systematic terror and its use in revolutionary strategy appeared for the first time in the writings of Mikhail Bakunin and Sergey Nechayav. They had authorised rules of a revolutionary which advocated destruction of the existing order – not by mobilisation of the prolitariat, as was advocated by Carl Marx, but through total destruction of the legal state and civilisation.[2]

(b) The leading French anti-parliamentarian Paul Brousse was the first to coin the phrase "Propaganda by Deed."

(c) Another elaborate and systematic attempt to create any philosophy or ideology of asymmetric warfare can be seen in the works of 20th century prominent thinker Jean Paul Sartre. He propounded the philosophy of, and accorded respectability to, terror, by saying, "Terror, far from being a cancer of the body politic, is indeed its life and blood."[3]

(d) But the greatest contribution to the philosophy of asymmetric warfare came from a neo-Marxist intellectual of Africa, Frantz Fanon, who wrote the book

The Wretched of the Earth, in which he wrote :

Violence committed by people, and violence alone, organized and taught by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them.[4]

Thus, Fanon helped to set the stage internationally for asymmetric conflict by justifying resort to it as a legitimate way of attacking injustice.

(e) In recent times, Carlos Mareghella, the Brazilian Communist, can be considered as the main inspiration for operators of asymmetric warfare. He wrote the book *Mini Manual of the Urban Guerilla* This book is considered the Bible for contemporary terrorists and has greatly influenced the operational art of asymmetric warfare.

The Terrorist Vis-a-Vis Other Anti-National Elements

While there is no internationally accepted definition of asymmetric warfare, various countries and international fora as well as authors have defined it according to their own perceptions and interests. However, some basic characteristics of 'terrorism' have been recognised. It is these parameters which distinguish asymmetric warfare from other forms of violence, or crimes, which may terrify but are not 'terrorism':

- Using terror as a method of governing.
- Coercing governments and communities by the use of terror.
- Threat or use of violence for political purposes.
- Use of violence to generate fear in the public.
- Terrorise, in order to win submission to terrorists' demands.

Since terrorists have always claimed the 'fight for liberation' as their cause, a clear-cut distinction needs to be made between terrorist acts of violence and violence of guerrilla war, insurgencies or any liberation movement. In the case of liberation movements :

- Their goals are to save or liberate people.
- The methods employed are bound by certain rules of behaviour, consistent with the goals.
- The targets are forces of oppression and instruments of power – not the general population.
- The targets are specific and linked to the opposed regime.
- Violence is directed against selected people – not indiscriminately.
- They draw a sharp distinction between soldiers and small children, between

authority and helpless women, between government agents and ordinary citizens, between military posts and common houses.
- Conflicts are brutal, vicious and bloody, but they recognise the humanitarian aspects of their adversary.

However, in contrast, acts of asymmetric warfare are radically and fundamentally different :
- They show no moral restraint on their choice of targets or methods of warfare.
- Their target is the entire population. They recognise no innocents or bystanders, and consider all lives expendable.

In defence of their acts, those who indulge in asymmetric warfare have often claimed that the suffering they inflict upon their victims is unfortunate. They justify it as a requirement necessary for the long-term well-being of others. This argument raises the vital question as to what are the causes or goals which justify such brutal and inhuman acts as a whole separate issue by itself.

Causative Factors

Motivation
What is their motivation? What factors contribute to the making of a terrorist movement? Social and political scientists have proceeded from an indisputable assumption that, "Deprivation, discontent, or inequalities of any kind — be they social, political or economic — cause grievances. When such frustration is provided the catalyst of a foreign or religious card, the whole thing becomes highly explosive." This explanation, *per se*, may not appear adequate because our world can never be a perfect place to live in. There will always be inequalities and frustrated people of various kinds. Ironically, it is seen that at many places, despite very real grievances, there is no terrorism. On the contrary, there are places where the grievances are minor, but very powerful terrorist movements prevail.

So, is terrorism necessarily left-wing oriented? Detailed studies show that it is not so, but has been branded as such by extreme rightist groups or by nationalist separatist movements. To quote Prof Walter Laqueur, "The further we move from Paris and London, the less significance should be attached to terms like 'Left' or 'Right'. Once we are East of the Suez Canal, these terms become almost totally meaningless."

A study of various asymmetric conflicts, particularly the moderately successful ones, suggests that terrorist movements are usually nationalistic, religious, extremist or even racialist in nature. In most cases, the motivation is not revolutionary socialism, even though there may be a veneer of socialistic rhetoric. The underlying motive is quite clearly nationalistic, xenophobic or religious.

Terrorism did contribute to the success of colonial insurgents a generation ago. However, since then, terrorists have rarely achieved their own goals. Thus, terrorism has not been able to bring about the reunification of Ireland, nor has it been able to recover the homeland of Palestine for the Arabs. The main reason for this is, that in today's context, modern communities subjected to asymmetric warfare are not easily cowed down into changing their beliefs, attitudes or values as per the terrorist demands. On the contrary, in most cases, such communities have closed ranks, showing much greater resilience to terrorists and all that they claim to stand for.

Terrorist Strikes

Like those in Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad or even the kind in Madrid, New York, London, terrorist strikes cause an outpouring of frustrated anger. We begin to feel weak and hate the terrorist. But we also hate ourselves for allowing this to be done to us. Newspaper headlines talk of retaliation and hot pursuit. TV channels provide unending coverage. The fact that the latest victims were all people like us makes things worse.

Randomness of Terrorist Attacks

It is the 'randomness' of terrorism that makes it so potent. Every random strike may kill only a few, but it kills something inside every one of us. Even if the actual victims number 10, 20, 30 or 50, the kernel of fear is planted amongst millions. The terrorist has exerted power over our belief in our own lives. We know that life and death is not in our hands (it is God who is remembered most in this context)! Life in this case falls into the hands of a social wretch who can randomly exercise that power over us and blow our well-ordered existence into bits.

Responses

Asymmetric warfare, as an idea, rests not on the terrorist's actions but on our responses to it. The terrorist action is only symbolic. It is actually our reactions to it which makes that terror 'real'. Fear arouses anger — the desire to hit back But then, where do we hit back? Because there is really nowhere to go. So, what do we do? Since we are compelled to hit back, we do so at those

who are visible to us and who we can somehow (or anyhow) link to the terrorist. In so doing, the terrorist succeeds in planting fear and getting the resultant anger response directed towards a specific group, which in the time to come, becomes the fountainhead of asymmetric warfare. Thus, by creating a 'false enemy' and by forcing ourselves to attack it, we manufacture a 'real terrorist'.

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Civilisational Ethos

All our responses operate within the bounds of civilisation where the highest value is accorded to the lives of others. This respect comes from our obsessive concern with our own lives, because, to be civilised is to respect other people's right to live as much as we do our own. However, those who indulge in asymmetric warfare, free themselves from such *'bandhans'* of civilisation by first rejecting all concerns for *their own life*. The suicide bomber confounds us because he renounces his attachment to his own life. In any case, and as one director general of police (DGP) of J&K stated, "There can be no counter or defence against a suicide bomber. We can tighten security, chase down suspects, apprehend those responsible, but none of this can crush terrorism of the suicide bomber kind."

The Notion of Martyrdom

The heroism of destruction is, in many ways, at the core of the notion of martyrdom – i.e. the urge to die for a cause (or even a perceived cause), which, for the terrorist, becomes larger than life itself – the struggle to derive a sense of worth by using his power and motivation to destroy himself and others. Such a death requires the sanctity of a metanarrative because metanarratives are an escape from the agonies and predicaments of present woes.

Retaliation

In Jean Bandrillardi's words, "Terrorism is a gift that cannot be returned." Every gift carries with it a possibility of reciprocation. In this case, there is simply no way to reciprocate. Killing the terrorist is empty retaliation; for what the terrorist planted was not a bomb, but an 'IDEA'–an idea that is not going to die in a hurry. Terrorism forces us to turn our attention away from the real problem. It makes

us focus on the terrorist problem. In doing so, we have little choice but to adopt methods of retaliation like the terrorist – because all conventional methods of retaliation operate within the limits of civilisation. The US, therefore, sets up a 'Gulag'; we create draconian anti-terrorist laws; some of us even justify what happened in Gujarat, and soldiers like me eulogise counter-militancy operations in Punjab as a successful model against terrorism.

Terrorism is Self -Generative

Thus, there is a degree of elegance to the concept of 'asymmetric warfare' – however horrific its practice might be. Terrorism is self-generative. It compels a response from us, which, in turn, creates more terrorists. The illusion of retaliation is very difficult to resist. Our notion of strength and toughness pushes us into counter-violence. We convert a symbolic war into what you may call a real one. We end up sending our soldiers to death as a result of this 'need to do something', in the belief that this will somehow be a deterrent for the terrorist. The example of Iraq clearly tells us that far from being a deterrent, a war against a people's 'mass' manufactures even more terrorism.

The End State

Thus, we are left with a problem that is truly frustrating. There are enough ways of believing that we are doing something to counter it, but none of that can really makes us believe that we are solving the problem. We are locked in a belief system from where there are no roads to peace — and that becomes the ultimate victory of the terrorist. So, what is it that we can do then? While counter-terrorism methods and anti-militancy operations can only be an adjunct, there can be no military solution to the problem. The military can only bring about an environment of control and stability in which the political will must apply itself to seriously and genuinely address the root causes of any particular terrorist movement, in order to ameliorate their grievances, whether they be real or perceived.

The Barometer of 'Alienation'

Daily we read and hear about a suicide bomber or bomb blast causing havoc, destruction, panic, and loss of innocent lives somewhere or the other. We dismiss it, label them as terrorists, and legislate them out of our lives and concerns. Easier still is to brand them as dangerous people to be captured, tortured and eliminated at any cost. But the more difficult task is to unravel the psychology, the sociology, the economics and the politics that manufacture alienation and consequent anger.

A metal detector can neither gauge nor recognise anger or alienation. Even armies cannot lock up an idea or a cause. Missiles and submarines cannot fight a war within the 'self' and against collective memories of discrimination and discontent. When we cease to trust each other as human beings, a tragedy unfolds deep within. We lose a part of ourselves. Insecurity creeps into the innermost part of our being. That insecurity breeds fear and fear breeds further insecurity – creating the ideal ground for 'alienation', which then erodes the very 'hope' of

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a person or community or segment of society. It appears that the more we get 'connected', the less we trust each other, because our identities and sensibilities are increasingly shaped by the globalisation of stereotypes and images.

Every bomb blast or terrorist attack signifies the new 'Sensex' of alienation. The ongoing economic and technological growth is accompanied by a corresponding sense of inequality, a perceived sense of discrimination, deprivation, injustice and, hence, alienation. If the barometer of growth is the thesis, the barometer of alienation is the anti-thesis. We no longer have dreams beyond the urges to gratify desires constructed by the market place. The Sensex has become the barometer of our own security and of the stability of nations. If the Sensex of growth is on track, we think we are secure. However, we forget the counter-thesis – with the Sensex of alienation, which goes hand in hand, alongside, in tandem and parallel to it. The recent suicide attack on Glasgow airport and charges against a few highly educated professionals are a new landmark in the barometer of alienation. It is no longer the uneducated, or half literate, different looking person in the wastelands of war-torn Afghanistan or Iraq who is willing to send a message out with his death. The problem has become all pervasive and all inclusive.

What makes us human beings distinct is our ability to create and communicate. When a deeper sense of cultural, social, economic or political alienation occurs, our ability to communicate, convince and create is affected. When we cannot be creative, our anger that comes from deep alienation takes a destructive turn:

(a) The chief minister of Nagaland once being asked for his passport in a hotel in Delhi to prove his identity.
(b) Students of the northeast in Delhi University being called 'Chinkies'.

(c) Senior ministers and bureaucrats from Delhi while attending a high level conference in the northeast were confused about who was the chief minister of which state.

Amidst a growing sense of inequality, injustice, double talk and discrimination, young people no longer have anything to aspire for. One falls into the trap of primary identity (religion, language or race), which is the easiest escape route. Through that primary identity, one can construct a metanarrative for another world – a world of death, the perfect political opium to escape. We need to create a new history, a new aesthetics of being to counter alienation, discontent and discrimination.

The Philosophy of Revenge/Jehad

Revenge and its glorification is one of the most popular justifications for all the arson, torture, murder and mayhem that plague our world today. The anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the Mumbai blasts, Godhra and even the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq were all justified by the idea of revenge. Evil is never committed with such enthusiasm as when it is done out of revenge, and especially if it is done in the name of religion.

'Murwah' (Revenge)

All religions preach the faith of their founders. But they also carry a huge baggage of customs that are social rather than spiritual. Easter and Christmas were never part of the teachings of Lord Christ. Eid and Ramzan were ancient Arab customs that long predated the advent of Islam. Similarly, 'revenge' was also an Arab custom that has unfortunately become a part of the Muslim tradition worldwide. In precarious times, small tribes of Arab Bedouins had to protect themselves from bigger and more powerful tribes, mainly for competition over scarce resources of food and water in the desert. 'Revenge,' thus, became a custom of necessity for survival. This was expressed in the Arab ideology of *Murwah* – meaning manliness, pride, courage, endurance in suffering, protection of the weak, avenging each and every injustice, and above all, boldly defying stronger enemies, regardless of consequences. This philosophy of *Murwah* glorified hospitality to friends and equally intense hatred for enemies. Any oppressor had to be very careful, because this well established tribal code made it certain that any injustice would be avenged, even at a future date. Regardless of power and position, no one could ever be absolutely safe from attack, had to tolerate lesser tribes, had to be very careful not to incite animosity. The American cowboy glorification of 'revenge' arose out of

similar compulsions. Paradoxically, today, we see the American 'cowboy spirit' pitted against the *Murwah* spirit of the Muslim world that views America as an oppressor.

Early Precedents

Ironically, this philosophy of 'revenge' has plagued Islam from its earliest days. The early *khalifs,*Umar and Uthman and later Prophet Mohammad's own son-in-law, Ali, were all

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assassinated. The predominantly Bedouin Kharajite faction, unhappy that Ali had not avenged the assassination of Uthman, mainly caused the split into Sunni and Shia sects that was to result in so much bloodshed. The Kharajites had a narrow and extremist view of Prophet Mohammad's words. Their successors, especially the *Wahhabis* from the late 18th century, gained great importance when the Al Saud family captured Mecca and Medina in 1924, and then used the power of oil riches in 1938 to export their extreme brand of Islam. This was later to become an intrinsic part of Taliban thinking.

Jehad

Jehad and the universal pan-Islamic ideology are emerging as powerful metanarratives for the alienated and angry young Muslims. Pan-Islamic ideology is both a critique of new imperialism and an assertion of reactionary politics based on exclusion and alienation. At every point of transit such as airports, we have begun to carry our name, our colour, our language and even our appearance like heavy baggage, to be scanned to ensure the veracity of our being. The word *jehad* is rarely found in the *Quran*. For Mohammad, there were only two *jehads* – the greater one meant a struggle against one's own weaknesses and the lesser *jehad* was to fight against injustice. Mohammad preached peace, except in times of actual combat. In fact, the very word 'Islam' means absolute submission to the will of a merciful God. The *Quran* clearly says that killing in the name of Islam was the opposite of *jehad*. The *Quran* expressly forbids an attack on anyone who has caused no offence. The *Quran* forbids causing harm or killing of women and children. The *Quran* forbids taking of hostages or to torture or kill prisoners. The *Quran,* above all, forbids suicide.

'Wahhabi' Islam

Many *Wahhabi* ideas were heresy to the words and actions of Prophet

Mohammad whose conquest of Mecca had been achieved without shedding a drop of blood through a year long, almost Gandhian campaign of patience and principles. In the *Hadith*, which was written two centuries after the death of the Prophet, the word *jehad* is referred to 199 times. The *Wahhabis* interpreted *jehad* to mean a holy war, even though it had actually meant a striving. A Mujahideen was no holy warrior but one who only strived. It is only later that the *Wahhabis* gave a different meaning to it. Since there was no need for any such philosophy of revenge in the more affluent pastoral or urban communities, it was thus unknown in the philosophies of China, India, Europe and in many other societies. In fact, mature cultures understand that accommodation is preferable to violence. This was so well enunciated in Buddhism and Jainism, which preached that hatred could never be appeased by hatred, but only by love.

An eye for an eye will only leave this world blind.

— Gandhi

It is heartening to note that recently the Islamic seminary of Deoband (UP, India), the most influential school for Islamic law in Asia, which has become the source of inspiration of the hardline Taliban, has finally broken its silence on *jehad*. Stopping short of a *fatwa*, the clerics categorically said that terrorism is NOT *jehad*. Denouncing terrorism in all its manifestations, the Darul-Uloom, Deoband, top Muslim groups, scholars and religious teachers from several sects and groups across the country adopted a declaration calling *jehad* "un-Islamic" and against the Islamic principles of peace. They said, "Terrorism is NOT *jehad* and it should not be bracketed together. *Jehad* means an act, which benefits humanity. It does not teach violence and killing." This resolution has been an important and progressive step towards establishment of peace and order, and against the protagonists of 'asymmetric warfare'.

Hijacking of Islam by Revisionists
The Islamic terrorists have moved far away from the teachings of Prophet Mohammad. Muslim clerics must understand that the philosophy of revenge has resulted in the Islamic communities being viewed with suspicion all over the world. They must go back to the words of their Prophet, instead of following the words of revisionists who have hijacked the Islamic faith.

The *Murwah* philosophy and spirit will ensure that terrorism will not surrender to brute military force. But, it can be eroded when terrorists begin to believe that, far from serving their religion, they are disobeying the words of

their Lord and will go to hell instead of the promised paradise (*jannat*).

Concluding with Quotes

If democracies have to wage a war against 'asymmetric warfare', the means adopted have to be consistent with, and not contrary to, the 'values' of democracy. This is in keeping with the Gandhian consonance of ends and means.

(a) Conflicts and inequalities are inevitable parts of human conditions. These need not be destructively so. While conflicts can be resolved, inequalities can be contained. Today's enemies are NOT just individuals. They are also the ways of perceiving the world. External engagements must, therefore, go hand in hand with internal interrogation in the interest of law and order, peace and security.

(b) There are many causes for which I am prepared to die, but there is NO cause for which I am prepared to kill.

— **Mahatma Gandhi**

(c) The clash we are witnessing around in the world today is NOT a clash of religions or a 'clash of civilisations'. It is a clash between an archaic mentality that belongs to the Middle Ages and another that belongs to the 21st century.

— **Wafa Sultan**

Syrian–American Reformist, *TIME* Magazine – 100 most influential persons

(d) Terrorism is the greatest evil of our age, a more severe threat to our culture and survival than the possibilities of a nuclear war or even a rapid depletion of natural resources of our planet. Civilisation not only has a right, but also a positive imperative duty to defend itself against this scourge. We are not only the beneficiaries of our past, but more importantly, the trustees of the future.

— **Paul Johnson**

Notes

1. Prof Walter Laqueur "The Anatomy of Terrorism" in *Ten Year of Terrorism: Collected Views* (London, 1979), p.9.
2. Sunil Adam "Philosophy of Terrorism: A Historical Perspective, Strategy and Analysis," December 1986, p.998.
3. Paul Wilkinson "Terrorism and the Liberal State" (London: Macmillan,1977), p.72.
4. Fanon Frantz *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press,1966), p.73.