Adopting a Conflict Resolution Perspective towards Terrorism – Possibilities and Limitations

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Abstract

Living in the world in peace and with dignity is the utmost desire of each and every human being. Everyone wishes to live in a society where only peace and humanity reign. But in the present world, at every moment world peace is getting endangered by 'terrorism' - the most horrifying phenomenon of the contemporary world.

Keywords: Conflict resolution; Terrorism; Adopting Conflict Resolution; Approaches.

1. Introduction

Living in the world in peace and with dignity is the utmost desire of each and every human being. Everyone wishes to live in a society where only peace and humanity reign. But in the present world, at every moment world peace is getting endangered by 'terrorism' - the most horrifying phenomenon of the contemporary world. News on frequent terrorist attacks on different parts of the world and the pervasive effect of terrorism keep on saddening and frustrating us. Though several actions have been taken time to time to put an end to terrorism, these have not succeeded yet to stop terrorism. It is high time that a highly effective method was to be applied to control and prevent terrorism. This paper discusses about the possibilities of applying conflict resolution approaches to put an end to terrorism, and also at the end it provides a suggestion as to what other procedures may be adopted to tackle terrorism.

1.1. Conflict Resolution – Definition, Description and Approaches

'Conflict resolution' is a wide topic that has been defined by different scholars, thinkers and philosophers from different perspectives. It can simply be defined as a process used for managing and settling disagreements that escalate between different groups, political parties, organizations or states. [1] Peter Wallenstein in his book 'Understanding Conflict Resolution' has presented an elaborate definition of conflict resolution and also has analyzed the key elements of the definition. According to him, conflict resolution is 'a *situation where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other.'*

Having defined conflict resolution, Wallenstein then heads to scrutinize the key elements of it. The term '*agreement'* generally refers to 'a formal understanding, document signed under more or less solemn condition'. These agreements may be informal as well. The informal treaties require considerable mutual trust between the parties. In most cases, informal pacts are not made without there being a formal agreement. Thus, it can be seen that formal agreements are much important for any peace process.

Parties accepting each other's continued existence as parties is another important element that differentiates between a peace agreement and an agreement of capitulation. An agreement of capitulation implies that one party must accept its defeat, leave the disputed territory and cease from exercising any influence in the conflict. 'Withdrawal agreement' is a perfect example of this kind of agreement. In this agreement, one party agrees to remove its army from the disputed area. On the other hand, a peace agreement refers to situations where the conflicting parties mutually accept each other's existence as parties, as much as is needed for the implementation of the agreement. Though here nobody wins, there is no defeat of any party either.

The most important element of this definition is the articulation that *the parties cease all violent action against each other.* Often, cessation of violence is declared publicly at the same time as the peace agreement is concluded, which implies that the war has come to an end and there is now less probability and danger of being killed. In many of the cases, cease-fire agreement usher in the conclusion of an agreement for managing incompatibilities between the warring parties. Cease-fire agreements resemble conflict management process, that includes freezing a military *status quo*. [2]

Mediation, arbitration, negotiation- etc. are some much crucial approaches of conflict resolution. **'Mediation'** is a flexible and informal process for putting an end to conflicts where a mediator's job is to guide the parties in conflict and help them reach a resolution. The mediator (third party) must be neutral who would help the conflicting parties to ascertain the risks presented by their disagreement and would facilitate communication between them. [3]

'Negotiation' takes place between two or more warring parties who themselves wish to resolve the conflict between them and to get benefitted mutually from a better deal. Instead of resorting to fight, the conflicting party propose changes to the position of the opponent and also make changes to its own position. [4] '**Intervention'** on the other hand refers to a process where an 'independent' third party arranges for a private and judicial determination of a conflict. Unlike mediation and negotiation, arbitration has legal binding and is governed by government and federal law. [5] Peace agreement, persuasion, settlements etc. are some other approaches of conflict resolution.

2. Terrorism- Definition and Classification [6]

'Terrorism' generally means the use of violence by a person or a group to terrify a region and its inhabitants physically and psychologically to gain benefit, e.g. - political power or political change. In the present time, whenever we hear the word 'terrorism, the name of religious extremist group like 'Al Quaeda' or 'ISIS' came in our mind. But actually, there are many other forms of terrorism, apart from religious extremism, which are equally terrorizing the whole world. Identifying these forms of terrorism is very much imperative before discussing about the ways to deal with terrorism.

2.1. State Terrorism

This refers to the systematic use of terrorism by a government for controlling its population. This is considered as the original form of terrorism. French revolution can be the best example of it.

2.1.2. Religious Terrorism

This is the most common form of terrorism, motivated by religious ideologies and injustice. The fanaticism within the practitioners of it and their strong will to sacrifice their own lives for the cause have made 'religious terrorism' even more dangerous. Al –Quaeda, ISIS etc can best exemplify it.

2.1.3. Issue Oriented Terrorism- Fulfilment and advancement of a specific issue work as the motivation behind this type of terrorism. In most of the cases, these issues are 'social' in character or intend to protect the environment.

2.1.4. Separatist Terrorism- Terrorism of this type are driven by separatists who aim at causing fragmentation within a society. Minorities living within a nation-state, who face discrimination by the majority group are the major actors of 'separatist terrorism'. The Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka is a prominent example of this.

2.1.5. Narco-Terrorism- Organizations benefitted by the trade of drugs are the actors who drive the 'narco terrorism'. This also includes the violence used by these groups for carrying out their business more smoothly. The violent activities (beheading, mass burials) of the Cartels of Mexico can be mentioned in this regard.

Besides, there are some other terrorist groups that resort to terrorism for the cause of political reasons. Terrorism of this type is known as 'Political Terrorism'. 'Hamas' of Palestine is an apolitical terrorist group.

3. Possibilities and Limitations of Adopting Conflict Resolution Approaches towards terrorism

Various sort of terrorisms mentioned above have been, and still are, terrifying the whole world and posing severe threat to the lives of mankind. As such, adoption of an effective method for dealing with terrorism has become a crying need of the present world. **Conflict resolution approaches** have a high potential of dealing effectively with terrorism and terrorist groups. Different types of terrorism can be tackled effectively by adopting various approaches of conflict resolution.

Theoretically, Negotiation with terrorist is not preferred by many as this might legitimize the activities of the terrorist groups. But, in practice, democratic governments often resort to negotiation for dealing with terrorists. In this regard, the negotiation experts believe that the aims and strategies of the terrorist groups play a decisive factor in deciding which group may be convened at the negotiation table. Separatists, political and issue oriented terrorist groups- that resorted to violence when their 'political ambitions' were frustrated and their grievances were not addressed properly- have the potential to become constructive 'interlocutors'. Negotiating with them efficiently can soon diminish the utility of violence to them. [7] Mediation, peace

agreements, settlements etc. can also be adopted to deal with these terrorist groups. As long as their political aspirations are legitimate, these peaceful approaches may be adopted successfully to deal with them and to transform their way of revolting. Separatists can be dealt with inclusive political processes as well.

Long term conflict resolution approaches are best suited for dealing with terrorisms. Because conflict resolution does not mean just putting an end to the dispute for the time being only, but to end them once and for all. With this view, several effective political strategies can be taken. Like- addressing the 'unmet' human needs for reducing the frustration that compel people to resort to violence and for reducing the 'grass root' support for terrorism, as has been seen in the case of Northern Ireland. When the economic condition was improved and the 'inside-the-system' political structures opened up for the Catholics in Northern Ireland, support for the IRA reduced in the late 1980's and 1990's. Inclusiveness of peoples and issues, bringing changes in the coalition dynamics etc. can also go a long way in preventing people's frustration from escalating towards terrorism. [8]

Religious terrorist groups, who have absolute goals and are driven by fanaticism, are commonly known as 'nihilistic terrorists'. Adopting approaches like- mediation, negotiation etc. for dealing with terrorists of this kind may not bring effective results as they tend to be rigid in their position. Still, coordinating with the religious leaders and trying to build relationship with them to some extent can reduce the violence. Also, the policymakers should cease from considering the members of a religious group as terrorist because this will only create grievance in them and make them even more prone to using violence. Narco terrorisms are generally run by gangs, and constant vigilance and monitoring can be applied to tackle this type of terrorism. [9]

But, there indeed are some limitations in adopting the conflict resolution approaches to deal with terrorism. In some cases, negotiation, mediation and dialogues with terrorists are viewed as weakness and many prefer to use military approaches than to peaceful measures. Also, some fear that negotiation and mediation with terrorists may justify their actions and may legitimize them. 'Talking to terrorist' are viewed from realist perspectives as rewarding and legitimizing the violence used by the terrorist groups. Some terrorist groups are structured in such a way that make the negotiators or mediators to contact with them physically and transmit messages to them. Lack of open channels for communications increase isolation and mistrust and often make conflict resolution approaches appear unsuccessful. [10] Rigidity and stubborn mentality of religious extremists often make it difficult for policymakers to resolve the conflicts with them peacefully and hence, they are compelled to use coercive counterterrorism measures.

Finally, there some other measures that may be applied to respond to terrorism. 'Persuasion'- reducing the motivation of the conflicting parties to resort to violence and minimizing support for terrorist groups can, to a great extent, reduce the violence of terrorist groups. This process includes three major elements-challenging ideologies of terrorism, persuading the conflict parties to use non-violent and non-coercive tactics and reducing the appeal of terrorism. Demonstrating greater humanity and efficacy of non-terrorist alternatives and persuading the parties that non-violent measures can best meet their strategic goals- can go a long way in dealing effectively with terrorists and their support groups. Reducing vulnerability and defeating hardliners, or in other words 'denial'- can also be used to respond to terrorism. Coordination and maximization of international efforts are also required to respond effectively to terrorism. [11]

4. Conclusion

From the discussion presented above, it can be acknowledged that effective and efficient conflict resolution approaches, to a great extent, can contribute to putting an end to terrorism. Though there are some limitations in applying them successfully to respond to terrorism, yet they can prove to be highly effective in dealing with the terrorist and their support groups. The policy makers and concerned authority need to be more strategic and play more tactfully while adopting these measures to tackle terrorism. It can be hoped that by making constant efforts and inventing more strategic processes, in near future they would be able to create a peaceful world free from terrorism.

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