The Causes of Political Violence and Terrorism on the Verge of the XX-XXI Centuries: The Basic Approaches

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Abstract

One of the main problems of modern socio-political relations is the escalation of violence, which takes on a mass character and spreads even in the once safe regions of the world. In this regard, a special research interest is the identification of the causes of political violence in the form of terrorist actions. The objective of this paper is to characterize the main approaches of Western researchers to determine the causes of political violence and terrorism in public life at the turn of the XX and XIX centuries, and to reveal the influence of various factors on the spread of political terrorism in the modern world. The main approaches to the study of the problem posed were the analytical method and content analysis. The paper shows that the natural causes of social tension and growth of terrorist movements should be eliminated with the help of educational and socially oriented policies of the state and the world community of nations as a whole. The materials of this paper can help further study the specifics of political violence and take preventive measures against terrorism by power structures and law enforcement agencies.

Keywords: Political violence, Terrorism, Social and group factors.

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Introduction

In connection with the drastic changes in the world situation at the end of the XX century, there had been profound changes in the content of the problems of war and peace. Instead of confronting the two superpowers, the XIX century offers us a set of local conflicts and regional wars.

According to a review by the American Jane's Defense Weekly, in 1992 there were 73 "hot spots" on the planet that threatened regional or international stability.

In 1996, according to the American organization, the Center for Defense Information, there were 28 "hot spots" in the world, where acute political and ethnic conflicts arose and military operations took place (Grachev, 1982).

A significant role in forcing an explosive situation in all regions of the world is played by acts of terrorism that undermine the economy, destroying the previous peace agreements, leading to chaos and destabilization.

Among the researchers there are many points of view on the causes of terrorism and political violence. Many believe that the source of violence is a whole range of socio-political, psychological and possibly even biological factors.

Youth is one of the most vulnerable social groups in society. Favorable ground for the spread of extremism among this group of people "provides a low level of education and a common culture, shortcomings in education and training, demographic problems, general low health, unemployment, drug addiction, criminalization, transformation of spiritual, moral and family values, and exacerbation of interethnic conflicts" (Khrapal et al., 2015).

Methods

In our opinion, the search for reasons leading to violence in general and to terrorism in particular must be conducted at three levels of the social organization of society:

1. At the level of society in general;

2. At the level of social institutions (media);

3. At the level of groups and individuals.

Accordingly, due to the specific features of the subject matter, this paper uses methods such as content analysis and analytical research. The purpose of the analytical study is not simply to describe the structural elements of the phenomenon being studied, but also to clarify the cause-effect relationships underlying the prevalence, dynamics, stability/instability of the phenomenon. An analytical study considers a set of factors affecting the research object, identifying among them the main and secondary, temporary and stable, explicit and latent (hidden), managed and unmanaged. Content analysis is a quantitative analysis of any kind of information, in particular, protocol documents, reports, publications of various kinds, letters, etc. This empirical method helps to reduce the subjectivity of qualitative analysis of information obtained as a result of sociological research.

Results

According to a number of domestic and foreign researchers, social injustice, preventing equal participation in the political system, nationalistic, religious and territorial contradictions are the main source of terrorism and political violence. They believe that if it is possible to eliminate these reasons, terrorism as such will cease to exist. In other words, terrorism can be eliminated in the fight against poverty and social

injustice. Supporters of this point of view argue that the anti-terrorism policy should be aimed primarily at improving social conditions, providing greater opportunities for self-expression in politics, destroying the social environment that initiates violence, resolving racial, national, cultural and ideological contradictions, shaping public opinion, rejecting violence in political life.

The supporter of this point of view, R. Rubenstein, in our view, rightly notes that instead of "re-profiling" people involved in terrorist activities, it is necessary to find an answer to the question why they are attracted to violence. Thus, the solution to the problem lies in the social conditions that cause violence and improve these conditions to eliminate terrorism (Rubenstein, 1987).

Such views on terrorism are to a certain extent based on so-called "socio-environmental" theories, since they are based on the assumption that terrorists are a product of their environment and will inevitably come to the idea of violence, because of having no other way of expressing their discontent. The final solution to the problem is to destroy the environment that initiates violence.

A. Lee (1983), working in the "person-environment" scheme, believes that the lack of opportunities for political expression and the absence of democratic changes is the main cause of violence in general and in Ireland in particular. According to R. Corrado and R. Evans (1988), separatist and leftist terrorism in Western Europe at the end of the 20th century declined because most political extremists got legal political opportunities to express their dissatisfaction. As a result, terrorists can no longer find political support from the majority of the population of European countries.

Based on the analysis of empirical material, C. Hewitt (1984) argues that when the government is not able to really improve the conditions that provoke terrorism, one can expect the most unintended consequences. Improving the social conditions that cause terrorism can significantly weaken terrorist activity. The government can eradicate potential sources of violence, adequately responding to poverty, limiting political expression, lack of economic opportunities, pursuing a long-term policy of reform in this direction. Initially, reforms can lead to an increase in the number of violent acts, because, when faced with gradual concessions by the government, especially during terrorist campaigns, terrorists can intensify their activities believing in weakness of the state power, however, socially oriented policies can eliminate the problem over time.

Most traditional cultures, according to F. Westie (1964), treat aggression as an evil threatening group unity and therefore suppress any manifestation of aggression. In modern Western cultures, people are often rewarded for manifesting aggression or violence. Young people are encouraged if they act aggressively, which is especially evident in sports games. Boys since early childhood are encouraged to act in accordance with the "recognized male type of behavior" and to resist those who somehow annoy or interfere - even if it leads to violence (for example, a fight).

M. Wolfgang and E. Ferracuti (1986) argue that certain subcultures in the United States treat violence as a legal means of resolving interpersonal conflicts and this psychological atmosphere naturally provokes further violence and even terrorism. In fact, this is a kind of subculture of violence involving norms and values that forgive and legitimize the use of violence to resolve conflicts. Thus, aggression and violence can be considered by some groups as an acceptable and even preferred "courageous" method of resolving disputes. American researcher A. Pinkney (1972) states that the culture of violence extends to all of American society, and is not limited to just a few groups and subcultures.

At the same time, studies by S.J. Ball-Rokeach (1973), H.S. Erlanger (1974), J. O'Connor and A. Lizotte (1978) back in the 1970s argued that such subcultural violence is not as widespread as it may seem. Some groups consider violence an acceptable response only in certain circumstances. And it is not so strongly condemned if provoked or if its target people are stigmatized as criminals or suspected of something.

According to J. Vander Zanden, aggression and violence are more possible if there are people who contribute to such behavior. In his opinion, the most significant influence is exerted by the first institution of socialization - the family. Parents involuntarily show children an example of violence, punishing them for anything. The child sees examples of violence in the street and in school (Kaftan & Naidina, 2013), so using physical strength to monitor children teaches them that the force can be legitimately used to control others. Researcher A. Bandura (1976) found that aggressive behavior is most common for children whose social position has repeatedly subjected them to similar examples of aggression.

For the past 50 years, Western researchers have focused on the role of the media in intensifying violence, linking crime rates on television and in the community, as violence is increasingly spreading on television and in most films where the characters claim justice through violence and also in the popular computer games.

Thus, the mass media, unwillingly so, contribute to the spread of violence and terrorism, "creating "a virtual space" able to influence politically and psychologically on the real world" (Kudriavtseva, 2016).

This dependence was reported by Van Evra (1990) and Huston et al. (1992). Many researchers came to the conclusion that, faced with violence on TV screens, young people become most prone to aggressive or violent actions, especially in provocative situations. Josephson W.L. believes that such actions are most typical for males, especially for children aged 8-12 years, who are characterized by increased susceptibility to violence shown on television (Josephson, 1987).

According to the Russian researcher I.V. Dementiev (1991), proceeding of a social group to terrorist acts is accompanied by the following social and group factors:

■   intensive deprivation of basic needs and rights;

■   threat of loss or decline of social status;

■   presence of the expressed ideological formulation of group requirements;

■   the emergence of strong group identification among the members of the organization;

■   rigid intragroup loyalty and cohesion;

■   closed type of the group (absent or limited external contacts).

Discussion

One of the first attempts to classify different points of view on this problem in Russian science was undertaken by A.S. Grachev. As a thesis, its classification can be represented as follows:

Terrorism is eternal as a world. In the opinion of the left-wing German sociologist and publicist G.M. Enzensberger, extremism and terrorism are coevals of any form of power, because any power, being "the appropriation of the right to bloodshed", generates a reciprocal extremism and equally "bloody" terrorist tradition. Extremism, therefore, fits into the scheme of "ancient and gloomy relations between murder and politics."

Terrorism is a new social phenomenon that has no analogues in history. The roots of extremist forms of social protest, according to the German-American philosopher H. Arendt, lie in the peculiarities of modern "industrial" society, in its "anonymous" character. The spread of extremist sentiments is explained by the fact that "terrorism disperses the boredom of the society of abundance, or even simply represents an attribute of the next fashion".

The reasons for the widespread of extremist and terrorist movements are associated with the increased vulnerability of modern complex economic mechanisms. This, in the opinion of the supporters of the "technological" school, provides unprecedented opportunities for extortion of the large masses of the population from irresponsible fanatics.

Terrorist actions of young extremists are a manifestation of a spontaneous protest against the "consumer society", which, according to some left radical ideologists, is the main form of class struggle and revolutionary activity in the modern era.

Political extremism in modern society is associated with "new socio-economic and political structures that generate violence".

The syndrome of terrorism and armed violence was, in the opinion of the Italian sociologist L. Ferrajoli, the result of the stabilization and political integration of the social conflicts typical of late capitalism, and is a kind of neurosis.

The variants of the "neurotic" justification of the nature of political extremism can also include a formulated at the end of the XIX century statement of the Italian psychiatrist C. Lombroso that "terrorism is an indirect form of suicide".

English sociologist K. Wilson also considers modern violence to be a kind of "neurotic protest of the personality" against various kinds of stressful factors and irrational living conditions, which are often difficult for it to adapt to (Dementiev, 1991).

In our opinion, a sociobiological point of view should be added to the above mentioned approaches, according to which the causes of violence are embedded in human nature itself.

J. van der Dennen and V. Falger (1990), F. Nielson (1994) and several other researchers believe that there are many parallels between the animal and human behavior, and therefore the genetic component plays an important role in social behavior. Public trends in the behavior of animals and humans include aggressiveness, selfishness, territoriality and the formation of major hierarchies. Sociobiologists argue that these features exist only because they increase the chance of species to survive.

Along with the indicated reasons, it is impossible not to mention the psychological side of the formation of a culture of violence and the role of the media.

Summary

The causes of violence and dissatisfaction, such as poverty, national or religious oppression, do not lead directly to violent behavior, according to a number of researchers. In fact, most of those having trapped into such conditions do not resort to violence. However, there are a number of indirect factors that increase the possibility of violence. On the one hand, whether violence will be caused and what form it takes, depends on the nature of socialization, during which a norm can be formed that violence is an acceptable and useful way of addressing interpersonal problems.

Subject to the development of the Internet and the latest digital technologies, audiovisual content has become an integral part of the modern information worldview and has a significant impact on socio-political relations and the social environment in general (Kliuev, 2015). Television, as the most popular source of information in modern conditions, the film industry and computer games, not only do not teach the population, primarily young people, to the cultural heritage, but rather, on the contrary, wean from it by imposing stereotypes of mass culture and provoke acts of violence. "As a result, the perception of social reality clearly shows the significant transformation of the discursive practices within which terrorism

begins to move from the periphery of the public consciousness to the central positions" (Kaftan & Naidina, 2013).

First, the media demonstrate routine, everyday or "good" violence, which manifests itself in response to external insult or violence. Thus, children learn how to use violent actions in a number of situations. The number of such acts of violence on television and especially in computer games has not been declining lately, but, on the contrary, tends to increase. "Everything that is displayed on the screen is automatically perceived by the viewer as really happening, and even as the most real truth, even if it has never been so" (Kliuev, 2015).

Secondly, the demonstrated violence is unreal and surreal: the wounds of people do not bleed so badly, the real pain and agony resulting from violent behavior are rarely shown, so the consequences of violence often seem insignificant.

As a result, scenes that demonstrate acts of violence excite the viewer, and then such aggressive energy is transmitted in everyday life, pushing to physical activity. This impact can last from several hours to several days, depending on the age and psyche of a person. The accents in the system of human values shift, and children begin to view violence as a desirable and "manly" style of behavior, legally used to re-establish justice (Medov, 2014).

However, we should agree with the opinion of researchers M.N. Zald and J.D. McCarthy (1987) that indirect factors do not lead directly to group violence. In order for this to happen, mobilization is needed - a social mechanism, which leads to a coordinated and organized activity. Unrest, acts of terrorism and revolution do not happen by themselves, even in response to the tensions and deprivations of the bulk of the population. Depending on the context that has arisen, there must be leaders and ways of using force, organizations, leadership, procedures and strategies of action must arise. If this does not happen, an outbreak of collective violence will not occur, even if predisposing factors are extremely significant.

Conclusions

Thus, the natural reasons that cause social tension and the growth of terrorist movements must be eliminated with the help of educational and socially oriented policies of each state and the world community of nations in general. The implementation of this policy should evolve in two directions:

1.   Improvement of socio-economic conditions of life; and

2.   Raising awareness of the importance of the principles of tolerance, non-violence and peaceful means of conflict resolution.

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