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● A Socio-Psychological Approach Towards Terrorism: How and Why Do Individuals Support, Join, Stay in, and Leave Terrorist Organizations?

Abstract

The phenomena of terrorism and other politically motivated violence have been assessed across different disciplines from political science and economics to theology and psychology. Whereas the definitions of the concepts of “terrorism” and “terrorist” are disputed and they rather reflect the perspectives of the defining entity, there is a common consensus that terrorism can be classified in terms of its type (such as state-sponsored, dissent, religious, pathological, narco-, cyber-, and bioterrorism), the scale (i.e. domestic vs. international), motives, and objectives. By the same token, the roots and causes of terrorism can be enumerated as internal sources (such as social, economic, political, and cultural indicators) and external sources (such as colonialism and neocolonialism, regional conflicts and historical enmities, failed/failing states and lawless areas, and the penetration of foreign cultures and lifestyles). Although such grounds can be considered as the collective causes, they can merely address how one becomes a potential appropriate recruit for terrorist organizations. Hence, identifying the causes of terrorism is of paramount significance in order to both combat and most importantly prevent terrorism. Given that the first generation of psychological approaches to terrorist violence, chiefly drawing from psychoanalytic theory, has basically run its course, this study takes a systematic approach to evaluate the root causes of terrorism, particularly from social and behavioral perspectives, and attempts to address some key questions such as the progress of and reasons for individuals supporting, joining and leaving terrorist organizations, the relevance of psychopathology to comprehending and preventing terrorism, and the roles of ideology, identity, and belonging in terrorist behavior.

■ **Keywords:** psychology of terrorism, terrorist mind, roots of terrorism, violent extremism, causes of terrorism



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