

What is the relationship between globalisation and terrorism?

This essay is about terrorism and how it relates to the process of globalisation. I will argue that globalisation has produced a globalised form of terrorism which is markedly different from earlier acts of insurrection. I will look at the colonial age and how it coincided with the golden age of piracy as an early form of terrorism, then I will show how contemporary terrorism makes use of globalisation and vice versa.

The definition of terrorism is generally contested because it has many meanings for different people. For the FBI terrorism includes the “unlawful use of force and violence”¹, thus ignoring lawful or state-sanctioned violence. It also ignores 'nonviolent' acts of terrorism, such as the use of the media to terrorise a domestic population into submission. I've modified the FBI definition to read “the use of fear to intimidate or coerce a government and/or its citizens”. This is a very broad definition and includes individual acts of terrorism, through to asymmetric guerilla warfare and state terrorism.

Beckford defines 5 components of globalisation which emphasise cultural and social interconnectedness and the compression of time and space (Beckford, 2003:119²). He makes only passing reference to economic globalisation as 'protocols for processing money and commodities'. As a Marxist I believe that the economic base takes precedence over the superstructure of cultural globalisation. Keeping this in mind I define globalisation in the broadest possible sense as a “process by which markets and cultures become increasingly interconnected across the globe”.

At the moment we can't prove a certain correlation between 'globalised' countries which are fully plugged into the world market and embrace global culture, and an increase of terrorism in those countries. From a liberal perspective one could even argue that globalisation actually eradicates terrorism. Thomas Friedman argues that “no two countries that are both part of a major global supply chain will ever fight a war against each other as long as they are both part of the same global supply chain”(Friedman, 2005:421³). I think this argument is simplistic, as it fails to take into account the role of economic globalisation and global cultural hegemony as an antagonism to fundamentalist ideology.

From Barrie Axford's perspective terrorism emerges as a reaction to globalisation (Axford, 1995:190-195⁴), it has a parasitic relationship. I can prove the other side of this argument with North Korea, a country cut off from the rest of the world in both economic and cultural relations. North Korea was described by Colin Powell as a terrorist state⁵, yet it is 'not known to have sponsored any terrorist acts since the bombing of Korean Air Flight 858 in 1987⁶ and it hasn't experienced any attacks by non-state actors on its soil since the end of the hot period of the Korean War in 1953.

We cannot prove an increase of terrorist activity in globalised countries precisely because contemporary terrorism doesn't limit itself to fighting in any one nation. In George Bush's speech declaring the war on terror he doesn't define any boundary to the conflict⁷, and so for today's terrorists the world is their battlefield.

We can establish a positive relationship between terrorism and globalisation by looking at the period of proto-globalisation in the colonial era. Piracy emerged as a reaction to the conditions of mercantile capitalism and can be considered as one of the first global terrorist movements. 17th Century pirates paved the way for modern terrorism by attacking countervalue civilian merchant vessels and ports. Donald J Puchala draws a parallel between the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the sacking of Panama City by pirate hordes in 1671 (Puchala, 2005:3⁸). In both cases the terrorists attacked the centre of economic not military power. Again this can be linked to the influence of globalisation as in a globalised world there is a transfer of power from national and state-run military institutions towards international and stateless economic institutions (Kofman, 2003:250⁹).

17th Century piracy was also motivated by an ideology. In Hakim Bey's analysis of *the General History of the Pyrates* (Wilson, 2003:52¹⁰) he argues that the pirates held anarchist or libertarian communist beliefs, and later on he describes “class solidarity, interracial harmony and freedom from government” as elements of the 'buccaneer way of life' (Wilson, 2003:191¹¹).

The description of terrorists as ideological forces doesn't fit in the realist school which treats terrorism as a security issue (Cha, 1997:610¹²). In my opinion this is deceptive as the ultimate goal of terrorists is not to cause the most destruction and disruption but to enforce their ideology. Realists who measure the effectiveness of terrorism in terms of its functional strategic value (Buros, 2011¹³) are missing the terrorists ultimate goal. So once you can see terrorism as another means by which ideology is disseminated it becomes a lot easier to prove the positive link between terrorism and globalisation. Identity with an idea can be international, and we can see networks of terrorist groups brought together by ideology. The Provisional and Official factions of the Irish Republican Army and the Basque liberation movement Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) co-operated in the cause of nationalism. Other revolutionary communist groups such as the Rote Armee Faction, Brigade Rosse, Action Directe and the Celles Communistes Combattantes also collaborated with each other to form a terrorist network¹⁴. Outside Europe the Provisional IRA were involved in training members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC)(Drumbell, 2006:361-364¹⁵). Looking back to history there were 'suspected links' between the Kurdistan Workers' Party and the Palestine Liberation Organisation¹⁶. These groups form a global network of organisations which all fight for broadly the same ideology and in this way they can be seen as a product of globalisation.

Terrorists also make use of globalised media techniques to spread their ideology. The ultranationalist terrorist Anders Breivik wrote a manifesto in English¹⁷ which he distributed by email. Breivik also had a facebook profile¹⁸ and a youtube account and his own website¹⁹. He can be considered the first fully globalised terrorist in the sense that his demands were broadcast around the world before his first attack even took place.

The use of global media has also been taken on by the FARC who have a website where they publish press releases²⁰ and music videos²¹ and invite journalists to come and live with them to report on their struggle. This shows a willingness on their part, like Anders Breivik, to take possession of the tools of global media and use them to further their ideological goals.

The creation of the internet as a global platform allows terrorists to report on their actions in their own words and spread their ideology far further than their actions allow. It also means they adopt the conventions of the global medium. For Breivik English is a global language and he was using it instead of his native Norwegian to reach a global audience. For the revolutionaries at FARC their music videos subvert western global culture by using its styles to present a narrative of alter-globalisation.

From a critical thinkers' perspective this is explained by Jean Baudrillard who, in the 'spirit of terrorism' writes that globalised terrorists "appropriate all the arms of dominant power. Money and financial speculation, information technologies and aeronautics, the production of spectacle and media networks: they have assimilated all of modernity and globalization, while maintaining their aim to destroy it." Once again the terrorists are products of the globalisation which they wish to destroy, and so they have a dependent relationship.

Baudrillard's analysis sees terrorism as a spectacle, and its victims as passive spectators. I want to examine the alternative view proposed by members of the Weather Underground organisation that the victims are not passive spectators but active participants in the act²². Fear is an emotion, and it's irrational, we cannot fault a population for being scared, however we have to ask why they are scared. Ultimately it's not the act of terrorism which terrorises, it's the threat that it might reoccur. This threat is regurgitated by the state which has a vested interest in keeping the population in a state of preemptive fear so as to better govern them.

John Mueller argues that the 'cost of terrorism comes from the over-reactions it inspires' (Mueller, 2005:491-492²³) and that in the case of the United States a large military-industrial complex, or in Mueller's case a 'terror-industrial complex' (Mueller, 2005:494²⁴), has a vested interest in creating that over-reaction. In an artificially created atmosphere of instability the state benefits by presenting itself as a bastion of order and authority and arms companies profit from the militarisation of the economy.

These outcomes hint at a symbiotic relationship; not only is terrorism dependent on globalisation, but globalisation is to some extent also dependent on terrorism. However, I think we mustn't confuse the selfish interests of individual states and cultures with the interests of the global whole and in my opinion it is possible

for the process of globalisation to take place without terrorism.

In conclusion, terrorism is dependent on globalisation and they have a positive relationship. This relationship is complex and can be interpreted differently from different moral positions.

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- 3 **Friedman, T.** (2005) *the World is Flat*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p.421
- 4 **Axford, B.** (1995) *the Global System*, Palgrave Macmillan, p.190-195
- 5 **Slavin, B.** (2004) Powell: N. Korea a 'terrorist state', *USA Today*, 24th October. Available at: http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-10-24-powell-nkorea_x.htm
- 6 **U.S. Department of State.** (2007) State Sponsors of Terrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism*. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2006/82736.htm>
- 7 **CNN** (2001) *Transcript of President Bush's address*, [online] Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>
- 8 **Puchala, D.** (2005) of Pirates and Terrorists: What Experience and History Teach, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26(1), p.3 Available at: <http://www.southchinasea.org/docs/Puchala.%20Pirates%20and%20Terrorists.pdf>
- 9 **Kofman, E. et al.** (2003) *Globalization: theory and practice*, 2nd ed. Continuum International Publishing Group, Chapter 17. p.250
- 10 **Wilson, P.** (2003) *Pirate utopias: Moorish corsairs & European Renegades*, 2nd ed. Autonomedia, p.52
- 11 **Wilson, P.** (2003) *Pirate utopias: Moorish corsairs & European Renegades*, 2nd ed. Autonomedia, p.191 I should also point out that 'Hakim Bey' is a pseudonym, but he is best known by it. His correct name which I have referenced here is Peter Lamborn Wilson.
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- 14 **Transnational Terrorism, Security & the Rule of Law** (2008) *Euroterrorism*, [online] Available at: <http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu/tekst/publications/Euroterrorism.pdf>
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- 22 **the Weather Underground.** (2002) [DVD] Berkeley, California, USA: the Free History Project.
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