Starting the last decade of the last millennium, the phenomenon of terrorism has been redefined. Moreover, since the French Revolution, when the term “terrorism” became prominent, its connotation has undergone changes over a period of time. It is pointed out that there are at least 212 different definitions of “terrorism” throughout the world, 90 of them being used by various governments and institutions over the past two centuries. Yet, there is no single internationally acceptable definition of “terrorism”, making it one of the most disputed terms in social sciences. The aim here is not to add yet another definition of “terrorism”, but to describe the term in the traditional sense so as to place the concept of “new terrorism” in a proper context.

Evolution of the “Old”

At the layman’s level, terrorism can be defined as the illegal use of political violence, although, when the term firstly came to the fore during the French Revolution, it had a positive connotation, being used as “an instrument of governance” to “consolidate the new government’s
power by intimidating counterrevolutionaries ...

However, with the spring of democracy and liberalism in Europe in the 19th century, the term started gaining revolutionary and anti-state connotation, exactly the reverse of the earlier Robespierrean context. In the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, terrorism meant “propaganda by deed” to attract public attention to the then-existing anarchist terrorist groups and their cause. Except during the interwar period, when state terrorism dominated, the revolutionary connotation of terrorism continued even after the Second World War. Significantly, it meant violence used by anti-colonialist and indigenous nationalist groups especially with the sponsorship of some sovereign states.

During the Cold War, some American scholars went to the extent of regarding terrorism “as a calculated means to destabilise the West as part of a vast global conspiracy by the USSR”. “Terrorism” also got associated with the “proxy war” employed by the smaller states to take on the powerful ones without risking formal retaliation. This was when the well-known phrase of “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” came to the fore bringing in the problem of moral judgement while defining the term “terrorism”. This problem continues even today, not as a moral dilemma, but more as a usage for convenience by the states that sponsor terrorist groups to “bleed their enemies”. The use of terrorists as “surrogate warriors” by some states to take on their powerful adversaries has become a kind of asymmetric strategy mainly to escape identification, retaliation, and sanctions. In its evolution, the term “terrorism”, thus, from a “positive” origin reached the other end of the spectrum to bear a “pejorative” and subjective connotation.

**Birth of the “New” ?**

Down the evolutionary ladder, the term further became more pejorative, although less subjective. In the 1990s, the concept of “New Terrorism” started appearing in the literature on terrorism as the “grey area phenomenon” mainly to describe catastrophic and religiously motivated terrorism threatening “immense regions or urban areas”. Soon, new patterns of terrorist attacks were conspicuous

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5 See for instance *The Terror Network* by Claire Sterling, claiming that the Soviet Union was the source of all international terrorism in the world.
to force the acceptance, if not formalise, the concept of “New Terrorism”. The New York World Trade Centre bombing, in 1993, and the Sarin gas attack in Tokyo, in 1995, can be taken as defining timelines between the “old” and the “new”. In the Indian context, it was Mumbai (formerly Bombay) serial blasts of March 1993. Some called it “postmodern” or “catastrophic” terrorism. While some described this as the “fourth wave” in the evolution of terrorism, a metamorphosis, having been preceded by terrorism focused on the breakup of empires, decolonisation, and anti-Westernism\(^\text{10}\). In short, it is described as a “new evil in our world”\(^\text{11}\) that encompasses “both the dark forces that threaten «civilisation» and the fears they arouse”\(^\text{12}\).

Walter Laqueur notes that “there has been a radical transformation, if not a revolution, in the character of terrorism”\(^\text{13}\). Although the “New Terrorism” is not fundamentally or qualitatively “new”, but grounded in an evolving historical context, there are some characteristics that should be acknowledged that distinguish it from the “Old Terrorism”. Those distinctions vary from its amorphous and global nature, the character of perpetrators, organisational structure, motivation, lethality, support systems and technological sophistication.

**Characteristics of the “New Terrorism”**

- **Global and amorphous.** While the old style terrorism is not wholly but mainly local, the “new terrorism” is mainly global. As a result, the traditional distinction between local and international terrorism has blurred. The globalised “flat world”\(^\text{14}\) has facilitated not only the movement of terrorists, but also their operations, support system and methods. With advancements in information and communication technology, terrorists are now in a position to guide operations thousands of kilometres away. The World Wide Web is also used as a tool of propaganda and fundraising by the terrorist groups\(^\text{15}\).

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The organisational structure of the new terrorist groups is more networked than the traditional-formal-hierarchical one of the old. Pyramids have been flattened with multiple leaders wielding authority. Decision-making and operations are decentralised, allowing for local initiative and autonomy. Although the network-based structure existed earlier, what is new is the professional way of networking in the globalised world. Most of the present-day terrorist groups prefer operating in small, dispersed and autonomous entities, yet linked by advanced communications and “shared principles, interests and goals – at best an overarching doctrine or ideology – that spans all nodes and to which their members wholeheartedly subscribe.” Simon and Benjamin term such arrangement as a combination of “a <hub and spoke> structure (where nodes communicate with the centre) with a <wheel> structure (where nodes in the network communicate with each other without reference to the centre)” Overall, the structure “sometimes appears acephalous (headless), and at the other times polycephalous (Hydra-headed)” This phenomenon is called by various names: “leaderless resistance”, “phantom cell networks”, “network of networks”, “lone wolves” and “franchise terrorism”.

The new form gives them more flexibility and adaptiveness to the rapidly evolving situations. The network-like form also increases their resilience as even few of its constituent entities are destroyed, while the others carry on. As a result of loose, informal organisational structure, it is difficult to find terrorist groups having a permanent infrastructure in place. For training, they tend to utilise more of “how to do” or “do it yourself” sources freely available on the Internet, and for physical/weapons training they take the help of freelance, retired or disbanded military personnel. They are trained not only in the military art but also in the “black arts”. Amateur groups prefer taking short-term training courses from established terrorist groups. For instance, cadres of Indian Mujahedeen are trained by Lashkar-e-Toiba in Pakistan. It is due to this amorphous nature that the new terrorists are difficult to spot and counteract. The anonymous nature of modern-day terrorists is further reinforced by their comparative disinterestedness to claim

17 Ibidem.
23 David Tucker, op. cit. p. 2.
credit for their attacks. According to statistics, only about 30 percent of all terrorist attacks in 2004 were claimed.

- **Wide-ranging motivation.** The “new terrorism” is also characterised by perpetrators who are paranoiac and fanatic elements especially from the right. Religion has emerged as a predominant impetus for terrorist attacks unlike predominantly secular motivations of the “old” one. Political impulse for committing terrorist acts has fallen from being a priority. Consequently, the new terror groups have “radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimisation and justification, concepts of morality and Manichean world views.” Their sense of alienation makes them all the more deadly as for “the religious terrorist, violence is first and foremost a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative.” The struggle is seen as “good against the evil” and therefore large-scale violence is morally justified as necessary for the advancement of their religious cause. They hold themselves accountable to none other than to “their own God” or their representatives. The inevitability of their victory is taken for granted for “God too plans” and “would grant victory.”

The rabid motivation of present-day terrorists also lies in “inhuman hatred, all-consuming ill-will and raging fanaticism” in addition to personal vengeance. Suicide attacks are mostly “motivated by the desire for revenge and retaliation” rather than by deprivation or love for a political cause. Significantly, most of the Islamist terrorists have deep hatred towards the West, in general, and the United States, in particular. A fatwa issued by the World Islamic Front: Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders on 23 February 1998 pointed out “the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty of every Muslim who

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26 Ibid., pp. 88-89.


can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it ...”\textsuperscript{31}. Osama bin Laden made the “holy war” between Islam and the Western world as his sole mission and went on to invoke religion to spur terrorist attacks.

- **Numerous and innocent victims.** Present-day terrorist attacks have become bloodier. Accordingly, the choice of victims by the new paranoiac terrorists has been indiscriminate. The aim is no longer to conduct “propaganda by deed” but to effect maximum destruction\textsuperscript{32}. Thus, the “new terrorism” is not only deadlier but also more indiscriminate and unpredictable, which is evident in attacks like the Oklahoma City bombing, the Tokyo subway attacks by the Aum Shinrikyo cult, Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, 9/11, London train bombings and more recently Mumbai attacks.

The “new terrorism” aims at destruction as an end in itself, while the “old terrorism” used violence that was “targeted and proportionate in scope and intensity to the practical political objectives being pursued”\textsuperscript{33}. In other words, it is “a terrorism that seeks the total collapse of its opponents”\textsuperscript{34}. As some experts aptly put it, “they [the new terrorists] believe that their violence is divinely justified and that great goals require dramatic means, and the dramatic means is mass bloodshed”\textsuperscript{35}. This is evident in the increase in the number of casualties per attack. They are “freed from ordinary constraints of morality. ... There is less inhibition to kill in quantity and a greater willingness to die in the process”\textsuperscript{36}. Although the use of suicide/suicidal tactics existed before, their use is more predominant now because martyrdom is seen as a way of reaching heaven. The “suicide terrorist production line”\textsuperscript{37} has become all the more easier than ever before. This is one of the main illustrative characteristics of the new terrorism\textsuperscript{38}.

Unlike in the past, both the incidents of terrorist attacks and the casualties per attacks have increased. For instance, 0,17 percent of international terrorist

\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in Yonah Alexander and Michael S. Swetnam, *Usama bin Laden’s al Qaida: Profile of a Terrorist Network*, Transnational, Ardsley, 2001, Appendix 1 B.


\textsuperscript{36} Ibidem.

\textsuperscript{37} The elements of this “production line” include the establishment of a social contract, the identification of the “living martyr” (which accrues great prestige within the community), and – in the culminating phase – the production of the final video. See Jerold M. Post, *Addressing the Causes of Terrorism Psychology*, paper presented at the International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security, 8-11 March 2005, Madrid.

\textsuperscript{38} Except the LTTE and PKK, all other terrorist groups that employ suicide attacks are religiously motivated.
attacks in 1995-1999 caused 67 percent of the casualties. In this regard, urban terrain holds significant advantages for terrorists. It is in urban areas where targets are most varied and abundant: laymen, officials, foreign nationals, corporate heavyweights, government buildings with symbolic/strategic value, bus stands, railway stations, airports, markets, foreign embassies, communication centres etc. By attacking high profile symbolic targets, terrorists wish to make a point that if a government fails to protect high value targets, it is obvious that it may not be in a position to protect the normal ones. As a result, the credibility of the government of the day is undermined.

Since the quality and quantity of terrorists’ “defined enemy” is high in cities, the impact of a destructive act is more widespread. Urban operations often demand less for terrorists in the way of brute physical strength and endurance than do operations in mountainous or rural terrain. And they do not need sophisticated long-range weapons to inflict desired damage. As is the characteristic of urban areas, population is not only high but also dense. Unlike in rural areas, inhabitants in cities and towns are more heterogeneous, which gives more space for anonymity. It is this posture of anonymity that enables the terrorist fish to swim easily; an excellent place for camouflage. For terrorists, logistical support like arms, medicines, food, and lodging are readily available in an average urban area. Manoeuvrability of terrorists is guaranteed by the presence of public and private transportation facilities that are both dependable and unobtrusive. In urban areas, a terrorist group may find it easier to recruit prospective terrorists in a predictable manner, for it is the city that nurtures dissidence in general. Cities are the nerve centres of a country.

Since terrorism is “propaganda by the deed”, the attention-seeking goal of the terrorist is well served in the urban environment, where the immediate audience is greatest and where representatives of print and electronic media are readily available and quite eager to report. Such coverage also magnifies the fear-generating capabilities of terrorists. If the general population begins to fear, the objective of a terrorist group may have been achieved. Overall, an urban landscape facilitates terrorists in realising their goals: surprise, maximum damage with minimum risk, hyper media attention and subsequent disappearance.
• **More lethal attacks.** The “new terrorism” is described as “far more lethal than anything that has come before it”\(^{44}\). Accordingly, their choice of weaponry, techniques, and tactics are made to meet the objective of causing mass casualties in a more lethal manner. The new terrorists are more “high tech”. Terrorist arsenal is not only deadlier, but also more miniature and sophisticated, obtained from various sources. Through the general diffusion of scientific skills and dual-use technologies, there is a danger of WMDs falling into the hands of terrorists, who wish to use them for mass destruction\(^{45}\). For instance, al-Qaeda considers as a “religious duty” to acquire WMDs\(^{46}\). WMDs are highly destructive, but also difficult to defend. They may produce an enormous psychological impact because of the sheer fear they inspire. The new terrorists have no taboo, no morality and see no reason to limit extreme violence that might trigger a backlash. Their “purpose is not to intimidate or persuade but rather simply to destroy”\(^{47}\). The new cohort of terrorists believes that they have to do something spectacular to receive a grand attention. To them, according to Bruce Hoffman, “both the public and media have become increasingly inured or desensitised to the continuing spiral of terrorist violence. Accordingly, these terrorists feel themselves pushed to undertake even more dramatic or destructively lethal deeds today in order to achieve the same effect that a less ambitious or bloody action may have had in the past. Indiscriminate lethal attacks against civilians are also motivated to demonstrate that the state is incapable of protecting its citizens"\(^{48}\). They feel driven by the urge to surpass previous “body counts” and the scale of destruction. Thus, there is an unrelenting upward spiral of violence.

• **Diverse support systems.** State sponsorship has also become more subtle and diverse in the new form of terrorism. Today, one can see resources from many countries for terrorist groups routed through a single organisation or state. Diverse state sponsorship has, in fact, acted as a “force multiplier” by enhancing planning, intelligence, logistical capabilities, training, finances, and sophistication.


\(^{47}\) David Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

making the new terror groups more akin to elite commando units. In addition, support from non-state “amorphous constituencies” has swollen. Moreover, a new dimension of private sponsorship has come to the fore. Now, individuals like Osama bin Laden run foundations like al-Qaeda to support terrorist projects they consider worthy. Declining costs for conducting terrorist attacks have increased the confidence of terrorist groups to become independent of state sponsors. The modern-day terrorist groups have also been increasingly relying on their own income generation through illegal sources such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, video piracy and credit card fraud, as well as legal business investments, donations from wealthy individuals, charities and diaspora. Due to advanced communication and information technology, appealing to their supporters and sympathisers, near and far, has become very easy.

**Countering the “New Terrorism”**

The “new terrorism” is seen as “a threat to all states and to all peoples, which can strike anytime, anywhere”. Yet, the world has not fully grappled with the ways to deal with this new form of threat. Amorphous nature of present-day organisational structure of terrorist groups is deliberate not only to thwart any easy identification but also to facilitate the escape of terrorists. The “new terrorism” is more lethal, claiming more casualties than ever before. Religion and revenge factors constitute major ingredients of motivation to the new cohort of terrorists. They are high-tech, professional and leave fewer footprints. The present-day terror groups are difficult to penetrate. The funding for them has become diverse and, at the same time, opaque. Therefore, it is difficult to identify and fully block the funding sources. Since the target of the new form of terrorism has become more urban-oriented, it gives an added advantage to terrorists to prevent any kind of indiscriminate counter-terrorist operation by the state that could maximise collateral damage. For the same reason, the use of aerial bombardments against terrorists becomes difficult.

Countering this complex nature of terrorism effectively requires a “new” set of counter-terrorism policies. The entire counter-terrorism mechanisms demand

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a thorough overhaul based on clear understanding of the threat potential of the "new terrorism". What is required is a comprehensive approach based on thinking beyond conventional methods.

The basis for any counter-terrorism policy, at the outset, should be "zero tolerance" – terrorism as a means of redressing grievances is unacceptable under any circumstances. Addressing the "root causes" of grievances is vital. Some of the important "root causes" that require immediate attention include deprivation, inequity, religious intolerance, discrimination etc. By neutralizing the causes, most, if not all, militants can be dissuaded from resorting to violence as a means of achieving their ends. Appropriate methods should be used to prevent and as well to deter terrorists. Appropriateness is such that "one does not use a tank to catch field mice – a cat will do the job better".\(^53\)

Multi-pronged and multilateral approach, as well as solidarity within the international community is imperative. The strategies should involve the prevention and elimination of sources of terrorism wherever they are rooted, effective mechanisms of sanctions, transnational cooperation of all law enforcement authorities. Despite 12 international treaties relating to terrorism, a comprehensive convention covering all aspects of counter-terrorism is missing. Such a convention should be powerful enough to deter states from supporting terrorist groups. Multilateralism should not prevent states from having bilateral arrangements aimed at enhancing intelligence ties between the security agencies of their countries, mutual sharing of database and experience on counter-terrorism, as well as joint training/exercise of their forces.

At the same time, the fight must be compatible with fundamental freedoms and human rights. The argument is that if we compromise on the "core values"\(^54\) in our response, we are handing a victory to the terrorists. In other words, any counter-terrorist strategy disregard for human rights keeps alive the underlying tension, hatred and mistrust of government among precisely those parts of the population where terrorists are most likely to find recruits. A vicious circle should not start all over again.

\(^54\) The United Nations identifies these "core values" as the rule of law, the protection of civilians, mutual respect between people of different faiths and cultures, and peaceful resolution of conflict.