

STATE-SPONSORED TERRORISM: MODERN CASES AND RECENT TRENDS

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a rise in the awareness of state-sponsored terrorism, as scholars seek to define the murky concept and combat the growing problem. State-sponsored terrorism presents a unique challenge, as states can deny responsibility for direct actions, while funneling resources into groups separate from the government who will carry out egregious attacks themselves. The cases of government actions in Syria, Pakistan, and the Ivory Coast represent classic examples of state-sponsored terrorism, despite the fact that the governments which aided the terrorism have, until now, denied any wrongdoing. Drawing from the three example states, this paper argues that the financial or resource-based support of a terror group, the appointment of allies as political leaders (specifically, corrupt allies which support a leader's drive for terror towards civilians), and the suppression of free speech, specifically speech criticizing a government, constitutes state-sponsored terrorism.

Literature Review

Stephen D. Collins argues that in the 1970s and 1980s, the most prominent terrorist groups relied upon states sponsoring them; however, state-sponsored terrorism declined beginning in the 1990s and has continued to decline ever since, making state-sponsored terrorism less of a threat today.¹ Collins coins three different terms to represent the three different phases of terrorism: he describes the peak phase of terrorism, which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, as terrorist groups began to find an ally in oppressive governments and swarmed to receive aid; he describes the intermediate phase, which began in 1990 and continued until 2001, where a few more terrorist groups emerged and sought the sponsoring of states, while some of the existing terrorist groups disbanded.² Finally, he expounds on the low phase, which we are currently in and began at the end of the intermediate phase in 2001.³ The low phase consists of the lowest amount of states sponsoring terrorism, and Collins makes an important note that the most current and prominent

terrorist groups are carrying out their attacks with minimal to no state support.⁴ This paper will focus on the “low phase” time period.

Collins finds that state-sponsored terrorism can occur in a variety of ways. Some of these ways include the state providing the arms for the terrorist group in question, the state providing haven and secrecy to the group, special intelligence passed on from the state to the terrorist group, aiding in communication and transportation of physical and digital goods, and the manipulation of the media to either conceal or miscommunicate the true intentions of a terrorist group.⁵

Daniel Byman agrees that the primary element of state-sponsored terrorism is the government’s support of a terrorist organization and the government’s own engagement in causing fear among civilians. He notes that governments inspire terror while denying involvement, and although he questions the effectiveness of terrorist groups in a government’s campaign, he concedes that governments continue to fund terrorist groups, thus becoming states who sponsor terrorism.⁶

Pakistan

The first case this paper will examine is state-sponsored terrorism in Pakistan. Shaun Gregory notes the curious case of Pakistan, which he deems a “persistently failing state.”⁷ This is characterized by Pakistan seemingly being on the constant verge of collapse without actually crumbling. Gregory believes that Pakistan has not collapsed because it is too important of a state to fail; it is too prominent in the international field and its downfall would be disastrous. Therefore, it carries on in all its toppling ways.⁸

In the case of Pakistan, the state supported not one but a number of terrorist groups in hopes of bringing about destruction and fear in India. In one instance, Pakistan established connections with several groups, including Jaysh-e-Mohammad, Harkat-ul-Ansar, Harkat-ul-Mujahedin, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Hizbul Mujhideen, which are all active in Kashmir, a region which has historically been contested between Pakistan and India.⁹ Therefore, the logic follows that Pakistan is

aiming to intimidate and force India out of the region they believe belongs to them. In connecting with these groups, Pakistan offered them generous support, including funds to gain supporters, recruit fighters, purchase weapons, and provide training to the individuals recruited for their cause.¹⁰ The goal was to make the regime of Pakistan appear authentic and legitimate, against an India which refused to budge on their stake of land. To increase the severity of the situation, the *jihadist* organizations which Pakistan aided received the opportunity to communicate directly with prominent political movements in Pakistan which were critical of India and were staunchly Islamist in nature.¹¹ It is the eager support which Pakistan extended to these terrorist organizations which constitutes it as state-sponsored terrorism. In this case, we see monetary support channeled towards the various groups, which were then utilized to maintain the mission and recruit others. We can also see the access to highly skilled and knowledgeable movements already existing in Pakistan, which facilitated the communication of intelligence to the terrorist groups.

The failures of state-sponsored terrorism are also outlined; when the state is not directly in control of the terrorism, the actors who lead the terrorist group have the final say in what the group's goals will be. In the case of Pakistan, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, which is a political organization which formerly participated in terrorism, was funded and trained by the Pakistani government.¹² The group initially embraced the arms provided and took to violent struggle in the fight for Kashmir liberation, but a change in leadership lead to the group adopting a campaign for a peaceful approach to achieving political prominence. With this shift came about a group critical of Pakistan's government and its sponsoring of violence, which rejected the valuable resources Pakistan had already provided for them. Several members also became outspoken critics of Pakistan's government.¹³

One of the other primary concerns Byman finds is that Pakistan puts itself in a security dilemma when it supports a multitude of terrorist groups. He notes that suicide bombings and

politically-motivated assassinations, staples of terrorism, have increased within Pakistan; the terrorist groups they fund have backfired in the sense that they are carrying out their actions within the already failing Pakistan, weakening its legitimacy.¹⁴

The second feature of the Pakistani government which characterizes its actions as state-sponsored terrorism is its appointment of politicians who support terrorism. Pakistan's strong feudal history has cultivated a traditional society which, while theoretically a free democracy, relies on strong manipulation of the lower and middle classes. Due to a lack of education and politicians' strong influence over the Pakistani people, the religious elite instruct the deeply devout population on how to vote, while politicians profit off their connections with the clergy.¹⁵ This is an instance of when the state directly influences elections, but also of state allies, such as the religious clergy, exercising a sway over a group of people to cause a certain electoral outcome. To increase the severity of the situation, the leader of Pakistan, once having achieved power, can rule absolutely without checks or balances. Bora notes that the leader is not subject to regulations and can act as he wishes; these rulers usually ignore the input of international organizations, such as the United Nations and its various committees, as well as demands from any states.¹⁶

In exploring the last requirement for a state's actions to constitute as state-sponsored terrorism, we can examine the suppression of free speech in Pakistan. In fact, the suppression of speech is so entrenched in society that journalists do not even wait to be reprimanded by the state; they suppress themselves. This is because they know what is allowed and what is not, and in censoring themselves before a certain media is published, they prevent being censored and targeted by the government.¹⁷ This is also an extension of our second point, because it is the judges in Pakistan who determine what is acceptable speech and what is not, and these judges are all appointed and commanded by the leader, which demonstrates that the judges act as a medium to execute what a ruler wishes.¹⁸

Ivory Coast

In the Ivory Coast, there is a history which has set about the three aspects of state-sponsored terrorism discussed in this paper. It begins with the first idea, which is that of appointing political allies into positions of power, which leads to suppression of free speech, and finally, to the violence against the people of the Ivory Coast. We begin by examining the Constitution of the Ivory Coast and its corresponding council. The Constitutional Council acts as the supreme judicial body in the Ivory Coast, and it exercises its power in two main forms: in determining the eligibility of candidates running for president and in interpreting the Constitution. The Constitutional Council is composed of appointed members.¹⁹ The President of the Republic elects a President of the Constitutional Council, who acts in a similar fashion to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in the United States. Three other members are also appointed by the president, while the remaining three justices are appointed by the President of the National Assembly, for a total of seven members.²⁰ The Council rules by majority vote, leaving a clear path for the President of the Republic to make the majority of the decisions, having four hand-picked allies sitting on the bench. As several studies have noted, it is not a secret that the Ivory Coast has historically been dominated by a single party (which is always the party of the President), giving the President overwhelming power in all regards.²¹

One of the other key features of the Constitutional Council is its role in presidential elections. It is the Council's duty to confirm presidential election results and officially declare a winner.²² The Council's power was exercised in the presidential election of 2010, where President Laurent Gbagbo, who was supported in the north, ran for another term. He was opposed by Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara of the south.²³ Though Ouattara won the ballot, the Constitutional Council declared the election invalid and stated that Gbagbo would continue in his role as president. This drew international attention, including that of the United Nations, the African Union, the

European Union, and the United States, who all supported Ouattara and insisted on his victory. Since the power of declaring the presidential winner rested on the Constitutional Council, it was within their right to declare Gbagbo winner. However, it was also noted that the Council was composed of allies of Gbagbo, demonstrating the role of political allies in a leader's ability to run a country as he wishes.²⁴

The election of 2010 illustrates the influence of the Constitutional Council over the Ivorian people, and by extension, the sway the president has over all key decisions, suggesting that there is no effective structure of checks and balances in the Ivory Coast. To return to the importance of the election, we can examine how a monopoly of power resulted in the suppression of free speech. Following the faulty pronouncement of Gbagbo as the president, pockets of people living in the North began to protest. People took to the streets and demanded that the votes be counted fairly and accurately.²⁵ However, Gbagbo's Constitutional Council argued that because of voting irregularities in the North, these votes were illegitimate. Then, to prohibit free speech and engage in violence against the civilian population, the military terrorized those speaking up in the North, in an effort to quench their protests.²⁶ Gbagbo denied any wrongdoing and held that he was not behind the attacks, but the international community investigated the situation and came to the conclusion that Gbagbo and his government were funding terrorist groups to carry out attacks against civilians, while also instructing the Ivorian military to engage in violence.²⁷ These attacks did not last long, as the United Nations intervened and took Gbagbo to the International Criminal Court, but it demonstrates that the Ivory Coast engaged in state-sponsored violence through the sponsoring of terrorist groups, the appointment of political allies, and the suppression of free speech.

Syria

Syria's case is currently in a crucial state, because the amount of terrorism taking place has prompted an international crisis, requiring humanitarian aid from a myriad of development banks

and international organizations.²⁸ Seth Jones notes that in Syria, terrorist forces are learning how to build bombs, study combat, and utilize social media efficiently to promote interests and gather intelligence. The problem is that Syria's various terrorist organizations are connecting with other terrorist groups in nearby regions, thus passing information efficiently and at an alarming rate.²⁹

Syria's geographic position places it in the center among conflicts in the Middle East. It is bordered by the smaller Lebanon, where the Hezbollah group is focused. Nevertheless, Hezbollah receives support from the Assad regime. As Talbot notes, the Hezbollah is a manner in which Syria can extend its influence beyond its territory, though this influence is one which Talbot refers to as "threatening and destabilizing."³⁰ It is Syria's monetary and training support for Hezbollah which allows it to take an aggressive stance against Israel. The 1989 Tarif Agreement stipulated that militias would need to be disarmed in Lebanon; despite this, Syria continued to arm the terror group well after the agreement in hopes of reclaiming the Golan Heights, a contested region which Israel claimed and Syria wanted to recover.³¹

Syria also engages in the other two aspects of state-sponsored terrorism. In addition to aiding terrorist organizations, the government also launched a strict censorship campaign, hoping to curtail the avid use of social media to criticize the state-sponsoring regime. A large Syrian population was present on platforms such as Facebook and Blogger, both documenting daily injustices and criticizing the government in which they lived in. Because of the mounting number of "cyber activists" taking to the Internet and broadcasting their messages throughout the world, the Syrian government implemented censors on the Internet which prevented users from accessing certain sites.³² These sites were, of course, the ones in which users were most active and reaching the largest audiences. In Syria, the government created censors which would block websites with certain keywords present. As Saqaf describes, users attempting to reach these sites would instead land on an Access Denied page.³³

The last dimension in which Syria meets the requirement of sponsoring state terrorism is in its appointment of political allies who will continue the patterns of terrorism in the state. The Assad family has historically put itself in a position of supreme power and has ousted those it does not like from other positions; in one example, the Assad family removed Sunni Muslims from positions of power in the government, such as high-ranking positions within the military and posts regarding international affairs.³⁴ Since then, it has continued to put into power only those who will do as Assad says, thereby facilitating the monopoly of power for the Assad regime. It is noted that this concentration of power in the Assad family is unlikely to change anytime soon, seeing as the conditions which have led to the rule of Assad have become entrenched within Syrian societal structure and framework, thus leaving little room for change.³⁵

Conclusion

In the three cases described, which include the cases of Pakistan, the Ivory Coast, and Syria, important government actors engage in state-sponsored terrorism. While there is certainly overlap with state terrorism, the prominence of the actions of terror groups directly unrelated to the government aid in shaping a picture of state-sponsored terrorism. Across all cases, we saw examples of the appointment of political allies in positions of power. These power monopolies enabled state heads to execute their agendas across all government branches without resistance, including the sponsoring of terrorism with little political pushback. In another show of state-sponsored terrorism, the respective governments all engaged in various forms of passing funding and resources to terror groups to help achieve state goals. In the case of Pakistan, the government funded and trained several terror groups whose goals aligned with their visions. Some of these actions backfired, but the fact remains that Pakistan funded external terror groups. In the case of the Ivory Coast, the government, unhappy with the results of the election, sent the military and aided terror groups in wreaking havoc in the North (the area which voted overwhelmingly against the president who

legitimately won). In the case of Syria, the government interacted with terror groups, relying on the strategic position and places of attack of these groups to attempt to gain land and power back.

Lastly, all three state governments engaged in the suppression of free speech to block the cries of help and the documentation of the crimes being committed by the heads of state. This serves as state-sponsored terrorism in that the states are directly monitoring what is being spread, but the agents of the state are also censoring dissenting individuals and groups, and in the case of Pakistan, the fear of terror from several avenues based on free expression was so strong that journalists began to censor themselves in fear of what would happen if their reports flowed unchecked.

Therefore, in these three cases, we have demonstrated the convergence of political corruption by appointing only political allies, the suppression of free speech, and the support for terror groups spreading fear, thus filling all the requirements for these cases to qualify as state-sponsored terrorism. Though the case of the Ivory Coast has marginally become better, there is still a desperate need for dismantling institutions which breed state-sponsored terrorism. As state-sponsored terrorism is a difficult term to define, organizations with power have hesitated with taking direct action against states sponsoring terrorism, but with clear guidelines of what it constitutes, perhaps states can converge and push offending states to cut their support of terrorism.

Notes

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^{34.} Jomana Qaddour, "Unlocking the Alawite Conundrum in Syria," *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2013): 69.

^{35.} Qaddour, 76.

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