

Terrorism and Human Rights

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HIST 447W History of Human Rights: Nineteenth Century to Present

December 12, 2019

Introduction

There are few words that strike the heart as does the word “terrorism”. When that word is heard, a wide array of its examples come to mind. We might play back the fateful morning of September 11, 2001 when two hijacked planes brought down the mighty Twin Towers in New York City. We might sadden at the thought of domestic terrorism in the United States and the mass carnage of gun violence that has served as its tool. We might even fume at Bush’s “War on Terror” and its effects on the United States, both politically and militarily. Similarly, there are few phrases that provoke the mind as does the phrase “human rights”. Some may conjure the knowledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Others might rattle off the human rights atrocities of today and throughout history. There are thousands after all, from the Third Reich to the Rwandan Genocide to the Syrian Civil War. Unfortunately, none of this is new.

What is new, however, is a deep consideration of the intimate connection between these two concepts. Terrorism cannot be combatted without a grasp on human rights. Human rights cannot flourish without particular attention to terrorism. So quickly, what was once considered an antagonism of the highest degree, now transforms into a stage for reconciliation and mutual benefit.

This paper seeks to serve as that stage for reconciliation and mutual benefit. In attempting to function as such, a structural progression is employed to enhance the aims of this exploration. To begin, an etymological analysis is conducted to decipher the terms “terrorism” and “human rights”. Following this, a case study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is conducted. The case study consists of two parts: a historical analysis, where the general situation is outlined and an applied analysis, where human rights theory is used as a tool to examine the situation. The final section works to generalize the case study’s findings to the larger issue of terrorism and makes

suggestions for utilizing a human rights paradigm in counterterrorism efforts. With this blueprint, we can glide into our etymological analysis.

Etymological Analysis

To define terrorism as clearly as possible is of paramount importance. Such a task involves grappling with a highly complex and contradictory etymology. Various facets of the United States government, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation¹ and the State Department², provide completely unique definitions of terrorism. For the purposes of this examination, it is of greatest use to examine the United Nations' definition despite its ambiguity. In a fact sheet, released by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), terrorism is “commonly understood to refer to acts of violence that target civilians in pursuit of political and ideological aims.”³ By invoking the term “commonly understood”, OHCHR admits it is not offering a comprehensive definition of terrorism and goes on to discuss the historical development of understanding terrorism through “existing declarations, resolutions, and universal ‘sectoral’ treaties...”⁴ It is useful to acknowledge that the United Nations General Assembly considered an attempt at defining terrorism holistically at the time of the fact sheet's publication in 2008 but a resolution aiming to do such has not come to fruition. The OHCHR's “commonly understood” definition is preferable for the purposes of this examination. In direct contradiction with various other definitions, the OHCHR's does not marry

¹ FBI, “Terrorism”.

² U.S. Department of State, “Countering Terrorism”.

³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Human Rights, Terrorism, and Counter-Terrorism”, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

terrorism to non-state actors (NSAs) which proves crucial for understanding terrorism as it relates to human rights.

To define human rights is as much a conundrum as defining terrorism. A definition of human rights is possibly considered even more theoretical, abstract, and elusive than that of terrorism. Once an act of terrorism is perpetrated, it is generally simple to point it out. A violation of human rights, however, is classically more difficult. Perhaps it is the enigmatic nature of human rights that entices scholars to grapple with it so readily. Paul Lauren offers a roundabout, but inspiring summary in “My Brother’s and Sister’s Keeper: Visions and the Origins of Human Rights: “they [international human rights] emerge in complicated, interrelated, and sometimes paradoxical ways from the influence of many sources, forces, personalities, and conditions in different times and diverse settings.”⁵ Lauren goes on to provide an account of the historical development of human rights which he asserts arose out of the dialogue between numerous religious and philosophical traditions over thousands of years. Strikingly, much of his discussion focuses on injustice and abuse perpetrated on the level of the State or Empire.⁶ Such an indictment is a crucial aspect in understanding human rights violations that are responsible for creating an environment in which terrorism can grow. While Paul Lauren offers a vast historical analysis of the development of human rights, Bruno Cabanes condenses their development to the origin point of the First World War.⁷ Through a discussion of humanitarianism and its metamorphosis into international human rights, we are provided with several valuable case

⁵ Paul Gordon Lauren, “My Brother’s and Sister’s Keeper: Visions and the Origins of Human Rights, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 5.

⁶ Ibid., p.32

⁷ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

studies which illuminate what is at stake in this field. This, too, informs our working definition of human rights. The last and most important tenet of our working definition of human rights is derived from the United Nations' (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR is comprised of thirty articles that encompass a set of universal, unalienable rights.⁸ With these characteristics in mind, we are able to deduce our own working definition of human rights: the set of rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which have a direct and profound impact on society; almost always involving, directly or indirectly, of a State or Empire. Armed with these functional definitions, we can move on to the next part of our analysis: an in-depth review of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Case Analysis

Historical Analysis

The origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict date back to the end of World War I with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The British government's Balfour Declaration of 1917 is the initiating document for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it exists today. The document reads:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of the object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious' rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.⁹

Unfortunately, the object that Arthur James Balfour references was achieved. After additional justification was provided by the League of Nations' *Mandate for Palestine*¹⁰ and the tragedy of

⁸ United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (2012).

⁹ Arthur James Balfour, *Balfour Declaration*, (1917).

¹⁰ League of Nations, *Mandate for Palestine*, (1923).

the Holocaust, Israel was officially recognized in 1948 through the *Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel*¹¹. The document directly precipitated the First Arab-Israeli War and the Palestinian Nakba defined as “the mass expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from British Mandate Palestine during Israel’s creation...”¹² Various attempts at peace, largely organized by Western powers (i.e. United States) and involving key Arab states (i.e. Egypt, Syria), did little to heal the collective trauma of the constant war plaguing Israel-Palestine. A pattern of successive intifadas began in 1987. These intifadas led to violence during mass uprisings against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.¹³ The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has created a suitable environment for the operation of terrorist organizations in the area. Understanding these groups are key to moving forward with this exploration.

A variety of terrorist organizations operate in front of the backdrop that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite the evolution of the conflict, this has been the case since its inception rendering it a historically rooted problem. In *Terror Out of Zion*, J. Bowyer Bell addresses the history of the early underground movements surrounding the Mandate. He explores two crucial Israeli terrorist groups¹⁴, the Irgun and the Lehi (Stern Gang) in great depth. Bell discusses the formation of the Irgun (and later, the Lehi) by attributing it to the Arab-initiated violence in 1929. The violence by the Arabs and the indifference of the British, Bell argues, gave rise to this kind of Israeli terror. He writes, “If Jews were not again to be vulnerable to mobs...there would have to be changes. The more militant Jews of Palestine began to regard...self-defense – with skepticism, began to doubt the traditional British connection, and

¹¹ Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Israel’s Proclamation of Independence Issued in Tel Aviv”.

¹² Institute for Middle East Understanding, “Quick Facts: The Palestinian Nakba”, (2015).

¹³ Council on Foreign Relations, “Israeli-Palestinian Conflict’.

started to seek other forms and directions more appropriate to the new Jew, who had come to Palestine to build a nation.”¹⁵ In 1944, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) published a detailed report outlining the history, objectives, and actions of the Irgun. According to the report, the Irgun partook in a great deal of violence to meet their objectives. This violence was perpetrated against both the Palestinians and the British.¹⁶ The Holocaust was well underway at the time of the CIA’s report on the Irgun. According to our definition of terrorism, as well as our aim to understand the relationship between terrorism and human rights, Hitler’s Nazi Party is categorizable as a terrorist organization. The Holocaust, Hitler’s extermination program, and the Final Solution are the absolute antithesis of the realization of human rights. The senseless brutality of the Nazi regime certainly had implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seeing that the push for a Jewish national home was revived by the Holocaust. In *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* it states, “It was a widely held view that establishing new lives, looking forward and absorbing into Israeli society was the best way of overcoming the trauma of the Holocaust.”¹⁷ The authors go on to argue that the militancy of the Israeli occupation worsened with successive generations. With this, we come to our most controversial claim: that the Israeli government and military (IG-M) comprises a terrorist organization. IG-M satisfies the definition set forth in preceding sections. Matthew Carr summarizes IG-M’s impact succinctly: “the victims of Israeli air strikes and cross-border

¹⁵ J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: Irgun Zvai Leumi, Lehi, and the Palestinian Underground: 1929 – 1949*, (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1977), p. 7

¹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, *The Objectives and Activities of the Irgun Zvai Leumi*, (1944).

¹⁷ Karlsson Klas-Goran and Ulf Zander, *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe*, (Lund, Nordic Academic Press, 2003), p. 69.

military incursions tended to be routinised in brief news items or subsumed in the euphemistic vocabulary of counter-terrorism.”¹⁸ With this, we turn to Palestinian terrorist organizations.

On the Palestinian side, Fatah (the dominant body of the Palestinian Liberation Organization) serves as the historical precursor for today’s Palestinian Arab terrorist organizations. Yaser Arafat and Palestinian nationalists founded Fatah in the 1950s¹⁹ and it became the dominant member of the larger Palestinian Liberation Organization in the late 1960s.²⁰ Fatah’s origins are bloody, and their operations were violent for many years before any change towards peace has occurred. Most notably, Fatah’s collaborator Black September, committed one of the most atrocious terrorist attacks in history. In *The Infernal Machine: A History of Terrorism*, Matthew Carr writes, “Whatever its origins, over the next three years Black September carried out a string of bloody operations in different parts of the world, culminating in the deaths of eleven members of the Israeli Olympic team during the Munich Games in September 1972.”²¹ The massacre was symbolically loaded with the Olympic Games, to many a furnishing of peace, as its setting.²² The Munich Massacre was perhaps the most publicized terrorist attack to date. Carr describes the visual representations of the Massacre in detail and with special significance placed on the emerging paradigm of international terror.²³ In

¹⁸ Matthew Carr, *The Infernal Machine: A History of Terrorism*, (New York, New Press, 2008), p. 192.

¹⁹ Eric Westerfelt, “Q&A: Hamas and Fatah”, (NPR, 2007).

²⁰ Glenn E. Robinson, “Palestinian Liberation Organization”, (Oxford Online Encyclopedia of the Islamic World).

²¹ Matthew Carr, *The Infernal Machine: A History of Terrorism*, (New York, New Press, 2008), p. 201.

²² Adam Hofstetter, “Can Sports Bring World Peace?”, (*The Atlantic*, 2010).

²³ Matthew Carr, *The Infernal Machine: A History of Terrorism*, (New York, New Press, 2008), p. 202.

the 1990s, Yaser Arafat denounced terrorism and made strides to convert the PLO into a political regime, rather than a military one – a choice that was unwelcomed by many.

The Munich Massacre commonly serves as a generalized starting point for understanding Palestinian terror. Less than a decade after the Massacre, Hamas began to take hold in the Gaza Strip. Hamas' guiding ideology centers on four major points from the 1988 Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement: a commitment to Islam, a religious right to Palestine, an embracing of nationalism, and a denunciation of Israel through armed resistance.²⁴ Hamas is not known for any particular terrorist attack but its rap sheet is long and consistent. It is also vital to note that Hamas holds formal government power, along with Fatah. The Palestinian National Authority, the provincial governing body for the Gaza Strip and the West Bank was divided into two factions in the late 2000s. The West Bank was controlled by Fatah, but the Gaza Strip was controlled by Hamas. The Institute for Middle East Understanding simply explains that, "Following the elections, factional violence between Fatah and Hamas in 2007 left Hamas in control of governance in the Gaza Strip..."²⁵ Since then, Fatah and Hamas have reconciled to the point that the two could unite under the Palestinian National Authority.

Applied Analysis

As set forth in preceding sections, our unique definition of human rights possesses three components: it (1) relies on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as its foundation, it (2) possesses tangible effects on society, and (3) is almost always, whether directly or indirectly, involving of a State.

²⁴ Counter Extremism Project, "Hamas".

²⁵ Institute for Middle East Understanding, "What is the 'Palestinian Authority?'", (2005).

The last two tenets that we have set forth are immediately satisfied in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since 2008 alone, there have been 5,796 fatalities²⁶ as result of the conflict. The human impact is far-reaching and comprehensive. The State, as we have discussed, plays a key role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By State, we refer to the Israeli military forces (as discussed in previous sections) and national sponsors of terror such as Iran.

So, what then, can be made of the UDHR and its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? The easiest method for the analysis is to apply specific Articles to the situation. During research, it was found that *almost every Article of the UDHR is violated* by one party or another. However, several have been selected for closer examination: Article 3, Article 13, and Article 23. We will conduct our analysis in chronological order.

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”²⁷

Article 3 is one of the most basic, foundational tenets of the UDHR. Interestingly, what undermines this right is violence. Violence explicitly exists on both sides of the conflict and is the key ingredient in terroristic activities of Israeli and Palestinian origin. Violence is also the most foundational ingredient in understanding terrorism. As such, no explanation is needed as to how Article 3 and terrorism coincide.

In an article in the *New York Times*, Clyde Haberman describes a terrorist attack carried out by a Palestinian suicide bomber: “In the most serious terrorist attack inside Israel since 1989, 8 people were killed and 44 others wounded today...the explosion turned the bus into a storm of

²⁶ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Data on Casualties”.

²⁷ United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (2012).

flying metal and flames, slashing some victims to pieces and horribly burning others.”²⁸ What Haberman described in 1994 continues today. With every attack such of this, no matter the origin, Article 3 is undermined.

“(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country.”²⁹

The generational denial of the Palestinian right to return is what renders the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so unique in global context. The “Nakba”, translating to “catastrophe” or “disaster” in English, began when “Zionist forces destroyed 531 Palestinian villages, killed over 10,000 of Palestine’s native population, and forcibly displaced some 800,000 Palestinians from their home and property[,]”³⁰ making Palestinians “the largest and most long-suffering refugee population in the world.”³¹ The “right of return”, which is codified in the UDHR as Article 13, covers the Palestinian situation. It is further legitimated by United Nations’ Resolution 194 which specifically discusses the structure by which Palestinians should be allowed to reintegrate into former territories.³² Nonetheless, the “right of return” has been largely ignored by the Israeli government and their illegal occupation continues to cripple Palestinian progress.

²⁸ Clyde Haberman, “Arab Car Bomber Kills 8 in Israel; 44 Are Wounded”, (The New York Times, 1994), p. 2.

²⁹ United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (2012).

³⁰ Rania Muhareb, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Ongoing Nakba: 70 Years of Exile, Rights Abuses, and Israeli Impunity”, (Al Haq, 2018), p. 1-2.

³¹ Hussein Ibish and Ali Abunimah, “The Palestinian Right of Return”, (Global Policy Forum), p.1.

³² United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East “Resolution 194”, (1948).

Terrorism finds fuel in circumstances such as this. When collective trauma goes unhealed, it breeds radicalism. Hamas' official website states “[Hamas] commits itself to continue all activities undermining the legacy of Zionist occupiers locally, regionally and internationally in order to restore freedom and end the ongoing Nakba.”³³ The “tragedy of being stateless”³⁴, as Bruno Cabanes refers to it, has radicalization power. Frazer Egerton synthesizes the widespread idea that radicalization and participation in terror organizations is rooted in social alienation.³⁵ As such, Article 13 has heavy influence on the proliferation of terrorism.

“(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just a favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment...”³⁶

Article 23 and its violation are not generally considered obvious or abrasive concerns for human rights. That said, they play a critical role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The economic situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is an objective catastrophe. Along with lagging macroeconomic factors like real GDP, the unemployment rate hovered at about 30.8% in 2018. The youth unemployment rate was more than double at 67%.³⁷ Intuitively, these economic factors translate into some of the most impoverished and unjust conditions in the world.

Unfortunately, these outcomes are linked to the Israeli governance and policy. The International Labour Office writes, “Restrictions on the movement of people and goods as well as on access to

³³ Hamas Islamic Resistance, “Nakba”.

³⁴ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 133.

³⁵ Frazer Egerton, “Alienation and its discontents”, (European Journal of International Relations 17, no. 3, 2010).

³⁶ United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, (2012).

³⁷ World Bank, “Palestinian Territories”.

natural resources continue to stifle [Palestinian] economic activities and the labour market.”³⁸ In Elizabeth Ruppert Bulmer’s *The Impact of Israeli Border Policy on the Palestinian Labor Market*, we are exposed to a number of extensions to this simple fact. Bulmer discusses a range of factors which complicate the role of the Israeli government in Palestinians’ economic struggles. For example, Bulmer details the restrictive nature of work permits which Palestinians are required to hold if they commute through Israeli-held territory.³⁹ This factor, among various others, directly contradict the spirit of Article 23.

With this, we can easily establish that Israeli policy as it affects the Palestinian ability to work is a systematic abuse of human rights. How, then, do we make the jump to terrorism? The correlation between poverty and terrorism is one that continues to be debated among foreign policy experts and social scientists. This correlation is examined in a variety of research. Efraim Benmelech, Claude Berrebi, and Esteban F. Klor use the Palestinian case in their analysis of the linkage between economic conditions and suicide terrorism. Their findings are astounding: “we demonstrated that high unemployment and poor economic conditions allow terror organizations to recruit more educated, mature, and experienced suicide terrorists who, in turn, attack more important targets.”⁴⁰ The level of correlation between poverty (and by extension, unemployment) and terrorism is not the topic of this paper. However, the affirmation that such a correlation exists is central to a continuation of disclosing the nature between terrorism and human rights.

³⁸ International Labour Organization, *The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories*, (2018), p. 5.

³⁹ Elizabeth Ruppert Bulmer, “The Impact of Israeli Border Policy on the Palestinian Labor Market”, (*Economic Development and Cultural Change* 4, no. 3, 2003), p. 659.

⁴⁰ Efraim Benmelech, et al., “Economic Conditions and the Quality of Suicide Terrorism”, (*The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 1, 2012.), p. 125.

The examination of these three articles of the UDHR are crucial for understanding the intimate relationship that exists between terrorism and human rights. With this, we can move on to a synthesis of our conclusions.

Generalizations and Recommendations

A variety of generalizations and recommendations can be made from the preceding research. In the following synthesis, we examine a key characteristic of the relationship between terrorism and human rights and pose some basic recommendations for moving forward.

Characterological Synthesis

The interaction between terrorism and human rights is cyclical. As illustrated in our case study, several terrorist organizations emerged through the assistance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The IG-M and Hamas are among the most active today, but we must acknowledge the historical development of both groups. The rise of Palestinian extremism is a precipitant of human rights abuses by the IG-M. The militant culture of the IG-M is, at least in part, traced back to the Holocaust. It is a common historical theme that the rise of Hitler was enabled by the harsh treatment of the Germans following World War I, codified with the Treaty of Versailles.

What this display is a continuing, cyclical nature of human rights abuses where terrorism is often utilized. In an article released by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a question is raised: did Palestinian terrorism or Israeli occupation come first?⁴¹ We are less concerned with the answer provided by this article and more concerned by what it represents – that two examples of human rights' violations are in dialogue with one another in such a way.

⁴¹ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Which Came First – Terrorism or Occupation – Major Terrorist Attacks Against Israelis Prior to the 1967 Six-Day War".

Future research ought to explore the cyclical nature of terrorism and human rights violations. If a pattern is found among various cases, this should be noted and addressed ferociously.

Recommendations

First, the international arena needs to take their own resolutions seriously. A great deal of international covenants, treaties, laws, etc. have provided a solid basis for addressing the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The international community's unwillingness to take serious action is in violation of human rights expectations. In our case, the IG-M and Palestinian terrorist organizations must be held accountable for their human rights violations for any change to be realized in this conflict. Secondly, terrorism needs to be addressed as a human rights issue rather than as a security issue. By utilizing a human rights paradigm, international cooperation will increase, and terrorist organizations will not longer be provided with fuel for radicalization. All counterterrorism measures must be conducted with the UDHR in mind. Finally, additional research must be conducted on this subject. Comparative analyses of different terrorist organizations and their violation of human rights will serve this body of research well. With these recommendations in mind, we can begin to tackle terrorism as a human rights issue.

Conclusion

The relationship between terrorism and human rights is one of awesome and terrifying power. By understanding these terms, analyzing a case, and discerning characteristics, we were able to make the connection and begin to unravel its complexities. In this way, we are more equipped to address terrorism and the human rights violations that result.

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