Terrorism and Failed States in the Middle East
Background Guide

By Karen Veraza

“Terrorism has once again shown it is prepared deliberately to stop at nothing in creating human victims. An end must be put to this. As never before, it is vital to unite forces of the entire world community against terror.”

~ Vladimir Putin

“The purpose of terrorism lies not just in the violent act itself. It is in producing terror. It sets out to inflame, to divide, and to produce consequences which they then use to justify further terror.”

~ Tony Blair

Background

Terrorism has taken the center stage of the contemporary media, and as a relevant topic its discussion in the world’s political arena has become more heated than ever. Many countries have united in the fight against terrorism, together with the United Nations (UN) they have created a number of counter measures and initiatives to combat terrorism. Attacks were more frequent before and during the 1970’s but it’s the amount of deaths following each attack that have escalated, and thus attracted more attention to the topic. Most Americans will know the names of some of these terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaida, Hamas and Hezbollah, but not many might not know their backgrounds and the history of the nations where these groups emerged. It is important to analyze the history leading up to the current failure of the Middle Eastern states as well as the reasons for which groups of people turn to terrorism.

History

Terrorism has been present throughout history, but it is in recent history that we have seen terrorist attacks cause more casualties than ever before. There is no agreed upon definition of what terrorism is, but the U.S. Federal code marks it as: ‘the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.” That being said, anti-terrorism campaigns and the awareness of the American public has gone up ever since
the 9/11 attack. Although it was not the first terrorism attack in the United States, it was the first of its magnitude that caused such a high death toll. The 9/11 attack killed 2,996 and injured more than 6,000. Half of the world's major Foreign Terrorist Organizations as designated by the European Union and the U.S. Department of State are Palestinian or have a Palestinian agenda; 5 out of the world's 7 state sponsors of terrorism are Arab states and Iran. In order to understand why there are terrorist groups causing such havoc nowadays, we have to take a look at the Middle East and its failed states.

Many Middle Eastern states had leaders who had taken control of the government by organizing coups against previous monarchies. Said leaders had one thing in common: “an antipathy towards Western-style liberal democracies and market economies”. However it did not take long for the people under these leaders to grow tired of their tyranny and revolt against these dictatorships. A good example of such leaders would be Egypt’s Nasser, Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr from Iraq, and Hafez al-Assad from Syria.

Current Events

All we hear about in the news is the constant violent battles, and the blood being spilled in the Middle East. The name that currently is on every media source is ISIS, a splinter group of Al-Quaida. ISIS stands for Islamic State, formerly known as the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant, and it is headed by Al-Baghdadi (the Caliph). ISIS has been classified as more than a terrorist group. ISIS is a well-organized military group that seeks to unite all Islamic states under a Caliphate and get rid of the previously arranged political boundaries.

Perhaps what is most alarming is that with no intervention from Western states in sight and the Iraqi militia being rather weak compared to the organized forces from ISIS, it is increasingly likely that they will continue to control the areas they have taken over.

Although many claim that these states have failed because they have not embraced democratic ideologies, How Capitalism Failed the Arab World states that although authoritarianism is not the specific reason for a failed state, authoritarian regimes have “exemplified a mixture of miracles and disasters, while democracies have historically been more stable and sustainable on average.” (Heydarian, 53) As well as also stating that “Arab regimes, especially the non-petro rich republics, have been unable to increase overall productivity and rein in strong population growth, which has led to fewer major successes to show for their decades of top-to-bottom reform, large-scale projects and economic experimentations” (Heydarian, 54)

UN Involvement

The United Nations has “eighteen universal instruments combatting international terrorism that have been elaborated within the framework of the United Nations system relating to specific terrorist activities” as stated on their Action to Counter Terrorism website. It also has a Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), established after the 9/11 attacks that works with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED); its mission is to help member states “prevent terrorist acts both within their borders and across regions.” This committee has
come up with a series of measurements intended to be taken by member states in order to counter terrorism. The CTC visits countries to monitor their progress, provide technical assistance as well as collect reports from each country that go into detail of their counter-terrorist situation, meet with other international institutions that fight terrorism, and encourages countries to apply known best practices, codes and standards, taking into account their own circumstances and needs.

The UN News Centre published that on August 15th of this year, the UN approved sanctions against the militants of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as well as stating that those who have any kind of financial relationship with them will be punished. This resolution has been led by the United Kingdom. The UN has urged ISIS to stop its violent acts and has urged its member states to stop its citizens from joining and supporting ISIS and prosecuting those who do. For those added to the sanctions list there will be an asset freeze, arms embargo, and travel ban.

On September 4th, the United States convened a Security Council summit in order to deal with the threat that foreign terrorist fighters pose. President Obama would be attending this summit. The “key issues that were on the Security Council’s work plan, began with a briefing on the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria and a humanitarian update on the situation in that country towards the end of the month.”

Positions on Terrorism Around the World

As would be expected, most of the member states within the United Nations have taken an anti-terrorism position, and have followed the counter measures established by the UN. The Counter-Terrorism Committee in the UN is comprised of the 15 members of the Security Council, all of whom work hard to combat terrorist groups and unite with other international organizations in order to become stronger and reach out to more of the global population. Although it has been the United States and the United Kingdom that have taken the lead, we also see the leaders of countries such as Russia that state that terrorism is unacceptable and must be combated. Recently, countries such as Australia, France, Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, and Iraqi Kurdistan have all united and are helping the US through various methods to stop the flow of foreign fighters joining ISIS, as well as hinder financial aid to ISIS. Additionally, some of these countries have sent armed forces or helped with military training and ammunitions.
Bibliography


"UN Counter-Terrorism Committee." UN News Center. UN, n.d. Web. 15 Sept.2014.

