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DEMOCRACY AND TERRORISM: MISSING LINK, OLD CLICHÉ AND NEW APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

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Since the 1990s, this problem has become the main research subject for a substantial number of academics in the field of terrorism studies. Actually, it has reached the top of the agenda in the field of terrorism research. However, especially if one takes into account how much time and effort has been already spent on the problem, it is hard not to be surprised – and not just by the lack of solid results but by something reminding endless scholastic debate on “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin” or alike that is going on among terrorism experts.

In this “scholastic” exercise, the divide runs between two camps. The first one includes researchers who argue that more democracy means less terror, to rephrase the title of one of numerous studies on the subject [1]. In a nutshell, democracy gives to those dissatisfied with sociopolitical *status quo* legal means to express their dissatisfaction and try to peacefully bring about decisions aimed at redressing voiced grievances. The second camp, logically, comprises of those researchers who see democracy from the opposite point of view – as the regime most prone to terrorist violence. In a nutshell again, democratic governments are said to be too soft even on their avowedly radical opponents (among whom potential terrorists may be “coming of age”); too soft even on actual terrorists not giving a free hand to the police or security forces to deal with the terrorist threat; *too humane*, so to say, treasuring every human life and therefore providing terrorists with plenty of easy targets. In other words, more democracy means more terrorism. It is this “cursed question” of whether democracy decreases or increases terrorism that constitutes the main subject of the ongoing discussion of the problem of democracy and terrorism. Leonard Weinberg, commenting on this debate's interim results and prospects, draws rather pessimistic picture of possible discussing the problem “back and forth until ennui or exhaustion sets in” [2]. What is proposed here is the new, broader and, hopefully, more promising approach to the problem.

This approach has two points of departure. The first point is to draw attention to the fact that there is a missing critically important link in the previous discussion. Quite surprisingly, that link is the conflict that brings about terrorist violence. When democracy is *a priori* depicted as the exclusively effective force preventing or reducing terrorism, one tends to think that every conflict behind terrorist violence can be “translated” into and discussed in the language of democracy. The origin and nature of particular conflicts that have led or may lead to terrorism seem to be negligible from such a point of view since any demands made before and/or during a conflict can supposedly be the subject of negotiation, casting votes and compromise. Yet democratic regimes could (and often do) face opponents that accept

no compromises, do not represent the majority or at least a significant part of the citizenhood and, finally, reject the very notion of democracy. Under such conditions, a democratic regime, all its supposed virtues notwithstanding, with a fairly high degree of probability may become a victim of terrorist attacks. Therefore, it is not the workings of "the genius of democracy" (to quote the Bush Administration's 2006 National Security Strategy [3]) that should be turned to in the first place every time democratic regimes succeed in preventing or reducing terrorism, but the nature of those (potentially) terror-laden conflicts that proved to be amenable to democratic solutions.

On the other hand, when democracy is presented as providing – because of its alleged "softness" – a fertile ground for terrorism, the question of the causes of terrorist violence (that is again various conflicts) is being pushed to the margins and replaced with that of conditions under which terrorists act. Simply put, instead of asking "What has led to the outburst of terrorist violence?", researchers dwell on relative easiness of being a terrorist in a democracy. Such an approach almost amounts to assertions that terrorism emerges in democracies simply because there are less obstacles to it than in dictatorships. Dealing with the problem of democracy and terrorism should start, seemingly paradoxically, with rejection of the very efforts to establish a simplified straightforward correlation between the two. Before one is able to conclude anything important about the positive or negative relationship between democracy and terrorist violence, questions should be asked about the relationship between democracy and conflicts that lead to terrorism.

With this, one turns to the second point of the presented approach. For both camps in the democracy-terrorism debate democracy represents what is basically a "good thing". It is because of its "goodness" – its fairness, openness, flexibility – democracy helps to stop or reduce terrorism. Or, on the contrary, it is because of its "goodness" turning to be its weak point democracy proves to be a seducing and relatively easy target for terrorists. However, if one looks for an adjective to describe democracy, the optimal choice will be not "good", or "fair", or "soft", but "contradictory" or "ambivalent". In all its varieties (not only as Fareed Zakaria's "illiberal" one [4]) democracy is not an etalon of justice, respect for the rule of law and the adequate use of force. Notions of "the will of the majority", "voting", "people's representation" are not put squarely into any clearly defined political or ethical coordinate system and merely refer to certain procedures that, however important they may be, do not define the whole complex of sociopolitical relations. In other words, a democratic decision could be not only "technically" wrong, but also unjust. Fulfilment of the majority's will could mean the utter neglect of interests of the minority. Finally, the very nature of the dominant majority could be unjustly artificial (due to various forms of gerrymandering, discrimination, etc.). In this light, and contrary to the clichéd apologetic understanding, it could be seen that democracies, far from acting as "the good geni" of counter-terrorism, could (and quite often do) themselves spawn and/or perpetuate conflicts that, among other things, lead to terrorism.

Departing from the two above-stated points, one may set out to develop a coherent depiction and explanation of the relationship between not two, but three phenomena. In stead of "scholastically" arguing whether more democracy always means more or less terrorism, one should work to trace more complex and flexible connections between democracy conflicts and – no sooner than that – terrorist violence. In order to achieve this, one will have to answer the following questions:

- Conflicts of what types are statistically prevalent as the "prelude" to terrorist campaigns and, subsequently, as those campaigns' driving impulses?
- Are these conflicts by their nature amenable to democratic solutions of one kind or another and if yes, why, and if not, why not?
- And the most provocative if not the most important of all: Whether (and if yes, to what extent) democracy itself should be blamed for the emergence of at least some of these conflicts?

Within this broad framework, there are more detailed questions to be asked about:

- types of democratic regimes;
- the correspondence between certain types of democratic regimes and the nature and intensity of sociopolitical conflicts;
- factors precipitating the emergence of terrorist violence from the sociopolitical conflicts in various democratic regimes;
- particular responses of democratic regimes to the terrorist threat (soft or hard; with the use of the optimal or excessive force);
- the nature of the dynamics (upward or downward) of terrorist activity under various counter-terrorism scenarios executed by democratic regimes.

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