What and Where are the Risks of International Terrorist Attacks: A Descriptive Study of the Evidence

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ABSTRACT

There seems to be a great deal of attention in the media given to global terrorism but the authors do not know what and where the actual risks are. Western countries such as Australia, UK, and USA have invested a great amount of financial resources to combat global terrorism yet there is a concern the investments outweigh the risk. Furthermore, there are some people who question the reality of global terrorism. To explore these issues, this study analyzes the global terrorism empirical evidence from 1970 to 2013 (2014 was still in progress). The goal was to describe the global terrorist behavior factors and patterns from a socio-economical perspective, to identify who the terrorist groups are, what they do, and where they attack. Interesting descriptive statistics and insights were provided to help practitioners understand how global terrorism impacts us and to motivate more empirical into this important topic.

Keywords: International Global Terrorism Risk, Terror Risk Security Policy Planning, Terrorism Uncertainty Quantification, Terrorist Attack Probability, Terrorism Factors, Terrorist Groups

INTRODUCTION

Living with the risk of global terrorism is the ‘new normal’ for people around the world (Oprescu, 2013, p. 51). The problem is that scholars and practitioners do not have sufficient data about terrorist risks (Stevens et al., 2009). Additionally, many people in society may not recognize there is a terrorism risk.

Terrorism is real. After the first author presented a research paper at a conference in Sydney Australia he witnessed the fallout of the Lindt Café hostage crisis where three people were killed (including the Iranian-born terrorist) and five were injured (Scott, 2014).

Coincidentally, two months earlier the first author was visiting Lacolle (Quebec) Canada to complete a research project when just a few miles away a domestic-born terrorist killed a military officer and wounded another in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu (Austen, 2014). Both of the above terrorists were Islamic State of Iraq/Levant followers.

As an additional example, there have been at least 70 terrorist events killing 338 and injuring 62 people in Canada since 1970 (this includes the two distinct terrorist acts from Quebec residents during October 2014 in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Ottawa, based on the research of the second author). Some
of those Canadian deaths were caused by the Quebec-based domestic terrorist group Front de libération du Québec [FLQ] (Wikipedia, 2014). A well-known terrorist activity by a Canadian was the bombing of Air India flight 182 by the Sikh Extremists group resulting in all 329 passengers dying (Strang, 2012).

Nonetheless it may be difficult for some people to acknowledge the global risk of terrorism is real in regions that seem peaceful. Take Australia for instance, who would believe that there have been 116 deaths from terrorism, cumulatively, over the last 45 years (Habib, 2014; Keane, 2014). Australia is experiencing more terrorism. Eight days after the Lindt Café fatality, two foreign-born terrorists were jailed and Australian Prime Minister Mr. Tony Abbott declared more attacks were likely:

A man has been charged after he allegedly was found with documents designed to facilitate a terrorist attack against potential government targets in Sydney, police say....As you’ll all understand, at this level, an attack is likely, we don’t know when and how an attack may come, but we do know there are people with the intent and capability to carry out further attacks (Levy & Partridge, 2014, p. para 16).

Furthermore, it may be hard to believe the universal ‘neutral country’ Switzerland was besieged with 3 terrorist events in 1970 including the bombing of Swiss Air DC-9 by Palestine extremists resulting in 47 people being killed (START, 2014a). In the same year United States lost 31 lives due to terrorist activities (START, 2014a).

Clearly 9/11 was a world-changing palindrome. The 9/11 al-Qa’ida terrorist group who killed over 1614 people (including themselves) in the United States during 2001 were foreign-born (Breckenridge, Zimbardo & Sweeton, 2010; Koc-Menard, 2009). “If men armed only with knives can cause such mass destruction, the world must review its assessment of threats” (Garden, 2001, p. 4). More so, Garden reminds us that the 9/11 terrorists were armed only with knives. On a global scale there have been more than 125,000 recognized terrorism events around the world since 1970 (Rivinius, 2014).

Not surprisingly, terrorism has resulted in a great amount of death, injuries, and property damage. Anti-terrorism measures are expensive to administer (Blalock, Kadiyali & Simon, 2009) Koc-Menard, 2009 #302; Blalock, 2009 #303}. For example, the 9/11 terrorism event caused approximately US$123 billion in economic losses and the London bombings in 2005 were estimated to cost England UK£2 billion (Fischhoff, 2011; Hanes & Machin, 2014). We still don’t know the long term socio-economic costs of the ‘Boston bomber’ terrorist act that occurred in USA during the spring of 2013.

Unfortunately, we do not have many empirical studies that identify the factors causing domestic and international terrorism, nor do we have sufficient statistical models describing the nature of the global terrorism risk (Green & Spry, 2014; Kastenmüller,Greitemeyer, Hindocha, Tattersall & Fischer, 2013; Smith & Fischbacher, 2009).

Problem Statement and Research Objectives

Terrorist behavior is socio-economically expensive to societies around the world. Terrorists kill and injure people but they may require only simple weapons like knives to kill thousands of people, as was the case in 9/11. Terrorist acts may originate by domestic residents or foreigners crossing borders, but we do not know how, what, when or where terrorism will manifest. To reiterate the problem statement, there is not enough scholarly research to articulate the empirical risks of terrorism. These are all exemplary rationale to substantiate why it is important for scholars and practitioners to study terrorism.

Therefore, the focus of this study was to review the relevant literature to identify the key factors associated with terrorist behavior and then to develop preliminary analytical models in order to describe the empirical risks of terrorism. The secondary research purpose was to show researchers and practitioners how they may continue to extend the body of knowledge about global terrorism risk.


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