

# **Critically Examining David Rapoport's Four Waves Theory of Modern Terrorism in the Light of Factual Historical Events**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines David Rapoport's Four Waves theory in the light of factual events in the field of terrorism particularly after 9/11. It determines whether unlike Rapoport's projection, the Religious Wave, would transcend its expiration date of 2025. The dateline is gradually approaching yet, the wave keeps waxing stronger. Thus, given its unusual strength, the impact of technology and the internet, the Religious Wave of terrorism may certainly extend beyond the expiration date and possibly become more sophisticated. In fact, with the new features and characteristics that the wave is gradually assuming, it is very unlikely that it would disappear as projected by David Rapoport in 2025.

**Key words:** Terrorism, waves, religion, conceptualization, ideology, Rapoport

## **1. Introduction**

The attacks of September 11, 2001 opened new frontiers into academic discourses on the complex dynamics of modern terrorism. It was sequel to this historic event that David Rapoport published his 'most influential articles ever written in the field of terrorism studies' (Parker and Sitter, 2016, p.197). His article 'The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism' has provided a theoretical framework for meaningful discussions on the subject. Like Samuel Huntington who argued that democratization came in waves, (Huntington 1991, p.12), Rapoport also conceptualized the emergence of terrorism in terms of waves. Thus, apart from being one of the most influential theoretical and conceptual frameworks, it has become the most widely debated theories in the field of terrorism studies. Rapoport grouped previously homogenous patterns of political violence into four waves, and each lasted a generation usually drawing their ideological inspiration from

anarchism, anti-colonialism, socialism, and religious fundamentalism. The start of each wave is often inspired by a significant catalyst usually in the form of an unanticipated event resulting in a milestone that identifies issues that would galvanize the new movement.

The wave approach attempts to uniquely examine the historical evolution of violent non-state actors and to contextualize their actions by de-emphasizing the conventional approaches which are used in respect of interstate conflicts. Hence, Rapoport's theoretical model is a well-defined and coherent framework that is useful in the simplification of 'the frustratingly complex phenomenon of terrorism' (Walls 2017, p.9). His application of an 'orderly, evidence-based understanding of terrorism, national identity, and political legitimacy may be the most effective weapon we could employ in any "war on terrorism" now or in the future.' (Rosenfeld, 2011, p.9)

This paper is divided into seven parts. The first part is essentially introductory and part two examines briefly the general understandings of terrorism and how it has been viewed in the light of factual events. Part three examines the basic assumptions of the wave theory, an explanation of the various waves and how it has explained historical events. Part four examines the weaknesses of the theory and how difficult it is to apply the theory in explaining certain events. Part five examines the strength of the current religious wave namely the impact of technology and the internet. Part 6 looks at the emergence of fifth wave theories and how they can be used to predict the nature of terrorism in future years. The seventh part concludes the analysis and submits that the dateline of 2025 predicted by Rapoport to be the year when the Fourth Wave would disappear seems to be unrealistic as terrorism in this era is waxing stronger than ever before.

## **2. Terrorism and the Context of the Four Waves Theory**

It is important to briefly consider the basic assumption of terrorism as understood in the academic literature. Terrorism is so replete with conceptual confusions that providing an all-encompassing or univocally acceptable definition is bound to be epistemically problematic (Faluyi, Khan and Akinola, 2019, p.13). However, in occidental climes, the term is used to describe and condemn 'enemies' of the state as well as brand actions such as bombings, assassinations and kidnappings as terrorist activities (Weinzierl, 2004, p.45).

Nonetheless, without dissipating energy on the epistemic dialectics of terrorism, three consistent and fundamental variables are particularly instructive namely; (a) Terrorism is a manifestation of a person's or group of persons' perception of justice and often involves the use of strategies designed to attract extensive public attention with a view to causing a political change.(b) Terrorists are generally non-state actors although in rare cases, one may find terrorists being supported by governments in form of military, economic or other logistic support from public resources.(c) Terrorist attacks purposefully target the innocent to facilitate the spread of fear and anxiety in the minds of the general public in order to make a political statement (Cronin, 2002, p.32). All these have been replicated in factual events ranging from the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya in 1998, the destruction of the U.S. naval ship called *USS Cole* in Yemen in 2000, the 9/11 attacks, the executions of US journalists in Syria and the 2014 kidnap of the Chibok school girls in Nigeria to mention but a few, explains the point being canvassed.

In the explanation of terrorism, the most widely used definition is the one adopted by the UN Security Council in its Resolution 1566 of 2004, in which terrorism was described as:

Criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.

Although a brief reference to the definition of terrorism is desirable, it is not the primary concern of this paper to dwell extensively on the debates that have characterized the meaning of terrorism in the extant academic literature.

Prior to 9/11, the major terrorist organization which had been a thorn in the flesh of the US was the al-Qaeda. But the US response to the group's threats and attacks was in the form of war which was sworn to be fought 'until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated' (Rapoport 2004, p.47). The foregoing commitment reaffirmed a similar declaration of the US government made one hundred years earlier to sanitize the whole world of terrorism. Like 9/11, the US made this declaration following a terrific and tragic event namely, the assassination

attempt on the then US president William McKinley in September, 1901 during the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, by an anarchist called Leon Czolgosz. This incident ignited an aggressive clampdown on political radicals who were suspected of having connections with anarchist movements in the US.

Before then however, the US was not so much engrossed in the war against anarchist terrorism as it was a problem limited to Europe more than a decade and its impact was not felt in the US (Jensen 2001, p.15). It was after president McKinley subsequently died of the injuries sustained and Theodore Roosevelt came on board, that the lackadaisical attitude of the US towards terrorism was changed. The new president called for international collaboration to exterminate anarchist terror anywhere and everywhere it is found in the world (Jensen, 2001, p.18). Anarchist terrorism had earlier gained prominence in Russia and a significant part of Europe due to the inspiration it drew from successful assassinations of high profile political figures and other government representatives so many years before the assassination attempt on President McKinley. The new US President Roosevelt advocated for an international treaty framework to criminalize anarchist terrorism and empowered the U.S. government to treat anarchism 'as one of the most serious threats against its citizens' (Jensen, 2001, p.16).

It could be recalled that even before 9/11, the al Qaeda had successfully launched an attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. Thus, the group's attacks had essentially been directed against the US and its interest overseas as could be seen in the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the attack on the *USS Cole* in 2000 and other threats to the US. But so far, 9/11 is the most horrific terrorist attack in world history and the US particularly. According to Rapoport, 9/11 was 'the most violent and destructive day in modern history that triggered an aggressive resolve in America and abroad to end international terrorism' (Rapoport, 2002, p. 14).

As noted earlier, the US commitment to fight international terrorism was made one hundred years earlier precisely in 1901. However, it was largely unsuccessful because the cooperation needed to galvanize counterterrorism efforts was not adequate particularly due to the difficulties associated with having to adopt a unified approach that would suit every nation. Another challenge was that mobilization of international effort for sustained action is pretty difficult. Thus, Rapoport wonders if the US declaration of war on terrorism after 9/11 would be successful having failed in the past.

He contends that a proper understanding of counterterrorism can only be possible if a concomitant understanding of the historical features of terrorist acts of non-state actors is examined (Rapoport, 2004, p. 46). This would enhance a deeper understanding of the motivations, strategies and tactics of 9/11 and the impact it has had on the global war against terror.

Rapoport's theory has focused on the hitherto obscured aspect of terrorism namely the historical development and has now expanded the field of terrorism studies critical for security and diplomatic concerns (Ranstorp 2007, p.10). Meanwhile, history has produced a deeper understanding of the nature of terrorism as well as the examination of both the effective and ineffective strategies of counterterrorism in order to chart a new course in the renewed global war on terrorism (Thorup, 2010, p.2.). Thus, the focal point of the Waves theory is that an expanded and deeper understanding of the relationship between social economic and psychological motivations for terrorist ideas and actions is absolutely necessary. The theory has inspired discussions on whether a deeper knowledge of the evolutionary trends of terrorism would facilitate the adoption of effective counterterrorism strategies including the prevention of other forms of political violence.

### **3. Basic Assumptions of the Four Waves Theory**

Modern terrorism emerged around near the end of the 18th century following the French Revolution. The first usage of the term *terror* was in France in 1795; when it was used to refer to a policy systematically used to protect the fledging French Republic to counter revolutionaries (Cronin, 2002, p.34). It was used to describe the illegitimate use of politically motivated violence by non-state actors, who by definition in a state-centric era, only had illegitimate purposes. Thus, even though the term gained prominence following the French Revolution, terrorism and terrorist activities are traceable to as far back as the first century B.C.

Rapoport explains the emergence of terrorism beginning from the late 19th century, almost a century after the idea of terrorism evolved from the French Revolution. Two critical factors influenced the growth of terrorism during this time namely; (a) the development in communication and transportation patterns opened up and united the world by reducing the time and distance required for people and information to travel (Rapoport, 2001, p. 49), and (b) the invention of the

telegraph, daily mass newspapers, and transcontinental railroad transportation, all flourished during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were critical to the shaping of the new global dimension of modern terrorism. People were able to travel in more sophisticated ways at a much faster pace. News of events that took place in one country including terrorist attacks could rapidly spread beyond national borders within a day.

The wave conceptualization clearly outlined the chronology of terrorism and suggests that terror objectives are achieved along a continuum, operating in the context of current hegemonic struggles and tensions between groups within nations (Rapoport, 2001, p.35). According to Rapoport (2004: 47), a wave is:

...a cycle of activity in a given time period – a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases. A crucial feature is its international character; similar activities occur in several countries, driven by a common predominant energy that shapes participating groups' characteristics and mutual relationships.

Each cycle of the wave is dynamic in the sense that it expands and contracts. A wave has a 'precipitating event, signature tactics and weapons, and an inevitable gradual decline giving way for the emergence of another wave' (Kaplan, 2016.p4). Consequently, the demise of one wave inevitably results in the birth of another, providing anchorage for the next wave. According to Rapoport, the four waves are as follows: The Anarchist Wave (1878-1919), the Anti-Colonial Wave (1920s to 1960s), the Marxist or New Left wave (1960s-1979) and the Religious wave (1979-?). It is interesting to note that all these waves share this one common important feature- they all needed a catalyst in the form of a grand event to help galvanize supporters to launch a movement intending to change the political order. It is also imperative to note that this theoretical model has been used to explain the different patterns of emergence of terrorist groups that human history has seen.

#### **(a) The Anarchist Wave**

As noted above, Rapoport's first wave of modern terrorism is traceable to the late Nineteenth century with the anarchist movement in Russia during the reign of the Czarist Monarchy. The ideology of 'Anarchism was later spread to other parts of Europe and into the Balkan states (Walls,

2017, p.26). The early phase of the anarchist wave (1880s to the 1890s) was known as the ‘Golden Age of assassination,’ as it witnessed the frequency of attacks on government representatives, politicians and other highly placed individuals as an expression of rebellion against the political systems. It was in this same era that the US President William Mckinley was assassinated by Leon Czolgosz, an unrepentant apologist of the anarchist movement in 1901-the most tragic event in the history of the US.

The anarchist wave began with the Russian populist group called *Narodnaya Volya* (The Peoples Will) in the 1880s and up to the early decades of the twentieth century (Parker and Sitter, 2016 p. 198). This group is known as the first nationalist rebel group of the Anarchist wave known for using deliberate and coordinated acts of violence against the Russian government and its officials. The anarchists’ objective was to overthrow political systems by coordinating serial attacks on public institutions, with the overall aim of reconstructing Russia by getting rid of conventions socially developed to ‘muffle and diffuse antagonisms’ (Parker and Sitter, 2016, p.50). According to Rapoport (2002: 45), the anarchist ideological conviction was anchored on four significant points namely: (a) Modern society contains huge reservoirs of latent ambivalence and hostility. (b) Society muffles and diffuses them by devising moral conventions to generate guilt and provide channels for settling some grievances and securing personal amenities. (c) However, conventions can be explained historically, and therefore acts we deem immoral, our children will hail as noble efforts to liberate humanity. (d) Terror is the quickest and most effective means to destroy conventions.

The emergence of a wave in Rapoport’s model is usually preceded by an international event. But in the case of the Anarchist wave, it was the internal political strains in Russia though they still had significant international impact. For instance, on January 24, 1878 Vera Zasulich, a well-known anarchist shot and wounded a police officer in Petersburg, Russia. Her reason was that the police officer was fond of maltreating political prisoners by constantly beating them. When she was arrested she threw her weapon and declared that she was a ‘terrorist not a killer’ (Rapoport 2004: 50). During her trial, the conduct of the police officer was put in issue and consequently Zasulich was acquitted. When she came out of the court, she was received by a large crowd with

cheers and celebration. The acquittal of Zasulich rekindled the wave of violent anarchism as demonstrators began to perceive the imminence of a revolution in Russia.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Russian intellectuals began to spread their revolutionary propaganda through the publication of pamphlets. The most prominent anarchist writer in this regard was Sergey Nechayev. He produced one of the most radical documents of the time, *Catechism of a Revolutionary* which he wrote in 1869. *Catechism* was his manifesto and a manual which created secret anarchist organizations. The book provided guidance on total devotion to the revolutionary lifestyle by articulating the duties of the revolutionary to himself, his comrades, and society. Nechayev emphasized the need for an extreme commitment to the success of the revolution which to him was the only success in life. One must suppress all other desires and focus on the cause of the revolution which was ‘merciless destruction’ (Nechayev 1869).

The anarchists essentially financed their revolutions through bank robberies. Their activities and ideologies got extensive publicity following the development in communication and transportation technology. Consequently, information on terrorist attacks were easily circulated to far lands relatively quickly just as it enabled the anarchists to easily travel to other places in order to carry out attacks and to indoctrinate others with their ideology of violent anarchism. Technological advancements also facilitated ‘large-scale emigration from various parts of Europe to more democratic political systems, thereby creating sympathetic audiences abroad’ (Rasler and Thompson, 2011, p.28).

The anarchists orchestrated the assassination of prominent government representatives which attacks have remained significant in history. For instance, in 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian anarchist group called the Black Hand. The aim was to free the Serbian land from the reign of the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman Empire. In 1911, the Black Hand also attempted unsuccessfully, to assassinate Franz Joseph I of Austria and Oskar Potiorek, the military Governor of Herzegovina. This attack caused Austro-Hungarian Empire to declare war on Serbia which precipitated the outbreak of World War I (Jach-Chrzaszcz, 2017, p.98).



Given the disturbing activities of the anarchists in 1904, European nations signed an anti-anarchist protocol. The Protocol called for greater international policing cooperation and exchange of useful information on anarchist activities across Europe. This action exerted considerable pressure on anarchists groups causing a significant decline in the anarchist crusade of violence and a decimation of the anarchist wave.

### **(b) The Anti –Colonial Wave**

The Anarchist wave dissipated with the outbreak of the First World War. Shortly after the war which ended with the conclusion of the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919, new states began to spring up. The victors of World War I utilized the principle of self-determination to dismember the Austro-Hungarian empires of the defeated European state, and established new territories for independence (Rapoport 2004: 53). Where independence was not considered to be immediately feasible, such territories were regarded as ‘mandates’ ultimately destined for independence, to be administered directly by the victorious countries until the territories were considered ready to govern themselves (Walls, 2017, p.30). They were not meant to become permanent territories, although they had the effect of maintaining colonial control (Kaplan 2016).

The first national liberation movement was the Irish Republican Army (IRA) which was created in 1916 by a combination of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army (Hearne 1992, p. 1). The main objective of the IRA was to separate Ireland from Great Britain. The group partly achieved this because Northern Ireland was still under a heavy influence from England (Jach-Chrzaszcz, 2017, p.100). The need to unify Ireland became the focal point of IRA agitations that ultimately resulted in a civil war which in which the group lost out.

During the Anti-colonial Wave era, terrorism was waged in territories where differences existed among the locals as to their choice of leadership. This made it extremely difficult for the European powers to withdraw in some overseas territories, which option was not as attractive as independence. In some cases, the colonizers believed they could not relinquish control without creating serious problems within the territories. Some examples of these anxieties include the conflicting expectations of the outcome of British rule between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine.

Also, in Algeria, the European population was not happy with France abandoning its governance in that territory and in Ireland, majority of citizens in the North were not ready to liberate themselves from British rule even when the IRA had been fighting fiercely for this cause (Rapoport, 2001, p.54).

The strategy of this wave differed considerably from the previous wave of anarchism. Bank robberies were less common, partly because diaspora sources financed the activities of the groups. In fact, even foreign governments began to offer support. The assassination of leaders was also minimized because doing so had in the past resulted in counterproductive consequences. The *modus operandi* of this era was the use of guerrilla warfare and the targets were mostly security agents. While honoring the ‘revolutionary zeal of the first wave, the second wave idealized national histories and cultures as the second wave turned increasingly inward focusing on local struggles against colonial control’ (Kaplan, 2016, p.6).

The anti-colonial causes were legitimate to many more parties than the causes articulated in the first wave and that created a problem of definition. This created a situation whereby one man’s terrorist was regarded another man’s freedom fighter as the term ‘terrorist’ became a subject of minimalist and maximalist interpretations. Even when the subject of terrorism first appeared before the United Nations, the question of self-determination frustrated all attempts to define terrorism. The reason for this is not farfetched. Self –determination could not be guaranteed on the platter of gold as most people had to resort to violence in order to secure their independence from the colonial powers. This wave recorded significant success that at the end of the Second World War, the wave had served its purpose and had virtually gone extinct.

### **(c) The New Left Wave**

The major catalyst that triggered off the New Left wave was the Vietnam War also known as the Second Indochina War- a military struggle involving the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front (NLF) in conflict with United States forces and the South Vietnamese army from 1959 to 1975 (Robert 2009). The role of the US in the war resulted in increased global hatred for the US especially from the developing countries. This was coupled with the fact that the Soviet Union had portrayed the US as a rampant warmonger and the

communist world as peaceful. The aftermaths of this agonizing war produced the psychological requisites that gave birth to the New Left wave. A line of distinction was consequently drawn between the East and the West justifying the Soviet support in form of aid, resources, intelligence and other logistics to terrorist organizations in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. The same era witnessed the Cold War- strong ideological conflicts in which state sponsorship of terrorism was quite common.

The victory of the Viet Cong against American troops motivated radical optimism that the oppressive Western system was susceptible to change. It is instructive to note that the Marxist socialist revolution of the 1960s also greatly inspired terrorist organizations of the New Left whose aim was to pull down the oppressive capitalist system which was prominently represented by the US. Terrorist organizations rapidly developed throughout the Western world; the American Weather Underground, the Italian Red Brigades, the West German Red Army Faction, the French Action Directorate, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization are just few among many groups that sprung up after the Vietnam War in 1975 (Rapoport 2001, p.57). These so called freedom fighters claimed to be waging legitimate struggle on behalf of the 'wretched of the earth' against the rich and powerful whose grip of the basic resources has caused untold hardship to the down trodden. This wave greatly flourished in Third World countries where much hostility to the West already existed.

The ideology of the New Left was able to spread rapidly to target destinations because in this era, the mass media and other media of information dissemination as well as advance in technology. It is also important to note, that in the New Left wave, radicalism was combined with nationalism. For example, the Basque Nation and Liberty, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, the Corsican National Liberation Front and the IRA demonstrated radicalism and acts of nationalism (Rapoport, 2001, p.57).

Airplane hijackings and kidnapping were common tactics of the New Left especially in Italy, Spain and the states of Latin America (Kaplan, 2016, p.7).Some New Left organizations attacked their targets in their own countries, usually targets with international significance and affiliations with the US. Other groups launched and coordinated attacks abroad using different nationals. The 1972

attacks during the Olympic Games in Munich and the 1975 abduction of OPEC ministers from Vienna clearly demonstrate the foregoing point. In 1978, the Sadinistas took Nicaragua's congress hostage resulting in an insurrection that brought down the government of Somoza a year later (Rapoport, 2001, p.57).

Some groups abducted and assassinated prominent representatives of government. This was a strategy promoted in the first wave which found its way into the third wave. The most indelible incident of third wave assassination was the abduction of the Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1979 by the Red Brigades who later killed him because the Italian Government declined to negotiate and meet their demands. British Ambassador to Ireland, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and King Hussein I of Jordan were equally on the target list (Walls 2017, p.33).

The 1980s witnessed the end of the Cold War tensions and concomitantly, a significant dissipation of the third wave. Terrorist groups suffered defeat in many countries of the world. For instance, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon by Israel led to the extinction of the PLO as international counter-terrorism became increasingly integrative and states' refusal to negotiate with terrorists became more amplified.

#### **(d) The Religious Wave**

The perpetration of violence in the name of religion is not a new thing (Martinez 2016, p.42). The current global experience of religiously-motivated terrorism clearly explains the powerful impact of religion on human psyche. The fusion of religious beliefs and terrorist ideology has become critical in rationalizing the goals of the new groups. This era has been loosely described as the 'Jihad era' reflecting the propensity of terrorist organizations to identify with the Muslim faith (Ibid: 22). In Islam, Jihad has been interpreted in different ways but ultimately, it refers to a struggle between what is right and wrong. There are two dimensions of jihad namely; the greater jihad which is the struggle within oneself and the lesser jihad which is the duty of Muslims to defend their faith whenever it is under attack (Migaux 2007, p.265). It is under the guise of lesser jihad that the fourth wave terrorists rationalize their acts of terrorism.

It was the 1979 Iranian Revolution that inspired formerly quiescent or isolated Islamist voices to call for a struggle against the Western powers (which then included the Soviet Union) and to have some realistic prospects for success and eventual victory (Kaplan, 2011, p.66). Other factors that precipitated the fourth wave include the beginning of a new Islamic century, and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. In other words, the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan sent shockwaves through the Muslim world, providing alarming evidence of the threat to Islam from the infidels and therefore a stimulus to defend the faith (Proshyn 2015, p.98). All of these paved the way for religious fundamentalism to gain momentum and engulf secularism and political ideologies that inspired previous waves of terrorism (Gupta, 2011, p.35). The fourth wave is unique from previous waves in the sense that its methods and operations keep changing (Martinez, 2016, p. 22).

The religious wave witnessed the emergence of Al Qaeda and more recently the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Boko Haram in Nigeria, the al-Shabaab in Kenya and Somalia to mention but a few. Thus, one conclusion that can be drawn from the foregoing is that religiously motivated violence and fundamentalism has taken the centre stage in global affairs and could continue to be the prominent feature of contemporary international terrorism for some time.

Following the victory recorded in the Iranian Revolution and the successful removal of Shah from power, a new Islamic government was formed with Ayatollah Khomeini as the head. Khomeini's regime succeeded in exporting their revolutionary ideologies, and subsequently inspired terrorism in neighbouring Muslim-dominated states of Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia (Simon, 2011, p.46). According to Rapoport (2004, 62), 1979 till date remains significant to many Muslims as it marked the dawn of a new Islamic century when the redeemer, a tradition that ignited revolts in earlier centuries in Muslim communities finally emerged. The first successful example of state-sponsored terror was the Iran-sponsored suicide bombings which compelled foreign withdrawal from Lebanon.

Soon after Khomeini's assumption of office the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan opening another round of armed conflict in the Middle East. The Muslim forces were mobilized in Afghanistan and neighbouring Arab states and thousands of additional Sunni volunteer fighters coupled with strong

financial and logistic support from the US, they successfully evicted the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. This victory is quite significant for two reasons namely; (a) it demystified the concept of Super Power and it brought the aggressor (the Soviet Union) to a calamitous end unleashing a jihadist force that gave birth to the Taliban in 1993 (Kaplan, 2016, p.9). (b) The defeat of the Soviet Union, rekindled confidence in many including Osama Bin Laden who believed that Allah's miracle enabled them to defeat a super power even as lightly armed as they were. According to him, 'the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan in the last week of 1979, and with Allah's help their flag was folded a few years later and thrown in the trash and there was nothing left to call the Soviet Union' (Miller 1999). Therefore, they believed that it is even possible to defeat the *Al-Shaitan al-Kabir* (Great Satan; the US), a belief that ultimately resulted in the 9/11 attacks orchestrated by the Al Qaeda (Kaplan, 2016, p.9).

There is a significant lesson is to be learnt from the forgoing events. The US heavily supported Afghan fighters or the *mujahedeens* with finance, weapons and even training to fight the invasion of the Soviet Union. The war was successfully won causing the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan. The same people have now turned against the US (calling her the Great Satan) which they must conquer at all cost.

The same era witnessed the proliferation of other deadly terrorist groups with extremist ideologies. As the wave arose in the 1980s and early 1990s terrorist activities constantly engaged human societies in different parts of the world. In March 1995, a Japanese Buddhist group Aum Shinrikyo released nerve gas in a crowded Tokyo subway station causing the deaths of 12 people and injuring more than 5,000 (Gordon, 2009), the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 for attempting to broker peace with the Palestinians, the Hebron Mosque massacre of 1994 in which a Jewish settler killed at least 29 Palestinians inside the Muslim mosque built on top of the Cave of the Patriarchs, the Tamil Tiger violence of Sri Lanka and the assassinations of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 are just a few out of many. In Africa, the same era witnessed the advent of such deadly terrorist groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria, *Al Shabaab* in Kenya and Somalia, the Lord Resistance Army in Uganda to mention but a few.

There was also a similar dimension of what is loosely termed as 'Christian Terrorism' in the US expressed in what Rapoport describes as 'racist interpretations of the Bible' (Rapoport, 2001,

p.61), a demonstration of white supremacy manifesting in the form of Christian identity movements, whose adherents propagate the message of religious eschatology and apocalyptic doctrines. Timothy McVeigh, the 1995 Oklahoma City bomber is an example of a white supremacist with anti-government sentiments. Although apart from the Oklahoma City bombing, Christian violence has been minimal throughout the fourth wave. Acts of terrorism inspired by other religions, apart from Islamic fundamentalism, have virtually gone extinct since the attacks of 9/11.

Furthermore, the fourth wave of terrorism has been greatly facilitated by globalization. The global community has since witnessed the evolution of computers, mobile phones and the internet, making it easy for terrorist groups to have wider reach and enhanced capabilities for the coordination of their operations, attract sympathizers and recruit new members by easily spreading their ideologies.

It is imperative to note, that the objective of each wave was virtually the same namely, to challenge political 'legitimacy by calling for a new order of revolution' (Simon, 2011, p. 46). However, as Rapoport notes, the idea of revolution was understood differently in each wave. In the Anti-Colonial Wave, revolution was understood as national self-determination, while in the Anarchist and New Left Waves it was understood as 'a radical reconstruction of authority to eliminate all forms of [in]equality' (Rapoport 2004: 50). Yet, in the Religious Wave, recourse was to religious texts or revelations for the interpretation of revolution (Ibid: 50).

#### **4. Weaknesses of the Wave Theory**

David Rapoport's epistemic model has been widely accepted as the most influential conceptual framework on the analysis of terrorism. In the same vein, the theory has been replete with confusions and inconsistencies. First, Rapoport acknowledged the existence of other violent groups like the Ku Klux Klan between 1865 and 1875 (prior to the starting point of the anarchist wave), yet, he did not find a suitable place for them in his theory. He argues that examples of such other terrorist groups were just 'statistical outliers' that had little impact on the development of terrorism (Clutterbuck, 2004, p.154).

Again, a deeper exploration of this theory would disclose much of its intellectual weaknesses. Rapoport argues that each wave has an international character ‘driven by a predominant energy that shapes the participating groups’ characteristics and mutual relationship’ (Rapoport, 2004, 47). He further argues that a wave by definition is a historical event sparked or shaped by international events such as wars or peace agreement. The problem with this view however, lies in the fact that the emergence, activities and lifespan of terrorist groups however powerful their global influences might be, are in the first place determined by local factors namely, socio-political conflicts inherent in particular societies as was the case in the anarchist era, and not by global impulses (Proshyn, 2015, p.92). If Rapoport’s contention therefore, is that global events inspire or trigger the advent of a wave, he has not explained how exactly global events override local socio-political issues to become the main forces behind the creation of new terrorist groups.

Rapoport also argues that ‘when a wave’s energy cannot inspire new organizations, the wave disappears’ (Rapoport, 2001, p.48). As sound as this argument might seem, there is just some insignificant amount of evidence to validate this contention as each type of terrorism has deeper historical roots than his theory seems to suggest (Parker and Sitter, 2016, 198).

Finally, the appearance or disappearance of terrorist groups cannot be rationally tied to specific events. Indeed, it may even disappear through the lifespan of a wave, most evidently, ‘the local socio-political conditions... [which are] nevertheless supposed to be viewed as inspired by external global influences’ (Proshyn, 2011, p.95). Yet, other groups outlive their wave and spill over into another wave justifiably described as changing their nature under the influence of new waves. The details of how and why the transformation occurs are not adequately explained more so, that it is assumed to be transformed by external events as opposed to local socio-political strains which are supposed to precipitate the emergence of a wave.

## **5. Resurgence of the Fourth Wave**

As noted earlier, terrorism in the fourth wave has been greatly facilitated by developments in information and communication technology such as the introduction of mobile phones, computers and the internet. These developments have enhanced the operational capabilities of terrorist organizations and made their activities far-reaching in terms of coverage and efficacy. It has also made it easy for terrorists to finance and coordinate their operations as well as attract sympathy



and membership (Pillar, 2001, p.47). They create websites and social media pages to sell their ideologies and weep sentiments to attract financial support from far and near audiences. They upload videos and make podcasts where their leaders remind the foot soldiers of their responsibilities and rewards in the religious combat. They are also able to ‘manipulate the Internet for more clandestine measures including encrypted messaging, hacking, sending death threats, and embedding codes in their messages to conceal their communications and evade detection’ (Cronin, 2002, p.47). The use of ingenious sophistry and emotional appeal with compelling storylines has been the strategy of religious terrorist leaders. Bin Laden used this manipulative and emotive strategy effectively in organizing and executing suicide attacks. The message was always that of extreme paranoia- playing the victim card with messages that elicited strong emotional reaction from Muslims that Islam was under constant attack from the West especially the US and that they are duty-bound to defend Islam from the infidels (Cronin, 2002, p.37).

Furthermore, increased global interconnectedness and the ease of movement of people, goods and money from one part of the world to another has equally enhanced the activities of terrorists as they move freely to execute attacks or evade law enforcement authorities. This makes the apprehension and prosecution of terrorists difficult and complicated (Cronin, 2002, p.49).

The liberalization of trade and elimination of barriers in international financial systems has also made it easy for terrorist organizations in the fourth wave to access funds and support their operations. This is unlike the earlier waves in which terrorist activities were financed by ‘states, individual donors, diaspora communities and through criminal activist such as bank robberies and kidnaps for ransoms’ (Walls, 2017, p.46). Post 9/11 terrorist organizations have funded their operations through proceeds of sophisticated crimes such as trafficking in persons, drugs and weapon smuggling and donations from recognized Islamic charities and other organizations that support Islamic terrorism (Cronin, 2002, p.49). They also use informal methods of payments such as trade in gold and other tangible assets which transactions are difficult to trace. More recently, the advent of crypto currencies has also raised concern on the possibility of terrorist organizations having to use them to transfer funds since such financial flows are not regulated by many governments in the world today.

Therefore, the use of religious sentiment and emotive rhetoric by terrorist leaders along with developments in science and technology has enhanced the durability of the fourth wave which has become increasingly difficult to contain. According to Rapoport (2001, p.66), the frightening aspect of a wave lies in the fact that issues may spring up unexpectedly that would provide inspiration for terrorism, and it may be difficult to predict what they may be. Thus, in the light of the foregoing, Rapoport laments on how difficult it would be to make an accurate prediction as to whether or not the fourth wave would extend beyond 2025. This skepticism was cleared later in 2013 when Rapoport restated his conviction thus: '[i]n 2004, we said that the Fourth Wave would be over by 2025, and we have no reason yet to change our mind' (Rapoport 2013, p.300).

The reason for Rapoport's confidence is not far from the fact that as at 2013 when he wrote, the main international terrorist organization namely, the al Qaeda had suffered terribly due to leadership losses following the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the death of its leader Osama Bin Laden. Thus, if Rapoport's conviction is supposedly predicated on the weaknesses of the al Qaeda, he lost sight of the fact that post-9/11 witnessed the proliferation of other jihadist movements like the ISIS, the *Daesh*, *Hamas* etc., that have been waxing stronger than even the al Qaeda and wreaking unimaginable havoc particularly after the death of Bin Laden in 2011. Even the Boko Haram and the *Al Shabaab* terror groups in Africa reached their peak and recorded far more attacks in the post- Bin Laden era than ever before. This suggests that with the strength of this wave, the dateline of 2025 may not be feasible. But as some scholars have speculated, there may be indications that the fifth wave may be on the way and as theoretical predictions have already begun in the academic literature.

## **6. Proliferation of Fifth Wave Theories**

According to Rapoport a new wave emerges when a wave's energy can no longer influence the formation of new groups, that is when it will start to disappear. Although a small number of powerful groups can influence a wave's life cycle, the endurance of al Qaeda and other violent jihadist groups in the religious wave has ignited debates over whether the wave will last longer than its predecessors. In this paper the question is answered in the affirmative. However, it is quite difficult to state precisely when a particular wave would end and another would begin. Sometimes it takes so many years for ideologies to crystalize and for group patterns to emerge (Walls, 2017,

p.52). From the foregoing, it is possible that the recent developments seem to suggest that the emergence of a Fifth Wave of terrorism is imminent. Yet, the nature and characteristics of the fifth wave exist largely in the realm of imagination and thus beyond our capacity to discern (Weinberg and Eubank 2010, p.601). Since Rapoport's projection that the fourth wave would end sometime between 2020 and 2025, a lot of debates have sprung up as to how the fifth wave would look like particularly "considering the scope, lethality, and longevity of the extremist organizations in the fourth wave with others suggesting that the religious wave will continue indefinitely. In the meantime, some theories have emerged to explain the anticipated fifth wave of modern terrorism. These theories include Jeffrey Kaplan's New Tribalism, Anthony Celso's Jihadist terror groups and Jeffrey Simon's Technological wave. While these theories have made significant contributions to the existing literature on terrorism, they appear to overlap with the Four Waves theory as most of the terrorist groups and patterns identified by the Fifth wave theories have already been situated within the Rapoport's theoretical framework. Consequently, the scope of this paper would not include the examination of the Fifth Wave theories.

## **7. Conclusion**

This generation is no doubt the most dangerous era of terrorism particularly due to the powerful impact of information and communication technology. But that is not to say that terrorism is a new phenomenon as it has been a security challenge from time immemorial. Thus, Professor Rapoport attempted to explain terrorism with his Four Waves theory. The theory translated more than a century of political violence into a coherent wave model to explain the catalysts, groups, goals, and tactics of modern terrorist organizations. Yet, in spite of how much this theory has been celebrated, most of its findings have been proven to be logically and factually incongruous. Consequently, dissident voices like Parker and Sitter prefer to describe the emergence of terrorism in terms of strains rather than waves.

An important area of concern in the wave model is that each wave has a projected dateline. While the previous waves have ended within their projected lifespan, the current wave of religious terrorism has proven to be so incredibly powerful that if we are to go by Rapoport's projection, the fourth wave ought to have started diminishing. This does not seem to be the case in reality particularly due to the powerful impact of the internet and technology on terrorist operations. But Rapoport cautions however, that the fifth wave of terrorism may not come as

expected. He said that the wave would emerge abruptly and supposedly in reaction to an unforeseen political event which would make it difficult for one to predict accurately the nature of a new wave that would emerge.

Thus, even though some scholars have begun to theorize about the Fifth Wave, such theories remain largely in the realm of imagination. The New Tribalism by Jeffrey Kaplan, the jihadist terror group by Anthony Celso and the Technological Wave by Jeffrey Simon are the commonest attempts to predict the nature and characteristics of the Fifth Wave. Yet as noted earlier, the religious wave of terrorism has certainly been the most lethal and insidious of all the four waves presented in Rapoport's model. Islamic groups constitute the primary actors and have constantly waged war against the West in the last two decades. Their commitment in the fight to establish their global relevance is characteristically unshakable as violent religious groups like al Qaeda and ISIS are not likely to disappear soon. Consequently, it is the submission of this paper that the 2025 dateline projected by Rapoport is too early for the Fourth Wave to disappear.

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