

***Takfirism* and the Challenge of Negotiating with the “New” Terrorists**

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Abstract

The wave of *Takfiri* terrorist groups calling for jihad against the whole world and seeking to establish a global Islamic caliphate has dramatically increased in recent times. These groups operate on open and decentralised cells of fragmented structures, yet ideologically connected. Consequently, due to the transcendental foundations of their ideology, which does not accommodate dialogue, it has become difficult for states to negotiate peace with them. This paper examines some of the challenges of *Takfiri* ideology as states continue to attempt to negotiate peace deals with terrorists. The paper maintains that although it is difficult to negotiate with jihadists, it is not entirely impossible, as negotiations could still be conducted. However, such negotiations are often restricted to achieving such temporal goals as the release of hostages and not to the substance of their ideology. The paper also argues *inter alia*, that even if the terrorists agree to a ceasefire, the longevity of the results cannot be guaranteed insofar as the liturgical sources of their fundamentalist ideology are still in existence. Moreover, nothing stops them or other groups whose ideologies of violence are equally derived from the same sources from springing up and taking arms in the future. However, whenever a state has the opportunity to negotiate with terrorists, it should not hesitate to utilise it for the safety of its citizens.

Key words: Jihadists, Negotiation, Terrorism, *Takfirism*, Fundamentalism

1. Introduction

Negotiation is the means by which terrorists gain an advantage over state actors to obtain money, publicity, and secure the freedom of their members, who are prisoners of the state. However, traditionally, most states have firm policies against negotiating with terrorists because the concessions in the negotiation process may be interpreted as legitimising terrorist violence and the emasculation of democracy. They also maintain that negotiations with terrorists tend to create

precedents that encourage terrorist violence and normalise unlawful coercion as a tool of political interaction. Consequently, most governments in the west believe that the best way to stop terrorist activities, especially hostage-taking, is to refrain from negotiating with them.

While the no-negotiation policy may seem realistic in theory, the practical reality shows that democratic governments negotiate with terrorists in order to choose a lesser evil from available options. Therefore, when it has to do with negotiating with terrorists, there is a clear distinction between what the states profess in public and what they do behind closed doors. For instance, despite the British government's seemingly uncompromising stance on negotiating with terrorists, it still maintained a secret channel with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) following the 1991 attack on 10 Downing Street, which nearly exterminated the British Parliament (Neumann, 2007:128). Other western governments, including Spain and France, are also reported to have paid millions of euros in ransom in 2014 to bring back journalists and aid workers captured by the Islamic State in Syria (Briggs & Wallace, 2022). Even the US, despite her avowed public stance of not negotiating with terrorists, in 1985, Ronald Reagan delivered weapons and spare parts to Iran in order to rescue seven Americans kidnapped in Lebanon by Hezbollah. However, only three hostages were freed; one was killed, and three more Americans were kidnapped in Lebanon.

In the past, although decisions of governments to capitulate to terrorist's demands were often heavily criticised, the negotiation was not as difficult as it has become in recent times with the advent of *Takfiri* terrorist groups – the so-called “New terrorists”. Consequently, even where negotiations appear to be the solution, it is often limited in scope to the attainment of such temporal goals as the release of hostages and not the substance of their ideology and agitation. This is based on the fact that their demands are often assumed to be characteristically “irrational and irreconcilable” (Pruitt, 2006). As Harris (2002) notes, there is a “psychological chasm” between the terrorist [objectives] and [that of] western governments in the sense that their demands appear to be opposed to western values and the ethos of modern civilisation. Moreover, their agitations are not the result of rational or instrumentalist considerations but are assumed to be in pursuit of “personal or collective fantasies”. Thus, engaging with the groups on the substance of their ideology and agitations or even negotiating a ceasefire becomes challenging.

In his speech on the US-led “Global War on Terror”, President George Bush, speaking on the ideology of the Al-Qaida observed as follows:

[T]he group has no “[...] set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed. [Rather], we’re facing a radical ideology with unalterable objectives: to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world [...] and no act of ours invited the rage of the killers, and no concession, bribe or appeasement would change or limit their plans for murder” (Miller, 2011:145).

Thus, as difficult as it may appear to try negotiating with Jihadists or the “new” terrorists, this paper examines the possibility of exploring negotiations with the terrorist to achieve some temporal goals. The decentralised structures of the “new” terrorist groups present greater opportunities to exploit individuals or factions to negotiate such matters as the release of hostages, as it may not be possible to negotiate with the new terrorists on the substance of their agitations and the foundations of their ideology. Therefore, if a state with a firm policy against negotiating with terrorists chooses to maintain its position even when it has to do with negotiating the release of captives, it might endanger its citizens’ lives.

Apart from the preceding introduction, this paper captures the following topics: conceptual deconstruction and reconstruction of terminologies, the new terrorism discourse, critical features of *Takfiri* or “new” terrorism and why the difficulties of negotiation. It also questions whether it is ideal to negotiate with terrorists, feasibility of negotiation with *Takfiri* terrorists and concludes that when it has to do with dialogue, jihadists cannot be options since the rigidity of their ideology does not accommodate dialogue that would touch on the substance of their agitation.

2. Conceptual Deconstruction and Reconstruction

2.1 The concept of “Negotiation”

Negotiation means a consensual bargaining process by which the parties attempt to reach an agreement on a disputed or potentially disputed matter. Negotiations usually involve absolute autonomy for the parties and are often devoid of any intervention from a third party (Garner, 2009:1138). However, in the context of this paper, negotiation is understood to be much deeper

than the literal meaning. Here, negotiation refers to exerting influence over someone else's thinking, behaviour or decisions. While the foregoing definition may appear straightforward, difficulties are bound to arise in trying to make sense of this subject.

Consequently, it is imperative to navigate beyond the simplistic "process of exerting influence over someone's thinking, behaviour and decisions". The point sought to be canvassed here is that when state actors declare that they do not negotiate with terrorists, they do not mean they will not "negotiate". What they mean is that they cannot "make *deals* with terrorists, make *concessions* to terrorists, *compromise* with terrorists or *reward* terrorists' behaviour" (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2008:1). The quick declaration by most states particularly in the west is that "we do not negotiate with terrorists" is predicated in almost all cases on a restrictive understanding of negotiation as a process of "bargaining, compromise and deal-making".

Although the negotiation process involves bargaining, i.e. making offers and counter-offers, which are expected to result in compromises on each side, bargaining should not be understood as being synonymous with negotiation. Therefore, if negotiation is understood to be solely "about bargaining, making deals or concessions, then of course one should not negotiate with terrorists as this action is likely to lead to some rewards for undesirable behaviour" (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2011:268).

Contrariwise, if negotiation with terrorists is understood as expressed in this paper to mean "the use of communication to exert influence in order to change someone's thinking, behaviour and decision making", then negotiating with terrorists may not necessarily require states to make foolish concessions, neither would it reward rebellious or dissident behaviour. Therefore, a reconstruction of the concept of negotiation in the context of counter-terrorism requires a decimation of the restrictive and incapacitating assumption that negotiation means capitulation or making concessions, compromise or deals. It is also imperative to dismiss the idea that negotiation is a demonstration of weakness on the part of the state to combat terrorism. This is particularly important with the advent of "new terrorists", who have increasingly become less discriminate and more lethal than the old terrorists (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2008:2). Due to the nature of their ideologies, the idea of negotiating with terrorists, at least in line with the reconstructed definition of negotiation used in this paper, is challenging and restricted to hostage-taking incidents, and does not relate to the substance of their ideology.

2.2 Who, then, is a terrorist?

Terrorists or terrorism, like other abstractions in the social sciences, has no univocally acceptable definition. Conceptual confusions abound such that providing an all-encompassing definition of terrorism is bound to be epistemically problematic (Faluyi, Khan & Akinola, 2019:13). The quest for a definition of terrorism has elicited a description of the exercise as a search for the “Holy Grail” (Wardlaw, 1989) or a useless endeavour to be abandoned (Laqueur, 1999). Nonetheless, one point stands out conspicuously from this exercise, namely terrorism and terrorists are made to represent a fusion of everything bad, while the opposing ‘we’ takes on the characteristics of everything good (Toros, 2008:409).

Consequently, in light of the widespread epistemic controversies in the academic literature, the need for a consensus on the definition of terrorism is quite desirable. Accordingly, a few such attempts are worth examining. For example, Schmid and Jongman (1988:28) view terrorism as “an anxiety-inspired method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individuals, groups, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons”. Another view conceptualises terrorism as a premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents usually intended to influence an audience (Zartman, 2003:444).

It is imperative to note, however, that the way we define terrorism determines to a significant extent, the kind of counter-terrorism strategy to be adopted. For example, scholars like Hoffman (1999) interpret terrorism as a type of warfare or conflict, while others view terrorism as a mere strategy of warfare (Tilly, 2004). The former view supports the combat counter-terrorism model adopted in the US-led Global War On Terror, which dismisses the idea that terrorism is a rational cause of action. The foregoing view is reinforced by the logic of the proponents of the new terrorism discourse. They maintain that “terrorists are irrational in their objectives and use of violence, less cohesive in their structure, religious and distinct ... in lethality” (Hoffman, 1999).

Spatio-temporal considerations may not allow for a holistic examination of all the definitions of terrorist or terrorism as it is not the primary focus of this paper. However, for analytical purposes, this paper adopts the simplistic description of terrorists given by Zartman and Faure (2011). They note that a terrorist is a person or a group that has been proscribed by the state for

its rebellious activities, including the use or threat of violence on the populace to create a general state of apprehension. This view restricts terrorism to acts of non-state actors and rules out the possibility of terrorism being perpetrated by state actors. This is based on the assumption that a state has a legitimate monopoly over violence and the use of force.

2.3 Takfirism

Takfir is an Arabic word used to describe a Muslim as an infidel or non-believer. It is a practice of accusing other Muslims of apostasy or declaring them as infidels (Zahid & Takar, 2016). Under Islamic law, a Muslim who leaves his Islamic faith is liable to face capital punishment. This is where the terrorists find justification for their aggression against anyone they declare apostate for refusing to see Islam through their minimalist worldview of self-righteousness (Drennan, 2008). *Takfiri* terrorism is essentially an Islamic form of terrorism rooted in the belligerent Salafi-Jihadi ideology.

Although the concept of *Takfir* has existed for many centuries in the Islamic world, it only became popularised after the defeat of the Soviet Union by the *Mujahedeen* in 1991. The fiercest proponents of this ideology in recent times were some top leaders of Al-Qaida, namely Osama bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri and the Uzbek leader Tahir Yuldash (Shahzad, 2007). According to Al-Zawahiri, for instance, *Takfir* should be understood much broader and beyond the context in which it was initially conceived. To him, even governments ruling over Muslim lands are considered illegitimate and apostates. This includes anyone, even tangentially employed by the government or state-affiliated institutions, the intelligentsia, security forces and any person collaborating or engaging with those entities. These are all considered infidels who must be fought by Allah's army until they repent and embrace Islam.

Therefore, in the context of this paper, *Takfirism* would also be understood in a much broader sense. Consequently, a reconstruction of the concept is quite desirable to encompass the violent activities of these groups against both Muslims and non-Muslims. This is particularly so because when a Muslim is declared an infidel or non-believer, he is to be treated in the same manner as a person who has never believed in Islam before. Thus, when the Al-Qaida declared war against the Americans, it was because America was seen as an infidel along with all her allies, even

among governments of Muslim countries. In one *fatwa*, Sheikh Osama bin Laden admonished all Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies- civilians and military- is an individual duty of every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it... we with God's help call on every Muslim who believes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulama, leaders, youths and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's US troops and the devil's supporters allying with them and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson..." (bin Laden, 1998:3).

An examination of the above-quoted *fatwa* tends to show that the war is not just against Muslims who have been declared infidels for supporting Americans, but everyone who opposes their campaign of terror. Moreso, the reason for the command, as explained in the statement signed by the top leaders of the Al-Qaida, including Osama bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri, was the allegation of "crimes committed by the Americans", which was interpreted as "a clear declaration of war on Allah, his messenger and [all] Muslims" (Kadivar, 2020:8). Therefore, *Takfiri* terrorism would be used in this paper to connote all acts of terrorism carried out by jihadists to further a religious cause for Islam. Accordingly, the terms *Takfiri*, jihadist or new terrorists would be used to mean one and the same thing in this paper.

3. The "New" Terrorism Discourse

There is a growing trend in the literature which seeks to distinguish between "old" and "new" terrorism to understand the challenges of negotiating with terrorists (Jones, 2017:22). After the 9/11 attacks, policymakers, journalists and scholars have realised that the world is now faced with a "new" terrorism different from the terrorism of the past (Hoffman, 1998). Others have expressed the distinction as one between "traditional" and "absolutist" terrorists (Hayes, Kaminski & Beres, 2003:453). However, although there is nothing "traditional" about terrorism, this characterisation may only be accepted for analytical purposes.

Many authors have expressed concern that terrorism is gradually assuming disturbing trends, particularly the increasing lethality of terrorist activities, introducing a new epoch in the study of terrorism – the new terrorism. However, as Crenshaw (2003) notes in her seminal article

“New” versus “Old” Terrorism, there is nothing fundamentally or qualitatively “new” about terrorism. Rather, the idea of “new” terrorism is based largely on insufficient knowledge of history and misrepresentation of contemporary terrorism, as it is generally unclear when the “new” terrorism began or when the “old” ended.

Thus, to ascertain when the idea took off, David Rapoport opined in his Four Waves theory that new terrorism emerged as an aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Rapoport, 2001). The idea gained prominence in 1995 after the nerve gas attack by Aum Shinrikyo in a Tokyo subway station and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 by Timothy McVeigh. Although, it has been argued that McVeigh’s actions belong to the category of right-wing extremism rather than religion (Crenshaw, 2003:21). By then, scholars had already begun to warn about the impending threats of new terrorism. This was later confirmed when the leader of the Al-Qaida, Osama bin Laden declared war against America in 1996.

It was consequent upon bin Laden’s declaration that the Al-Qaida launched attacks 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 the port of Yemen in 2000 (Chiangi, 2021:13). The 9/11 attack was rather a striking confirmation of the ‘new terrorism’ hypothesis and a further proof that the emerging wave of fanatical Islamic violence was more dangerous than the ethno-nationalistic terrorist groups that had existed before (Jones, 2017:25). The primary objective of this paper is not to dwell extensively on the epistemic controversies surrounding the classification of terrorism into “new” and “old” but to identify the characteristics of each category in order to establish the difficulties associated with trying to make deals with the new terrorists.

Since the 9/11 attacks, the global spread of suicide attacks against civilian targets is further demonstration that terrorism has assumed a fundamentally new dimension over the past decades. The “new” terrorists are more dangerous than the classic type, often associated with ethno-nationalistic or political agitations. They are extreme in their religious rhetoric, and “their motivations include rage, aggression, sadism, paranoia as well as fanaticism...” (Laqueur, 1998:281). They are dedicated to causing the largest possible number of casualties among their “enemies” without any “clearly defined political goals apart from the destruction of society and

elimination of large section of the population” (Laqueur, 1999:81). This is done to maintain or heighten existing trepidation in public and to remain at the epicentre of attention.

4. Critical Features of *Takfiri* or “New” Terrorism and why the Difficulties of Negotiation

There is a general consensus that although negotiations with terrorists in the past have yielded positive results like the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the Oslo Accords etc., the terrorists of today are different from the IRA and similar groups classified as the “old” terrorists. The “old” terrorist groups have not necessarily been interested in killing many people, as doing so was often counterproductive because they would have difficulty attracting popular support and empathy. It was also considered as a means of achieving the secondary goals, namely clamour for national self-determination or social justice reforms, as the case may be (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2008:11).

On the other hand, the “new” terrorists are motivated largely by religious imperatives. They aim to achieve the “greatest benefits for themselves and their co-religionists only as opposed to the indiscriminately utilitarian goals of secular terrorists” (Hoffman, 1993:3). They are unwilling to engage in any political dialogue. Their ideology:

... make[s] them more difficult to negotiate with than older ethno-nationalist terrorist groups. The goals of newer terrorist groups are religiously inspired, apocalyptic, millenarian and therefore more fanatical than groups that have come before, meaning it is much less likely that they will make compromises with more secular governments that do not share the same ideology (Jones, 2017:28).

The implication is that while the “[o]ld terrorists are looking to bargain, new terrorists, want only to express their wrath and cripple their enemy” (Stevenson, 2002:35). There is, consequently, a general uncompromising attitude of jihadists to negotiation. It could be recalled that in 2019 when leaders of the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), began negotiations with the Nigerian government for the release of 10 abducted Christians, at the point when the negotiations were almost concluded, the Islamic State suddenly directed ISWAP to dress the captives in orange jumpsuits to evoke the uniforms of the Guantanamo Bay detainees and videotape their

executions on Christmas Day as a revenge for the death of Al-Baghdadi. This marked the culmination of the Islamic state's subversion of negotiation-inclined ISWAP members (Zenn, 2020). The foregoing demonstrates state actors' frustration whenever they attempt to engage in peace talks with *Takfiri* terrorists.

Contrariwise, the "old" terrorists were less fundamentalist and more capable of being reasoned with. Their goals were rational and practicable, especially those agitating for national self-determination or territorial autonomy. State actors were able to bargain and strike deals with them. To them, violence was seen "either as a way of instigating the correction of a flaw in a system ... or as a means to foment the creation of a new system..." (Hoffman, 1998: 95). The objective of the anarchist movement in Europe for instance, was to overthrow political systems, especially capitalism by co-ordinating serial attacks on public institutions and personalities. The German Red Army Faction was also formed to overthrow strong and well-established liberal democratic systems, defeat NATO and bring down every form of imperialism (Alexander & Plunchinsky, 1992).

The point sought to be made here is that the "traditional" or old terrorists had tangible, realisable and practicable demands. Although, it appears in recent times that the ideologies of these so-called nationalist terrorists have begun to overlap with religiously-motivated terrorists following the advent of the "new" terrorists. For example, Palestinian nationalist militant groups are sometimes Islamic militant agitators; the Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad etc., have both nationalist and religious objectives in their struggle.

The new terrorists are conversely inspired by convictions of revenge, right-wing extremism and religious eschatology. Their risk of resorting to nuclear, chemical or biological weapons has grown due to increased availability (Stern, 1999). Their capacity to strike has been facilitated by what Dolnik and Fitzgerald (2008:13) term the "democratization of destruction", a consequence of the proliferation of advanced technological means of warfare and the advent of the internet, which has made access to terrorist instructional materials on operational strategies and the production of explosives easily available.

The proliferation of suicide attacks has also become an increasingly disturbing strategy of the new terrorists. Although suicide attacks are not new strategies of terrorism, to them, suicide attacks create a culture of martyrdom in which death on behalf of the group to inflict greater damage on the “enemy” becomes increasingly attractive, and volunteers are always handy. In other words, killing and being killed are regarded as an integral part of their struggle. Accordingly:

...the restraints on violence that are [often] imposed on secular terrorists by the desire to appeal tacitly supportive ... are not relevant to the religious terrorists. Moreover, this absence of a constituency in the secular terrorist sense leads to a sanctioning of almost limitless violence against a virtually open-ended category of targets – that is anyone who is not a member of the terrorist’s religious sect (Hoffman, 1999:3).

New terrorists are also mostly transnational and largely decentralised compared to old terrorists. They are structured in “lose networks, instead of organizational hierarchies” (Gofas, 2012:9). They are often motivated essentially by doctrines that emphasise transformational and apocalyptic beliefs, commonly associated with the religion of Islam (Crenshaw, 2003). The violent imagery “embedded in their sacred texts and the centrality of sacrifice in their liturgical traditions establish the legitimacy of killing as an act of worship with redemptive qualities” (Simon, 2003:2). This forms an integral component of the ideologies of *Takfiri* groups like the Al-Qaida, which is essentially eschatological, and thus insulated from any form of logical argumentation.

Finally, the new terrorist is expressed in the form of hatred towards western civilization, especially the American culture, and social and political systems. Their violence is expressive and not intended for any strategic purposes. Instead, they aim to destroy the world in order to save it from “eternal” damnation. The demands of these *Takfiri* terrorists are characteristically enigmatic and impracticable. They are increasingly poised to compel the rest of the world to accept their demands, and change and adopt their values, civilisation, belief system and way of life (Hayes, Kaminski & Beres, 2003:457). In other words, they are not ready to cohabit and tolerate a social system characterised by a clash of civilisation.

5. Is it ideal to Negotiate with Terrorists?

The nagging question here has always been whether it is ideal for states to negotiate with terrorists, which has received mixed reactions from the academic community and policymakers. The opinion is divided between those who support meaningful dialogue on the one hand, and absolutists who are completely averse to the idea of negotiating with terrorists. Terrorism experts such as Hoffman (2004) maintain the absolutist or “no negotiation” stance, rationalised by the perception that capitulating to terrorist demands and seeking to engage with them by democratic governments amounts to permitting the reign of violence. It also creates the impression that the government is:

Rewarding terrorism and terrorists’ actions, legitimizing terrorism and terrorists’ methods, undermining the efforts of those that have pursued political change through peaceful means, destabilizing the negotiating government’s political system, undercutting international effort at outlawing terrorism and setting a dangerous precedent (Nwamkpa, 2016:12).

This absolutist view appears to have found more expression in the policies of most western governments, including the US, than the former. For example, former US President Barack Obama stated his position unmistakably, “I have never supported engagement with extremists” (Obama, 2008). Thus, there appears to be a consensus that we both *cannot* and *should not* negotiate with terrorists (Miller, 2011:146). The reason is that “... their actions are not the result of rational instrumentalist considerations” (Jones, 2017:26).

Consequently, this absolutist position advocates a military solution to dealing with terror. Harris (2002) advised:

You do not make treaties with evil doers or try to adjust your conduct to make them like you. You do not try to see the world from the evil doer’s point of view. You do not try to appease them, or persuade them, or reason with them. You try on the contrary, to outwit them, to vanquish them, to kill them. You behave with them in the same manner that you would deal with a fatal epidemic – you try to wipe it out.

However, as sound as the above-quoted advice may seem, military strategy is not always helpful. *Takfiri* terrorists believe in the divinity of their cause, and suicidal martyrdom is often an integral

part of their strategy. Thus, however, a battle goes, it is a win for them based on the belief that eternal reward awaits them in the hereafter for waging war against the unbelievers.

Consequently, the question about whether or not to negotiate with terrorists is often answered in the negative before it is even considered. The demands of *Takfiri* terrorists calling for “defensive jihad” to defeat a rival system portrayed as existential threats to Islam imply that dialogue or negotiation is largely impossible. This further explains why negotiation is impossible because *Takfiri* terrorists are considered psychopaths (Jones, 2017:28) or people suffering from delusion and persecution mania (Lacqueur, 2001:80). This introduces a psychopathological perspective into the discourse and portrays terrorism as a mental health problem.

The sophistry that preceded the post-9/11 “Global War on Terror” represented the Al-Qaida and similar groups as forming the class of new terrorists, which are not only evil and irrational, but also unfeasible as negotiating partners, particularly due to the transcendental nature of their ideologies. Consequently, this confirmed the assertion that the terrorists are psychopaths and lacking in rationality. Nonetheless, this is a fundamental misattribution error because terrorists do not have a common profile, nor do they have a “common aetiology, personality type or developmental trait, nor are there common conditions in the background of the terrorist that could [instigate them]” (Miller, 2011:16). Therefore, the notion that terrorism is a psychopathological problem is neither supported by factual nor anecdotal evidence. As Crenshaw (1992:31) stated, “the idea of terrorism as the product of mental disorder or psychopathy has been discredited”. Therefore, the more we think of them as incapable of reason, the more likely we are to employ the military strategy against them and the less likely we will resort to diplomatic engagements.

Contrariwise, the other divisions of the scholars posit that the absolutist or no-negotiation stance with terrorists is not less damaging than negotiating with them. They maintain that governments negotiate, albeit inadvertently, with terrorists irrespective of whether they recognise it or not – a form of meta-dialogue through the actions and reactions of the government to terrorist activities (Neumann, 2007). Consequently, the absolute prohibition on negotiating with terrorists is not entirely justifiable because there is no objective standard for determining the rationality or otherwise of certain actions or an ideology. An example of the forgoing is the IRA, whose

ideology appeared to be more “rational” than, for example, the Al-Qaida because its ideology was largely anchored on nationalist agitations, which are well-known subjects in western history and political philosophy (Neumann, 2007:129). Negotiations between the IRA and the British government resulted in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The same result was achieved when negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) resulted in the Oslo Accord. Although it has not ended the conflict, it marked a historic rapprochement between Israel and Palestine and refocused international attention towards adopting a two-state solution (Jones, 2017:22).

Meanwhile, religious fundamentalism, the main feature of new terrorism, is quite alien to western history and political thought as a cause of terrorist agitation. However, that alone is not enough reason to dismiss the possibility of negotiations with terrorists because such negotiations can help to achieve such temporal goals as the release of hostages. Therefore, dismissing the idea of negotiating with terrorists is not entirely correct because it can help achieve certain temporal goals, such as the release of hostages. Nonetheless, even when states are willing and ready to negotiate with *Takfiri* terrorists, the rigidity of their ideology appears to be non-negotiable. Indeed, Osama bin Laden had made it abundantly clear that there can be no dialogue with occupiers except through arms (BBC, 2004:1). Al-Baghdadi, former leader of the Islamic State, also stated quite bluntly the position of their struggle as follows:

[T]he war will not be over until the caliphate covers all eastern and western extents of the earth, filling the world with the truth and justice of Islam and putting an end to the falsehood and tyranny of *jahiliyyah* (Manara, 2020).

The implication of the foregoing is that states are locked between having to contend with unending violence or opting for negotiation with jihadists which, apart from being difficult, does not guarantee that the violence will ever end. It appears that the groups only give room for negotiation in situations involving abduction, which would lead to the payment of ransom or the release of their members from incarceration. Thus, the submission here is that when it has to do with *Takfiri* terrorists, no amount of peace talks would ever end their campaign of violence but to say that states should not negotiate with terrorists is not entirely correct, as taking such a rigid position would only endanger the lives of the citizens. The US government declared that it would

not negotiate with terrorists in 1973 when the Saudi Arabian embassy was attacked, and as a result, three lives were lost. Accordingly, while states should be ready to protect their territorial integrity and national security, in appropriate cases, they should be willing to give negotiation a chance whenever it is necessary for the protection of the lives of their citizens, especially when in the captivity of terrorists.

6. Feasibility of Negotiation with *Takfiri* terrorists

The ideology of the new or old terrorists is faith-based and rigid. However, that is not to say negotiation is not possible. The only negotiable areas, namely the release of hostages, which may either take the form of exchange for prisoners or the payment of ransom, can only produce temporal results, and this does not affect the foundation of the ideology of the group being the main source of the problem.

Conversely, since negotiating with terrorists can confer certain advantages on them, most states generally have firm policies against negotiating with terrorists. However, clinging to that stance may be counterproductive. For instance, in March 1973, members of a Palestinian militant organisation took some hostages at the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Khartoum. Among them were three westerners, including the US Ambassador to Sudan. Instead of seeking a soft landing for the hostages, US president Richard Nixon declared that there could be no negotiation with terrorists. What he did not know was that his statement had put the lives of the hostages in danger because the following day, the three western hostages were killed (Briggs & Wallace, 2022). The problem in this regard always lies in the policy of states against negotiation in situations where it is feasible to negotiate. In other words, the no-negotiation policy with terrorists by states should, in appropriate circumstances, be relaxed for the safety of citizens. However, when a state decides to give negotiation a chance, it may only serve to confer certain advantages on the terrorists in terms of the monies paid as ransom and the release of their imprisoned members, who may sooner or later return to their gangsters' paradise to continue their acts of violence.

However, that is not to say there is no utility in negotiating with terrorists and sundry criminals. It may be exigent sometimes, but doing so with jihadists has been quite restrictive and incapable

of resolving the underlying challenges posed by the rigidity of their ideologies. At the very least, it throws up fresh challenges that may sometimes become worse than the original problem. Differences in rationality, extremely destructive political/religious objectives, lack of proper hierarchical structure, and will to establish a communication channel for possible dialogue creates physical constraints for negotiation to unfold.

On the other hand, since *Takfiri* terrorists or jihadists operate on loose and decentralised cells of fragmented but ideologically connected structures, negotiating with one faction may be seen by others as a betrayal. It can even exacerbate the problem if the dissenting factions use more brutal fighting methods to compensate for the betrayal of their counterparts supposedly corrupted by state actors. The point sought to be made here is that in all of these, even if jihadists, such as the Islamic State, are willing to negotiate and voice out rational demands that deserve any consideration from a state, there is no guarantee that the jihadists engaged with the state representatives would truthfully represent the opinion of the group as a whole or even its ideology. An illustration would suffice to drive home the point sought to be made here. In the course of negotiating the release of the abducted Chibok school girls in 2014, the Nigerian government initially failed because major factions of the Boko Haram, especially the Abubakar Shekau camp, were opposed to the idea of negotiation (Nwamkpa, 2016). However, they later succeeded in part with the other factions in releasing some of the girls because the negotiation involved concessions from the government, notably the release of prisoners and the payment of ransom.

However, let us even assume that the jihadists decide to negotiate beyond the release of hostages to include a ceasefire, the longevity of such a ceasefire may not be guaranteed as the risk that hostilities may resume in the long-run may still exist. In other words, *Takfiri* terrorists cannot be genuinely appeased and reintegrated into the mainstream. For as long as the liturgical sources of their fundamentalist ideology still exist, nothing stops them or other groups whose ideologies are equally derived from the same sources from springing up and taking arms in the future. Consequently, fears have been expressed regarding Nigeria's de-radicalisation and reintegration programme for the "repentant" Boko Haram fighters, as the tendency to go back and continue the violence remains high since the source of the problem is rooted in religious ideology (Aina, 2021).

Furthermore, where negotiation is geared towards the payment of ransom or other monetary benefits, it becomes a veritable incentive for the continuation of the violence, as there cannot be a guarantee that they would ever stop. For example, in 2019, the Governor of the Nigerian state of Zamfara, Bello Matawalle, embarked on peace talks with bandits operating in his state and other states in the north west region of Nigeria. Initially, the bandits agreed to an armistice promising to give peace a chance. However, soon afterwards, the agreement ran into muddy waters (Ajibili, 2020). It turned out that the bandits fooled the Governor into parting with large sums of money, only for them to return to their killing camps to continue their campaign of terror and violence. Therefore, apart from the constraints imposed against negotiation by the rigidity of their ideology, the issue of getting the terrorists to honour their undertakings is another formidable challenge.

7. Conclusion

Takfiri terrorists or jihadists are the wrong choices for political dialogue – whether one recognises the legitimacy of their grievances or not. They are never up for any negotiation in so far as the substance of their ideology will be the subject of such negotiations. Thus, as argued above, negotiations with the new terrorists can only be feasible if it has to do with the payment of ransom towards the release of hostages and, in most cases, the reciprocal release of prisoners, in which case, the ransom would serve as a source of funding for their logistics. However, that is not to say that states should shut their doors to possible negotiations. Indeed, whenever a state has the opportunity of negotiating with terrorists on any issue, it may be expedient to utilise it for the safety of its citizens.

However, although negotiations with terrorists may be strategically advantageous, they can sometimes be ethically compromising. In other words, providing terrorists “a place at the table” acknowledges their existence, actions and the validity of their interests. Therefore, in deciding when to reach out to a terrorist group, the difficulties and risks for a government must be carefully analysed. The state must consequently determine whether those individuals are reliable – whether they have the authority to enter into binding commitments. And most importantly, do they have the ability and credibility to deliver on their promises? These are some of the most difficult judgments

a democratic government will ever make. A miscalculation of any of the foregoing can be counterproductive.

Furthermore, a state must also make several tactical decisions. These include determining when the time is ripe to talk, whether it is negotiating from a position of strength or weakness, in its own eyes, in the eyes of its domestic constituents, and most importantly, in the eyes of the terrorists. A miscalculation could signal weakness, suggesting that the government no longer has the stamina to prolong the fight. This could result in the government losing domestic support and embolden the terrorists, lead to an upsurge of violence, and extend the campaign of terror.

Finally, despite the importance of this subject, there is regrettably little information currently available to guide policymakers in negotiating with terrorists. This is because these types of negotiations often occur in the shadow, and rarely have these experiences been memorialised, their practitioners interviewed, or their lessons institutionalised. There is no pre-existing template or framework for weighing the advantages and disadvantages of either engaging or not engaging. This creates a gap in the literature that future research should seek to fill.

8. References

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