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Democracy, Foreign Policy, and Terrorism

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Terrorism is considered as one of the modern scourges because it affects people of all age groups and all strata of society. Looking at the root causes of terrorism, one may notice that varied factors including political, social, ideological, economic, and even personal factors can lead to terrorism. Among these factors, experts view political-based reasons as one of the key catalysts. In that direction, the form of political governance in a country is being attributed to terrorism. Among various forms, democracy is viewed as one of the most acceptable forms of governance, but there is a view among certain political circles that democracy can facilitate both transnational and domestic terrorism. In addition, democracy-based governments' foreign policies are also seen as contributing to terrorist campaigns. This perspective of whether democracy and related foreign affairs can lead to terrorist activities is discussed in the article titled *Democracy, Foreign Policy, and Terrorism* written by Burcu Savun and Brian J. Phillips. As part of reviewing this article, it is necessary to discuss whether democracy and foreign policies can cause terrorism. In addition, it is important to analyze the ways the authors argue the topic and provide evidences along with personal perspectives.

Savun and Phillips start the article by investigating the factors that makes democracies vulnerable to terrorism from both abroad and internal sources. The authors then suggest that irrespective of the form of governance, if a state exhibits a particular type of foreign policy behavior, then it could be a victim of terrorism, particularly transnational terrorism. The authors correlate these two perspectives by opining that among various forms of governance or regimes, democratic states are more likely to be actively involved in international politics as part of their foreign policy behavior, and that can lead to terrorist campaigns against them. The authors provide evidences to support the former perspective of democracies' vulnerability to terrorism. "Certain aspects of democratic regimes, such as high levels of

executive constraints, free press, and political participation, facilitate transnational terrorism by providing a context in which terrorists can operate with relative ease” (Savun & Phillips, 2009, p.879). Speaking of executive restraint, there is a view that leaders of democracies are normally constrained to act strongly against terrorism because of the perspective that it could infringe on the involved individuals’ civil liberties. In addition, free press in democracies can provide an apt option for terrorist groups to gain publicity and attention to their cause. “Most of the literature suggests that press freedom should be positively related to terrorist incidents, as it allows terrorists to exploit media coverage” (Savun & Phillips, 2009, p.884). The authors then shift their focus on the relation between foreign policies and terrorism by listing three indicators. One obvious foreign policy indicator is that when a state is active in international politics, it is more likely to involve itself in foreign policy crises with other states. As it engages more frequently with other politically sensitive states, it may encounter resentment of those states and particularly terrorist groups operating there (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). The second indicator is that if a state has strong alliance with the United States, it may experience more terror threats than other non-allying countries. The thing is the United States intervenes in other states more frequently, dominates intergovernmental organizations, and utilizes its general economic and geopolitical prowess to oppress other countries (Chibber, 2009). These factors make it a key target for terrorist groups, so any country having close alliance with it also naturally becomes a potential target. The attack on the U.S. consulate in Turkey and Madrid train bombing are demonstrative examples of this argument (Savun & Phillips, 2009, p.890). A third indicator that denotes a state’s dynamic foreign policy is the frequency with which it interferes in civil wars. Civil wars are controversial and risky endeavors, which can antagonize domestic groups. So, these groups can launch terror campaigns against a state thereby validating the fact that active foreign policy of a state can lead to terrorism, particularly transnational terrorism.

By providing the above-mentioned evidences and through statistical analysis, Savun and Philips conclude that democracies may not inherently facilitate terrorism, but instead their active and even dubious foreign policies can contribute or even provoke terrorist activities against them. The authors come to this conclusion after finding out through empirical assessment that democracies do not necessarily contribute to domestic terrorism. The authors then probe that if democracies and their characteristics do not contribute to domestic terrorism, then it is unclear what factors can contribute to transnational terrorism. “Why are democracies vulnerable to transnational terrorism while they do not have particular problems with homegrown terrorism?” (Savun & Phillips, 2009, p.896). This question is answered through empirical assessment, which states that democracies become the victims of terrorism mainly because of their particular foreign policy behavior. When a state involves itself in foreign policy crises with other states, allies with the United States, and interferes in civil wars, it may provoke terrorist campaigns. So, the authors conclude that a state’s level of involvement “in international affairs, not their regime type, is likely to increase their propensity to experience transnational terrorism” (Savun & Phillips, 2009, p.891).

Based on the above review of the article, it is possible to state that the arguments regarding the ways a state’s foreign policy behavior can contribute to terrorism, particularly transnational terrorism, appear to be the strongest. The authors provide three clear and strong foreign policy indicators that can facilitate terrorist groups to act against other states. The indicators are states’ constant involvement in foreign policy crisis with other countries, their alliance with United States, and their interference in civil wars. The authors effectively explain these three indicators with apt examples making the argument regarding the indicators very strong. On the other hand, the argument regarding the ways certain characteristics or aspects of democratic regimes can lead to terrorism seems to be the weakest. The argument is weak because the evidence is very general and there are no

adequate concepts and examples that would illustrate it. The theories of *collective action* and *world systems perspective* seem to relate aptly to the article. The collective action theory focuses on the ways collective activities, such as terrorism, can arise when there are conditions that facilitate collective action. As the article focuses on the conditions that can contribute to collective action on the part of terrorists, it relates to the theory of collective action.. The world systems perspective refers to a collection of related theories that explore the relationship between nation-states and the ways this relationship can cause terrorism, particularly autocratic semiperipheral zones (that is, the relationship between core nations and the periphery). As the article focuses on this part of nation-states relationship, it relates to the topic discussed in the class. The key reason for picking this particular article is that it gives a fresh perspective on democracy. Although there is an impression that democracy is the most acceptable form of governance that should be encouraged throughout the world, its related foreign policy behavior and contribution to terrorism make the readers reconsider some of their views on democracy.

References

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