Assessing the influence of politics as a purveyor of social support for suicide terrorism

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Abstract

The patriotism and heroism that is seen in those willing to die with the enemy for the community's good, account for their martyrdom status and been venerated, even as outsiders condemn them as suicide terrorists. The more the social supports that could be garnered against the government the more the political legitimacy that gets conferred on terror cell groups. The brazen attacks by Hamas could be seen as a case in point and also a strategy to disrupt the Saudi-Arabia-Isreal normalisation moves, a charge against all Israeli's diplomatic rapprochements for common ground. This study employed rational choice theory to investigate the influence of politics as a social support purveyor for suicide terrorism which is seen as a low-cost operative. The study engages foreign military occupation, political legitimacy, and exploitation of enemy Counter-Terror Strategy, to explain the role of politics in generating social support for suicide terrorism. The study employed a desktop research design with a reliance on historical and secondary data from extant literature. Findings from the study showed that political narratives as seen in misgovernance play a pivotal role in generating and sustaining social support for suicide terrorism. The study also submitted that most militant groups employ political narratives in generating social support for their suicide terror endeavours, though in varied quantities depending on the environment. The study recommends that States' Foreign Military Occupation should extensively review such while non kinetic approach that addresses socioeconomic imbalances should be considered to counter the narratives of terror cell groups who may engage in social services to enjoy political legitimacy against the government.

Keywords: Enemy Counter-Terror Strategy, Foreign Military Occupation, Rational Choice Theory, Political Legitimacy

Introduction

The global landscape of terrorism presents unprecedented challenges to international security and stability. One particularly disturbing phenomenon that has emerged is suicide terrorism, where individuals willingly sacrifice their lives to carry out acts of violence against civilian populations and vulnerable targets. This insidious form of terrorism has raised crucial questions about its root causes, motivations, and the role of various factors in its perpetuation. Suicide terrorism represents a confluence of individual despair, extremist ideologies, and political motivations. Understanding the driving forces behind it is essential not only for counterterrorism efforts but also for crafting effective policies aimed at preventing its occurrence.

Suicide terrorism, though not the only form of terrorism, has however proven to be the most virulent, judging by its high casualty yield and global adaptation (Bergen & Hoffman, 2009). Terror groups could be seen searching for common ground of generating social support required to sustain the suicide campaign, which could be impossible if the populace hasn't seen the futility of other approaches (Pedahzur, 2005).

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Thus, the society need to experience humiliation, oppression, suffering and deprivations for some time, all of which are estimated to increase the public anger against the enemy to the extent of supporting all measures possible, including their members dying with the enemy (Hafez, 2006a). The need for radical acts to overturn the status quo and tip the balance, when a military conflict has reached a deadlock and a hurting stalemate has also been advocated as one of the logic for social support for suicide terrorism (Pape & Feldman, 2010).

Another social support channel for suicide terrorism is the presence of foreign forces in Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, Somalia, and Uzbekistan (Pape & Feldman, 2010). On the other hand, indirect occupation as seen when alien policy are mirrored and traced to foreign government, this has been blamed for the suicide terror campaigns in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, Yemen, Nigeria, morocco, and Jordan (Johnson, 2011). In pondering why suicide terrorism occurs in some area of the world and not in some, Pape (2006) affirmed that foreign military occupation and its attendant resistance has been behind virtually every suicide terror campaigns, especially when targeting a democratic state.

Terror cells equally win social support by exploiting the enemy counter-terror strategy this is done by provoking targeted security forces into a military response that harms the civilian within the terrorist organization's home area. This could be seen in Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, and even Maiduguri in North Eastern Nigeria, where the Boko Haram operates (IRIN, 2011). By so doing, terror cells seem to convince the society of the government's wickedness and evil mindedness, therefore portraying themselves as the credible alternative (Hoffman, 2006). Another channel of discounting the legitimacy of government and promoting suicide bombing is the ability of terror cells to magnetise political legitimacy to their groups through provisioning of basic social services freely as against the apparent failure of government to execute same. This strategy pays more when they are sponsored from external funding, and the populace just enjoy the incentives without paying for it (Bloom, 2005). Hezbollah and Hamas have been the greatest beneficiaries of this strategy, which has been opined to be most supportive of their suicide terror campaigns (Levitt, 2006).

The Israeli's diplomatic rapprochements towards Saudi Arabia in efforts to normalise ties and share common grounds is largely seen as a political efforts by Israel to douse tension, the 2020 Abraham Accords, had United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco all established normalized bilateral ties with Israel (Marcus, 2020). Efforts by Israel to share common grounds with Pakistanis in Gaza on electricity and water through renewed energy while deepening normalisation of ties with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia could be seen commendable (Fahim, 2021). The Arab world's geopolitical gravitation towards Israel stand threatened with the deadly terrorist attacks successfully launched against the State of Israel by

Hamas from the right flank while Hezebolah may also join from the Northern flank thereby escalating regional tension from all fronts. The Hamas terror attack garnered social and political supports particularly in the West Banks and beyond but drew condemnation from World leaders that condemn terrorism (Akinyemi, 2023).

This research undertakes an examination of how political factors and the provision of social support intersect in fostering an environment conducive to suicide terrorism. By analyzing the intricate web of political dynamics, governance structures, and the distribution of resources, this study seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which politics can inadvertently or deliberately provide social support mechanisms for potential suicide terrorists.

To achieve the objective of this study, answers are provided to the stated research question;

  a. How does politics influence the roles of social support for suicide terrorism?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section II presents a review of the literature on Suicide terrorism, Politics, individual, group and Social Supports. Section III briefly discusses the empirical review in the paper. Section IV describes the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Section V presents the methodology adopted by the study. The final section provides concluding remarks and recommendations. This study is not restricted to any geographical area or political ideology, as the use of suicide terrorism is not restricted by these demarcations.

Literature Review

Suicide Terrorism

The controversy, complexity and difficulties in defining suicide terrorism is not totally unexpected given the fact that the world is yet to come up with a generally accepted definition of terrorism (Ganor, 2005). The availability of different terms being used to describe suicide terrorism therefore reflects the various definitions that are associated with the subject accordingly (Hashim, 2006). The use of suicide bombing implies that only bombs are to be used in the operation, it therefore eliminates instances like the 9/11 attacks or even the kamikaze fighters (Hill, 2005). Thus, the use of the term suicide bombing might not be appropriate as not all suicide operations involve suicide bombing, while all suicide bombing on the other hand could be judged as suicide operations (Hafez 2006c). Complex as the different names of this form of terrorism might be, this study uses the broader term suicide terrorism to describe any attack with suicide as its modus operandi.

This therefore qualifies the 9/11 attack as a suicide terrorism as the attackers died in the attack, while the 2004 Madrid train bombings doesn't qualify as suicide terrorism as the attackers did not die in the attack, rather they committed suicide latter (Neumann, 2006). Nevertheless, the narrow approach to defining suicide terrorism affirms the death of the attacker as a precondition for the success of the operation (Gambetta, 2005). Additionally, this death of the attacker must also be concurrent with that of the targeted victim(s) (Ganor, 2002). In this light, the Bali night club bombings of 2002, 26 September 2011 Abuja UN house bombing and the 12 October 2000 bombing of USS Cole in Yemen are all suicide terrorism, since the attackers died concurrently with their targeted victims (Johnson, 2011).

Individual support

The individual level is where the best analysis about the motivations of militants involved in orchestrating suicide terrorism. The relevance of individual decision in suicide terrorism is similar to why war exists, because whereas some individuals have resorted violent confrontations in the face of challenges, some others rather opt for non-violent approach to problems. Notwithstanding the various motivations, no individual carries out suicide attacks without a group sponsor and planner (Pedahzur, 2005). The influence of political leanings, revenge, humiliation, peer and family, as well as economics, diffusion of responsibility and dehumanization were all found to play a part in encouraging individual disposition towards suicide terrorism (Ismayilov, 2010).

Group support

That Suicide terror is committed by individuals, yet it is normally planned and sponsored by an organization who takes credit for it (Hoffman, 2006). The determination of the high value target for suicide attack, the mode of the attack, the timing and who will conduct the suicide attack are all organizational roles and responsibilities in suicide terrorism (Ismayilov, 2010). An analysis of the nature of groups that have adopted suicide terrorism as their modus operandi reveals that they cut across both religious and nationalistic lines like LTTE, Hamas, al-Qaida, PKK, Boko Haram, al-shabaab and others (Johnson, 2011). Some of the issues driving these groups have been identified to include; nationalism, economic, political, religious, support and social benefits (Glucklich, 2009).

Though different motivations have been blamed for driving different groups in direct relation to their environment, religion and politics have featured prominently in most cases (Pape & Feldman, 2010). Interestingly, studies have shown that the application of suicide terror might be rejected by the populace owing to their aversion for such an extreme form of violence in exchange for other forms of armed opposition and terrorism (Gunaratna, 2002). This explains why the group level analysis cannot be done in isolation of the social factors (Victor, 2003). Additionally, the fact that majority of the people that carry out

suicide operations on behalf of a group are sometimes not members of the group, highlights the role of the group to include that of ideologue and organizers (Merari, 2010). Consequent upon the above, the group serves as a platform for the mobilization of recruits and social support for suicide terror campaigns, without which the campaign cannot succeed (Barbalet, 2006).

Social Support

Karl Marx submits that 'every individual needs a societal platform to achieve a revolution' which also apples to the high human life consuming venture like suicide terrorism (Hafez, 2006). Thus, Bloom (2006) argues that the public response to the use of suicide terrorism depends on how the tactic is used, against whom, and for what purpose. If the suicide terror attacks don't resonate in the form of high enemy casualty yield and wider publicity to the plight of the people, it would fail to win the hearts and minds of the populace, and will not continue in such circumstance. Additionally, since suicide terrorism is meant to serve a community, nation or religion, it is affected much by the opinion and attitudes (social support) of the community from where they emerge (Brym, 2009). Study shows that suicide attacks organizers in Palestine, confirmed that they will discontinue their suicide strategy immediately they are aware that the public opposes suicide attacks (Merari, 2010).

Similarly, the reported use of captured Ulster Orangemen to drive Explosive laden cars unto military and police targets in central London and Manchester by the IRA could not continue due to its rejection by the larger Catholic community (Cole & Cole, 2007). However, the reverse is the case in Palestine, where suicide terror is considered appropriate response to the enemy, with every successful suicide attack followed by elaborate celebrations (Shay, 2004). This development possibly explains why suicide attacks occurs more in Palestine than Western Europe, apart from a likely link between civilization and social support for suicide terrorism (Stern, 2010).

Militant groups and their members that lean towards suicide terrorism do not exist in a vacuum, this does make social support for suicide terrorism seems mandatory, as its absence could lead to the extermination of the insurgent group, due to its implications on recruitment, security and even logistics support (Hewitt, 2008). Finally, it is also opined that interplay of domestic and politics and external factors like severity of the on-going conflict, or a hurting stalemate all affects the extent of reception and social support for suicide tactics by the populace (Brym, 2008). No internal war can occur without precipitant events to set it off; and clearly no precipitants can set off internal wars unless the condition of the society makes it possible for them to dos so (Moghadam, 2006a).

Nexus between Politics and Social Support for Suicide Terrorism

The analysis of politics as motivation for supporting suicide terrorism by communities could seen in Pape's Alternative casual Pathways of Suicide Terrorism' hypothesis (Pape, 2005). The hypothesis advances nationalism, occupation, and religious difference as the main drivers of rebellion and mass support for suicide terrorism, though sometimes attributed to nationalism alone (the dotted lines) (Pape & Feldman, 2010). This study in addition to nationalism, occupation, and religious difference highlighted by Pape (2005), study interrogate effect of enemy counter-terror tactics, outbidding, foreign occupation, and political legitimacy under political manipulations that generate social support for suicide terrorism (Bueno de Mesquita, 2007).

Foreign Occupation

The motivation for the society and their members to become suicide terrorists has been argued to rest not only on the availability of a terrorist sanctuary for training and indoctrination, but the deep anger at the presence of foreign troops in a territory they price as their own (Pape and Feldman, 2010). The fear of the citizens that they would lose their ability to perpetuate their political, social, religious, and economic institutions reportedly drives some members to make the supreme sacrifice to prevent it (Merari, 2010). Foreign occupation has been defined not to be restricted to the deployment of foreign troops in a territory alone (direct occupation), but including indirect occupation, where the policies of government is seen to mirror that of an alien power or serving as a forward operation base (Pape, 2005).

The transnational suicide campaign of al-Qaida has also been attributed to their resolve to eject foreign forces occupying Muslim lands; especially holy land of Saudi Arabia, as well as American led Western influence on Muslim countries (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2006). However, occupation alone cannot be blamed for the resort to suicide terrorism, as states like Tibet, Kosovo, Cambodia have been or are still under occupation without any resort to suicide bombing (Moghadam, 2006a). Relying on Durkheim's theory of social integration, Merari (2010) therefore points out that social support for suicide terrorism in occupied territories is not strictly based on occupation, but, directly dependent upon the level of social integration of the society. Additionally, occupation alone as a reason for social support for suicide terrorism has been discounted by some authors who rather insist that readiness to resort to suicide terrorism is centred on despair borne out of a growing sense of victimization (Hafez, 2006a).

Consequently, some occupation has therefore proven to be more likely to attract suicide terror campaigns from the local populace than others, due to the religious and linguistic difference (Hafez, 2004). Examining the occupation of West Germany by the Western powers after World War II, it is therefore argued that where the occupier is of the same religion or language with the local populace, there is less likelihood of

local support for any suicide campaign against them (Brym & Hamlin, 2009). Additionally, the British occupation of Northern Ireland also didn't attract any local support for suicide terror when initiated, which might also be attributed to the linguistic and cultural affinity (Reed, 2008). The reverse is rather the case any time the occupier is of different religion and culture with the local populace, where the religious difference enables the terrorist leaders to portray the conflict in zero-sum terms (Pape & Feldman, 2010). This phenomenon was therefore blamed for the public support for suicide terror campaigns against the USA, Israel and France in Lebanon, Palestinians against Israel, Tamils against Sri Lanka, Iraqis and al-Qaida against the USA, as well as the Sikhs against India (Stern, 2010).

Furthermore, the fear of the loss of political domination and privileges has also been seen to cause a rise in social support for suicide terrorism (Cordesman, 2008). Thus, the displacement of the Iraqi Sunnis who dominated the regime of Saddam Hussein by the 2003 American invasion triggered the suicide terror campaign against the foreign troops and their Iraqi government collaborators (Ayers, 2008). Realizing that the US led invasion gave unprecedented powers to the Shiites and Kurds, it reportedly engendered a deeper sense of humiliation amongst the Sunnis, with even fear of retribution from the Shiites, thus the support for attacks against all the enemies (Hafez, 2007a). Additionally, the fact that the invasion of Iraq led to the end of Sunni domination and empowered the majority Shiites in that country has been emphasised as the reason why there was not even a single Shiite suicide terror attack in the country (Pape & Feldman, 2010). Similarly, the fear of the loss of political privilege has also been blamed for the social support for other extreme violence like the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, or even the current suicide terror campaign by Boko Haram in Nigeria (IRIN, 2011). Thus, apart from loss of political privilege, foreign occupation is also accused of being linked to long suffering and deprivations (Gabriel, 2006) .

Finally, the efficiency and effectiveness of the security forces of poor countries are always low, due to manpower, equipment, and technology deficiency (Baker, 2010). Inefficient response by the security forces may for most times present the suicide terror groups as being more superior in tactics, thus winning more social support for their actions (Ganor, 2005). Conclusively, foreign occupation has been hypothesized as the main driver of social support for suicide terror campaigns; though not a stand-alone factor as it goes with some collateral effects like harsh counter terror tactics, and nationalism (Korbin, 2010).

Exploiting the Enemy Counter-Terror Strategy

Suicide terror organizations are claimed to win social support by provoking the targeted security forces, thus seeking to goad them into a military response that harms the civilian within the terrorist organization's home area (Kyddd & Water, 2006). This strategy has purportedly been employed by militant organizations from Palestine to Spain, nothing radicalizes a people faster than the unleashing of undisciplined security

forces on its towns and villages (Crenshaw, 2007). This has been the situation in Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, and even Maiduguri in North Eastern Nigeria, where the Boko Haram is provoking the security forces into high handed response, thus increasing their social support for its attacks against the Nigerian government (IRIN, 2011).

Proponents of harsh counter-terror measures like pre-emptive attacks, targeted assassinations of militants, destruction of the terrorist infrastructure building of fence/barriers hail its successes against suicide attacks (Ganor, 2005). Furthermore, there appears to be a global acceptance of some harsh counter terror policies like targeted killing by the super powers, especially using armed drones and military raids, including the killing of Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awalaki. The efficacy of this claim however is dismissed as temporary, as its gains are claimed to be eroded in the long term (Ma'oz, 2004).

In condemning such harsh measures, Bloom (2006) claimed that the militant groups have the capacity to replace any lost manpower, since another two terrorists emerges to take the place of every suicide terrorist killed by the enemy. She attributed this to what she termed the 'boomerang effect', as depicted in figure 4a, wherein the targeted killing of any suicide bomber leads to outrage by the populace and an increase of public sympathy to the militant group. The increased sympathy to the targeted group therefore reflects in increased volunteers and public support, which leads to more attacks (Johnston & Sarbahi, 2011).

The boomerang thesis, Hafez (2006) of March 1999 showed that only 26.1% of Palestinians supported suicide attacks on Israel, while another poll in December 2000, showed an increased support for suicide attacks rising to 66.2%. The fluctuating social support for this form of extreme violence therefore allude to the fact that it is a rational choice dependent upon some external variables, which includes enemy counter-terror tactics (Milstein, 2003). Interestingly, governmental repression narrative and boomerang hypothesis, which has been blamed for the rise of suicide terrorism in Russia, Israel and Sri Lanka, contrasts the case in most countries in Sub-Saran Africa and Latin America where brutal authoritarian and dictatorial regimes abound (Moghadam, 2006). The fact that brutal conflicts in Darfur, the apartheid South Africa, and even the land crises in Zimbabwe did not engineer suicide terrorism implies that the boomerang hypothesis might need some other factors before manifestation (Unachukwu, 2011). Notwithstanding, high handed counter terror tactics including targeted killing and its attendant boomerang effect warrants a change of strategy, in order to deny the militants the much required social support (Ganor, 2005).

Political Legitimacy

The inadequate or non-provision of basic services in most of the nations under military occupation, , of which Africa is not excluded, has been blamed for providing fertile ground for the terror groups to recruit and mobilize social support for their operations, as some terror groups provide some amenities for their

people (Bueno de Mesquita, 2007). Most African Nation could be seen in this category as failure in governance gives terror cells better narrative as an alternative. This strategy reportedly pays more when they are sponsored from external funding, and the populace just enjoy the incentives without paying for it (Bloom, 2005). The war of sustaining social support for suicide terrorism therefore, is always won and sustained by not only the high resonating spectacular attacks, but by the economic incentives to populace in the form of social services provision. Hezbollah and Hamas have been the greatest beneficiaries of this strategy, which has been opined to be most supportive of their suicide terror campaigns (Levitt, 2006).

Naturally, conflicts and even alien occupation has always led to rebellion, which metamorphoses into suicide terror campaigns against the occupiers as a last resort, following the failure of all other forms of conventional and revolutionary warfare strategy (Speckhard & Ahkmedova, 2006). The case of the Japanese Kamikazes, who were unleashed on the allied forces, as soon as Japanese forces started losing the war (Stern, 2003). Furthermore, it has been reasoned that the enemy's making of conventional attacks very difficult by hardening their targets, especially the military and strategic installations, leaves suicide attack (the terrorists' ultimate smart bomb) as the only viable option (Bloom, 2006).The instrumental rationality of the proponents of suicide terrorism therefore suggests strategic consideration above all other issues in the context of asymmetric warfare, while not overlooking the equally important aspect of domestic political dynamics of suicide terrorism like competition and outbidding (Bloom, 2006)

Empirical Review

Collard-Wexler et al. (2013) investigated if foreign occupation triggers suicide terrorism as against domestic occupations. The study employed quantitative study on an original data set that distinguishes the different types of occupation. Finding from the study revealed that only foreign occupations have a strong and consistent effect on the incidence of suicide attacks. Study submitted that suicide attacks only become cost effective when targets are both hardened and accessible, a strategic environment that is more common to civil wars and foreign occupations than to domestic occupations.

Choi and Piazza (2017) queried the nexus between foreign military interventions and incidence of suicide attacks. The study engaged battery of statistical tests on cross-national, time-series data for 138 countries during the period from 1981 to 2005. Result that emanates from the study showed that only foreign interventions with specific features—pro-government interventions involving larger numbers of ground troops—boost suicide attacks in countries experiencing interventions.

Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice Theory

This study is underpinned by the Instrumental Rationality of Boudon (2009), which sees suicide terrorism as a social movement dependent on; individualism, understanding, rationality, consequentialism, egoism, and maximisation. However, the modification of these postulates by bounded rationality which replaced egoism with altruism, and further sees the society as an aggregation of individuals would also be adopted (Tosini, 2010a). The Value-rational behaviour of suicide terrorism therefore, is produced by conscious ethical, aesthetic, religious and other beliefs, sometimes independent of its prospects of success (Thornton, 2007). Worthy of note therefore is the fact that behaviours driven by such values can consciously embrace great personal sacrifices, which might contradict that of a classical rational actor (Bloom, 2006). Notwithstanding the peculiar nature of suicide terrorism, the fact that rational individuals choose one of the highest ranked feasible actions/outcomes available to them ought to be also borne in mind (Ward, 2002).

Additionally, the incorporation of non-material, selfless or normative ends in the rational argument like heavenly rewards, reputational or social rewards have assisted in clarifying and rationalizing the social support for suicide terrorism, in that the individual participants and the society stands to gain something, tangible or intangible from the suicides (Levitt, 2006). The utilitarian explanation of the choice of suicide terrorism therefore favours the rational choice explanation, as it defines the phenomena as a rational, goal-directed tactic. While Pape (2006) sees suicide terrorism as particularly effective against democracies, Bloom (2005) views it as a public good that could increase as the popularity of the attack increases, thus the outbidding phenomenon. Additionally, Hoffman and McCormick (2004) portray suicide terrorism as a form of strategic communication of the determination of the terrorists to their target audience, whereas Ismayilov (2010) emphasize the tactical advantages of suicide terror over other approaches to warfare. The utilitarian explanation therefore sees a resort to suicide terrorism as an organizational enterprise based on rational choice, supported by the environment, being a calculated tactic rather than an individual's emotional impromptu urge (Atran, 2003a).

In adopting rational choice theory for this study reinforces that culture not only bounds rationality but defines it by providing the context and criteria for recognizing and judging rationality, which cannot exist in a pure form outside of social context is valid (Jasper, 1997).

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research design to interrogate the influence of politics as a purveyor of social support for suicide terrorism. The study relies solely on secondary data. The research is conducted by examining literature concerning the suicide terrorism, foreign military occupation, search for political

legitimacy by terror cells, and exploitation of enemy Counter-Terror Strategy, all in efforts for social support for suicide terrorism. The literature was obtained through publicly available material, non-serial publications, official reports, and conferences has been included particularly if they have been cited by other references.

Discussion of Findings

The result gotten from empirical literature shows that politics especially national liberation has reportedly played a prominent role in the mobilization of social support for suicide terrorism, though it is opined to be most effective when garnished with other grievances (Pape & Feldman 2010). The love for homeland could therefore be blamed for the suicide terror campaigns in Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Palestine and even Chechnya (Pape 2005). Nevertheless, this research upholds the opinion that religious appeal especially that of militant Islam among Muslims generates stronger social support for suicide terrorism than politics (Task Force, 2011). Finally this study aligns with the study of Collard-Wexler et al. (2013); Choi and Piazza (2017)

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study conclude that that most militant groups employ political narratives in generating social support for their suicide terror endeavours, though at varied quantity depending on the environment. Government alignment with foreign countries with strange policy attributed to threatening local beliefs could lead to "us and "them" particularly when foreign military operation is visible. The inability of government to provide basic social supports to citizens could also be leveraged upon.

The study recommends that government with Foreign Military Occupation should extensively review such while non kinetic approach that addressed socioeconomic imbalances should be addressed to counter the narratives of terror cells group who may engage in social services to enjoy political legitimacy against the government.

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