WHEELING TERROR: A PSYCHOSOCIAL VIEW OF VEHICLES AS A WEAPON OF TERROR

Karen Wharton

(Postgraduate Student, MA IREL Global Program, Webster University, Missouri, USA)

A mainstay of United States (U.S.) economy an automobile has now become a weapon of terror, leaving us defenseless as we garble for an offense. For all the worrying that terrorist attacks will become more sophisticated, it took everyone by surprise when such a rudimentary object was used as a weapon of terror.

Millions of defense money has been spent on technology to protect mainly against cyberattacks, but the use of a common object (a car) was overlooked. The shift to such an unusual kind of attacks has become more prevalent in the last few years. Seven countries throughout Europe and two states in the U.S have been affected by this horrific wave of terror related vehicular attacks.

As depicted on CNN "Terrorist Attacks by Vehicle Fast Facts." Jerusalem — October 22, 2014 – An infant girl and a tourist are killed when a driver swerved into a crowd at a light rail station; France — July 14, 2016 – Bastille Day celebrations in Nice, a man drove a truck into a crowd killing 84 people; Germany — December 19, 2016 – A man drove a tractor trailer into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people; England —March 22, 2017 – A man drives a Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) into a crowd on the sidewalk along the Westminster Bridge in London, killing at least four; Sweden — April 7, 2017 - Four people are killed when a truck drove into pedestrians in the center of Stockholm. Spain — Aug 17, 2017 - Van struck and killed 13 pedestrians in "Barcelona Terror Attack." U.S. — March 3, 2006 – A man drove a SUV into a crowd at the University of North Carolina (NC), injuring nine. November 28, 2016 - At Ohio State University, 11 people are injured by a car and knife attack. And most recently August 20, 2017 - A man drove a car into a counter-protesters crowd in NC killing 1 injuring nineteen. Sadly, I can go on and on.

Hopefully, you have notice a common theme the use of vehicles as a weapon of terror. Ganor (2004) believes conventional warfare cost has force terrorist to seek a more convenient and cheaper means of achieving their political goals. However, the broader problem of "wheeling terror" is much more sinister.

Like 9/11 terrorist has brought the "war on terror" home onto our streets, methodically inflicting perpetual psychological fear. This deliberate act, aims to mentally change society's view of freedom by instantaneously replacing it with fear. The push to change people's psychology is the ultimate intent of terrorist, as seen in United States 9/11 attacks, Stockholm truck attack April 2017 and many more.

According to (Ganor, 2004), modern day terrorist intent is to undermine the government, demoralized the public and spread panic, using the media to show, "an attack on one is an attack on all" ideology. This article seeks to examine the psychosocial predictors of terror fear on society when freedom is challenge.

This psychological battle is not uncommon it was seen after an anthrax scare in the U.S. when people question if they should open their mails. These vexing questions linger on in society's mind long after the assault. Vehicles once looked as a source of freedom has now bring into question one's view of freedom and the price we must pay to maintain it. The tarnished public image of automobiles as objects of fear is no accident.

Automobiles were about economic status, being American, and for many a way to get from one place to another. Generations of automobile lovers, were inspired by media images of freedom —driving, with windblown hair in rolled down convertibles going 90 miles per hour on an open highway. In contrast to, media images of carnage, a car plowing into pedestrians with bodies flying everywhere. These images instantly, cause automobiles to lose some of its glory and pave a way towards a conservative shift; of restricting cars movement to preserve safety. Researchers Marc Hetherington and Elizabeth Suhay, stated, "When people perceive grave threats to their safety, most individuals are susceptible to 'authoritarian thinking'." This form of thinking leads to anti-democratic view and a willingness to give up their civil liberty of freedom to achieve safety.

Thus, causing people to embrace more "big brother" conservative government and restriction on their freedom — civil liberty in exchange for feel good — safety. On the other hand, Bonanno and Jost (2006), study on correlated psychological effects post 9/11 saw a rise in vengeance attitudes, increase patriotism and stronger religion beliefs. This psychological transform sounds like a conservative dream, but it is not the ideal way to deal with threats. We are no closer now than before, in providing answers to which form of political ideology is better to deal with threats. However, (Ganor, 2004), caution us not to intensify fear of terror attacks by using it as a political manipulation tool but instead to recognize it as a tool for counterterrorism.

Many communities have been affected to some degree by how easily an object of immense pleasure could turn into so much pain. This shows how vulnerable we are to terror attacks and even our best attempts to stop it is never enough.

 Nevertheless, we believe that terrorism is a battle that could be won with more counterterrorism and intelligence. This shifts pressure onto the public to recognize that we are living in a time of hate and anyone can take on terrorist behaviors to stop political and social practices. Miranda Darling Tobias argues, homegrown terrorists are not born flaming but rather frustrated and unfocused with a sense that they have to right the wrong.

This driving force ignites their flame of frustration at society who they perceived did them wrong (2006). "Thus, modern terrorism is a means of instilling in every individual the feeling that the next attack may have his or her name on it. Terrorism works to undermine the sense of security and disrupt everyday life so as to harm the target country's ability to function." (Ganor, 2004) Therefore, the best offense is to counteract fear with the ability to adapt to unexpected attacks and reject "fear of the unknown" by holding on to freedom.

Bibliography

Bonanno, G. A., & Jost, J. T. (2006). Conservative Shift Among High-Exposure Survivors of the September 11th Terrorist Attacks Conservative Shift Among High-Exposure Survivors of the September 11th Terrorist Attacks. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *3533*(September), 37–41. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324834basp2804

Ganor, B. (2004). Terrorism as a Strategy of Psychological Warfare. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, *9*(1/2), 33–43. https://doi.org/10.1300/J146v09n01_03

Hanna, J., Hartung, K., Sayers, D. M., & Almasy, S. (2017, August 12). *CNN*. Retrieved from CNN: http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-white-nationalists-rally/index.html

Hetherington, M. J., & Suhay, E. (2011). Authoritarianism, threat, and Americans' support for the war on terror. *American Journal of Political Science*, *55*(3), 546–560. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00514.x

Siman-Tov, Bodas, & Peleg, &. (2016, May 3). *CNN*. Retrieved from CNN: http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/03/world/terrorist-attacks-by-vehicle-fast-facts/index.html

Siman-Tov, M., Bodas, M., & Peleg, K. (2016). The Social Impact of Terrorism on Civilian Populations: Lessons Learned from Decades of Terrorism in Israel and Abroad. *Social Science Quarterly*, *97*(1), 75–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12254

Suhay, E. (2015). Explaining Group Influence: The Role of Identity and Emotion in Political Conformity and Polarization. *Political Behavior*, *37*(1), 221–251. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-014-9269-1

Tobias, M. (2006). The Falcon and the Falconer. *Policy*, *22*(3), 36–42. Retrieved from https://www.cis.org.au/images/stories/policy-magazine/2006-spring/2006-22-3-miranda-darling-tobias.pdf

Yang, D., & Journal, U. L. (2016). EDITORIAL security landscape . In the aftermath of these attacks , governments around the conventions and protocols 4 which relate to specific threats including attacks, (February 1977), 1183–1187.