

Terror and Sightseeing- Some odd features of an asymmetric world

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Abstract

We tend to live in a rather oxymoronic post-modern global civilisation of parallel worlds. At around the turn of the 3rd millennia, juxtaposing the swiftly globalizing so-called developed world, it has also emerged a huge, strikingly underdeveloped, and asymmetrically developing second world, too, consisting of billions of people living on the edges and prone to adopt rather fundamentalist and religiously affected political anti-globalist, and predominantly anti-Western ideologies. Typical of the antagonistic features of our postmodern world, we can witness different discourses, paradigms or civilizations co-existing and naturally yet inevitably clashing. In this odd global structure, two major trends tend to correlate and even use each other: global tourism and terror attacks of asymmetric conflicts spread around the world, both efficiently using the soft power of media discourse and interpretation. Terror acts do not randomly occur, they follow certain twisted logic patterns targeting particularly sc. global cities, major tourist destinations with global media anchors present.

Key words: tourism, mediatization, terror, asymmetric conflicts, security challenges

1. Introduction

It is quite a common, though exaggerated phrase that we live in the age of terror and constant security threats with numberless bloody actions looming upon us from every corner of the world. Weird as it may seem to the causal and politically less aware observer, this exaggerated though common standpoint proves to be distorted and fake by all standards, only the omnipresent media coverages and 'breaking news' headlines may convey and foster this anxious and frustrating feeling in the viewers of the globalised world of the 21st century.

No doubt, there are multiple, diverse security risks and environmental security and ecologic threats, which cause recurring headaches for the decision-makers as well as for the common citizens all over the world. It is a quite common intellectual position taken from ontological and hermeneutic conception that reality is not merely what surrounds us, but rather what we perceive and sense of *in sine*, or I would say what we are presented to grasp of it by external power factors, for instance the effective media corporations and political spin doctors. Thus, the postmodern world of the 20th century and, particularly that of the cyber and online media-driven age of the new millennium works and manifests itself based upon the findings and concepts of McLuhan on media guidance and manipulation (McLuhan, 1964). Hence by paraphrasing him into our times, I can assert that the medium of bad news has become the real message itself. In other words, the constant newsreel captions, breaking news headlines and social media information bubbles with the attached commercial ads do influence and affect our everyday lives and habits of the mind in quite a negative way, which altogether evidently amplify and foster our frustrations, mixed feelings of anxiety, alienation and especially lack of security. As many experts keep saying, it is not only the asymmetric 4th generation warfare is raging in the world, but also it is featured by sharp clash and even struggle over information resources and means of propaganda (Resperger et alia, 2013).

In my study I tend to highlight upon the correlations between the media coverages and headline news-editing

communication strategies of the mainstream news corporations and the new kind and forms of armed conflicts, especially terror assaults, particularly focusing on those which have taken place in the Western world (Europe, the USA) and share Islamic roots or affiliations.

My basic presumption is that these two factors, which tend to dominate our everyday lives and habits of the mind, do strengthen and foster as well as benefit each other in various ways following the distorted logic of McLuhanian media world. Besides the theoretical meta-discourse paradigm defined by McLuhan and also Michel Foucault on depicting and interpreting our reality (Foucault 1966), — or juxtaposing various postmodern realities — I intend to base my assumptions and findings primarily on the facts of World Tourism Organisation (WTO) as well as on the outstanding trend-setting projections and inspirations provided by the *Global Trends Report 2030* of the National Intelligence Council (NIC).

In my study paper I am going to look at and analyse the theoretical setting and media presentation of some outstanding terror attacks and their motivational background, moreover paying attention to the effects of global mass tourism, which interestingly enough recently has also been labelled as *sustainable/unsustainable tourism* or even *total tourism* by the tourism industry pundits (Tourism and Security, 2017), most likely inspired by the prevailing attributions of the adjective *total* in pompous expressions like *total war*, *total terror*, *total media* etc.

Having taken this stance, I consider it important to define the basic concepts to be used in the study, such as tourism, sustainable and total tourism as well as terror acts, which altogether prove to be rather quirky, foggy notions, which are supposed to be quite difficult to grab and find a genuine, commonly accepted definition for them.

2. Tourism: life on the go

*‘Terror yesterday, sightseeing tomorrow’
a tour guide’s report*

Tourism has undeniably become one of the most popular pastime activities of citizens of the developed world (the EU, Canada, the USA, Australia) as well as of the developing one (primarily, the Far Eastern countries including the quarter billion Chinese new middle-class customers) at the turn of the 3rd millennia, consequently it constitutes a significant economic income factor involving approximately a quarter of the Earth’s 7.5 billion residents and accounting for 7.61% of global GDP, which in terms of real currency amounts to a staggering 2.31 trillion US\$ in 2016 alone (Statista, 2017).

No wonder, people are on the move, yet this perception may also be controversial and biased, since it refers only to less than the quarter of our planet’s sharply rising population, furthermore this uncontrolled trend may pose significant security risk and environmental threat with quite gloomy consequences. Social scientists share the view that people of the *global village* — which, on the other hand, as a kind of postmodern oxymoron of McLuhan is becoming quite predominantly urban (World Bank, 2016) — live, basically in two asymmetric, parallel worlds. In other words, less than half of the Earth’s population conduct their everyday lives hooked on the internet (ITU, 2017) and get around the world quite freely, while the other bigger bulk, almost 4 billion people lack even the basic life amenities, such as fresh water, nourishment, electricity; not to mention costly internet access requiring basic literacy and info-communication skills.

The end of cold war and the disintegration of the *Communist Block* meant the ushering in the new, rather borderless, globalised age of new opportunities and of new threats, as well. In terms of global security and military issues, the United States of America has become a lonely hegemon, a unipolar power looking for her own way and place in the new postmodern, globalised and digital age. Moreover, having been recovered from the daydreaming illusions of the great American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 1992),

the US-led developed world has been facing new kind of threats and security concerns manifested in the activities of external, particularly Islamic terror groups, *failing* or hostile *rogue states* (notably Iraq, Somalia, Iran, North Korea) supplemented with the re-shaping Russian Federation as well as by the new challenges posed by the ubiquitous cyber-world dark lords.

The sense and expression of bigger freedom in the world manifested itself in the skyrocketing figures of global tourism, which has also resulted in the fact that there are virtually no white or blank spots left inaccessible on the continents for paying visitors, with the exception of some dark, impenetrable and insignificant corners of the jungles of Amazonia or the Congo. It has become quite common to take part in special costly tours to the cutting-edge expeditionary science-centre of the South Pole or even to get a lofty space-lift ride to the International Space Station 400 km above us, not to mention the very popular and also extremely polluting gigantic, luxurious floating fun-fair-like cruise-liner voyages around the world. This worldwide trend on almost unlimited scale is labelled as *total tourism*, which, similarly to the irresponsible manners of energy consumption of the world does not seem to be sustainable in the long run.

Evidently, due to the asymmetric global trends, the uneven economic development courses and particularly due to the lower fuel prices of the 2000's with the emergence of the so-called low budget airlines, more and more people can afford previously unimaginable itineraries and dream-destinations, which also implies unprecedented consequences and impacts upon nature and society as well. There are numerous media reports abounding in newsreels on constant traffic jams during the holiday seasons, overcrowded and dirty beaches and congested, polluted city centres or even hidden mountain tops around Machu Picchu or the Alpine ski-resorts suffering from the flood of tourists swarming there from all corners of the world. Mostly top touristy venues from where the local residents desperately tend to flee e.g. Venice, Nice, Rome, Florence, Barcelona, just to mention the most well-known flag-holder top destinations in Europe in the fight against uncontrolled total mass tourism. Within the limited boundaries of an essay like this, I cannot get involved into discussing and analysing the striking, mostly disastrous environmental as well as irreversible globalising cultural effects of mass tourism — several studies have already explored this issue really thoroughly — therefore, I focus and highlight upon the security risks and consequences of globalised tourism with special correlations to new forms of terror attacks taking place in so-called global cities.

It is a common experience that widespread tourism and global media corporations have jointly made our world shrink and become a kind of *global village*, where at least half of the local radio, TV and online daily media reports are on international issues, thus the general public may have the – rather transient and false - sensation that they are integral part of the big picture, that they have somehow become global players on the international stage of affairs. No wonder, any volcano eruption in Japan, disastrous traffic incident in India or bloody terror attack in Bali island or in Nice do cause — nevertheless irrelevantly — local shockwave effects and consequences, even in remote places like Hungary or Finland. People of the developed world, predominantly are shifting into a dynamic and urban lifestyle on scale and quality unprecedented in human history. This fact also implies unprecedented cultural, ecologic, economic as well as security policy consequences and effects, which, on the other hand share twofold or rather controversial interpretations among scientists of various disciplines. Nonetheless, there are common grounds among the intense inter-connectedness of the globalized world (Khanna, 2016), the undeterred trend of travelling and the asymmetric-form of armed conflicts penetrating into the global focal points.

3. The world of asymmetric conflicts

According to scholars and experts of military and security studies, we have been living in a world featured by international or globalized terror threats ever since the 1972 bloody terror assault of the Israeli sportsmen by

the Palestinian terrorists during the Munich Olympic Games. Furthermore, at this point the two main ideas, namely terror and tourism (including global sports events) discussed in this paper tend to merge and come to a common ground, thus I consider it particularly important to define the accurate meanings and connotations of these terms used. So, what can be called an act of terror, and who can be considered to be a terrorist? Interestingly enough, there are about 200 diverse definitions in this matter taken from various vantage points, — e.g. rebel, rioter, lunatic, insurgent or freedom fighter — therefore, it proves to be one of the murkiest and most controversial ideas or terms widely used on a daily basis. Commonly we could assert that a terrorist is someone who is pursuing a struggle for a cause illegally, without any set rules of engagement and with any weapons available.

In this respect, discussing security and military science issues, the classic wisdom of 18th century general Clausewitz comes quite handy; his classic definition of war is ‘an act of violence to compel our opponent to fulfil our will’ (Clausewitz, 2013). One might as well say that the so-called terrorists tend to achieve the very same goal, only through other non-conventional means and weapons available for them in an asymmetric chain of conflicts raged for either territorial (autonomy, independence), political-ideological, even individual interests or most often for political-religious reasons. Terrorists basically have neither armies, sovereign states, nor formal war ethics behind them to comply with, thus seemingly they enjoy absolute freedom to achieve their primary political goals.

The other synonym often mentioned in this war context is *asymmetric*, which, nowadays refers to a new type of warfare when great powers clash with small counterparts and tend to fail or lose the war for various reasons. As Professor Mack, the creator of the phrase *asymmetric conflict* highlighted (Mack, 1975), although this concept is new, it has also been known for centuries whenever talking about group of insurgents, guerrillas or armed civilians fighting against a much stronger and more organised foe. Even the revered Clausewitz makes also a hint on the opposition of armed civilians struggling for political, religious or any other reasons. When discussing the opposition of population, the famous Prussian military theorist and army leader highlights the importance of crushing not solely the enemy army’s will and capacity to fight but also dominating the hostile population’s will to resist and moral stance as well as their information resources in order to be able to completely win the war (Clausewitz, 2014). Nevertheless, I could also recall the ancient-old military wisdom of the revered Sun-Tsu’s on the ‘supreme art of war of subduing your enemy without fighting’ (Sun-Tsu, 2014), which has also inspired many great leaders as well as propagandists along the centuries.

Unfortunately, as history shows the military leaders and strategists keep forgetting about the importance of soft power and secondary or tertiary priority issues in warfare, such as the enemy’s morale and opposition will, the psychologic (religious) and information warfare manners, which altogether prove to be fatal mistakes even hindering victory as it happened in the case of Vietnam, Iraq or even the Daesh-ISIS.

First the opposition against the enemy may manifest through insurgency activities with the support of the population then in later stages it may also turn into terroristic and more destructive opposition with soft targets, civilian and enemy population in their primary scope (Resperger et alia, 2013, 28). Taken all these features into consideration, it may seem plausible and evident though it is still not a mainstream concept in military circles that one cannot win a war or armed conflict with 2nd or 3rd generation conventional army battalions against an enemy applying new generation, atypical, non-conventional guerrilla warfare tactics (ibid., 55).

From this vantage point, the asymmetric, guerrilla style or 4th generation wars (ibid, 2013, 24, 53) of the postmodern age do share the same basic features correlating with present day terror activities as well: clash or conflict of asymmetric opposing forces with totally uneven and asymmetric weaponry and organisation. This scenario would usually involve sovereign military forces vs. non-state, non-conventional, para, - or non-military armed forces in the conflict raging within the structures of civilian society and not on the army

battlefields, primarily for non-military but rather for sophisticated ideological purposes.

Paraphrasing the witty remark of Henry Kissinger from 1969 referring to the successful Vietnamese guerrilla-warfare against the mighty and superior American military, the guerrillas (and, nowadays, I would also add the terrorists) always win unless they lose (Kissinger, 1969, 214), due to the sheer fact that they pursue asymmetric warfare style against clumsy conventional sovereign military forces. Namely, they wage subtle psychologic and informational battles against their far bigger, superior and mightier enemy. Evidently, it is very difficult to counterstrike efficiently in terms of military might against media and psychologic campaigns targeting primarily the homeland population and political decision-makers, as the numberless decolonising wars of the post-WWII period also manifested from Algeria to Indochina.

That is exactly the case in present days' so-called Islamic-rooted terrorism, when a tiny, yet very militant religious zealot minority of the vast Muslim world of almost 2 billion believers keep fighting for regional — or even global — fundamentalist, theocratic state, and target the Western power structures, civilians and the civilisation in general. The masterminds behind the terror attacks seem to be former army servicemen and educated people as well, who are aware and can proficiently apply the Western online social media resources for sharing and disseminating their ultra-conservative, distorted politico-religious ideas, basically stemming from the 8th century revisited Islamic doctrines, among the frustrated, mostly unemployed youngsters of the 21st century.

These small terrorist cells of autonomous and rather untraceable status, follow the orders of their ultra-religious consciousness as well as their online spiritual and military leaders, mostly from the Middle Eastern caliphates (Syria, Iraq and Saudi-Arabia) or Afghanistan's and Pakistan's Taliban theocratic tribal regimes. They pursue a very simple though efficient strategy: choose a high profile, global city target and strike with the cheapest available means of destruction, such as knife, axe, rifle, rented truck or car. While the so-called classic political terrorist groups of the post-world war decades (like IRA, ETA, Red Brigades, Red October etc.) targeted high-profile decision makers, members of jurisdiction and law enforcement, the new kind of politico-religious groups stemming from Muslim communities tend to choose a different attitude and strategy. The so-called Islamic terrorist groups target the society, the low-profile common citizens so as to push the people into political action against their own leaders and to change the *status quo* for the desired objectives of the terrorist groups. Their main communicational strategic idea is to get into the news, rule the headlines for a couple of days, get media coverage for their actions and secondly make chaos, create fear and anxiety among the great masses of target society, and to make ordinary citizens feel much less safe and secure in their home country, to create mistrust in law enforcement as well as in the power of authorities (Kis-Benedek, 2016).

All these asymmetric warfare strategies foster real changes and success unless they are counter-balanced and handled efficiently by the authorities and society. For instance, the Chinese way of tackling the Uyghur insurgencies and terror acts with total media-control and online firewall system is a unique, efficient though quite out-of-scope method for Western democratic states. Moreover, it is also essential to use soft power tools (Kissinger, 1969), such as broad media and communication campaign, educational and psychologic set of actions, welfare state benefits instead of rather counter-productive hard power military tools against this kind of insurgency and terror actions (Mack, 1975). At this point, I might as well refer to the famous theory of Samuel P. Huntington on the clash of totally different and juxtaposing civilisations, where he also emphasizes the importance of ideas, principles, the influence of soft power (Huntington, 1998) versus the brutal power of conventional military forces which may cause the diabolic spinning wheel of violence, as it has been the case for instance in Israel/Palestine. The root of civilizational/religious conflicts — displayed through various proxy-wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, or Libya - between the West, led by the USA and the so-called Islamic world, led by the Shiite Iran and the Sunni Saudi-Arabia, as two heraldic regional power-players, lies in the mutually shared over-exaggerated cultural, religious and political supremacy attitude that should be given up or at least

extenuated for the sake of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. All the same, there are quite little chances for this to take place for the very same reasons.

4. Conclusions

As we could realize on the previous pages, I have attempted to highlight upon the correlation of global mass or so to say *total tourism*, and the features of asymmetric warfare with media influence, furthermore the spread of terror acts recently. Evidently the two factors have totally different projectile and origin, yet they tend to strengthen and even benefit from one another, since global cities function as primary destinations, as well as terror target venues where the media correspondents anchoring there can provide full live media coverage on any event taking place in that premise.

Tourism is skyrocketing and is getting to be one of the major power-houses of global economy generated by billions of people on the move eager to spend money and time to explore the world, yet the other half of the world's population basically lack the means and skills to leave the boundaries of their slums. A new term has also emerged, total tourism referring to the omnipresent and overwhelming impact power of mass tourism ranging from the South Pole through the congested waterways of Venice to the peaks of Machu Pichu with its controversial ecologic, economic and cultural consequences.

Obviously, the great flood of organised movement of people involves side-effects as well, such as illegal migration, trafficking, epidemics and terrorism. Insurgents and terror activists do prefer global venues and events with outstanding media presence and impact, consequently the touristy places and favourite destinations are more likely to become genuine terror attack sites as well. Due to their asymmetric warfare style, operational modality and closed ideological-religious ideas they are meant to be spotted and revealed pre-emptively with great difficulties by the authorities.

It is a common fact that ideas, particularly religiously embedded ones, and political principles cannot be efficiently crushed and defeated by brute military force. The transcendently rooted religious ideas and political ideologies tend to prevail and keep up with the swift changes of the cyber-age, though as the much-quoted Global Trends Report 2030 (NIC, 2013) also emphasizes that the classic 20th century *isms*, like fascism, communism fade away, though the ideological messages of nationalism and globalist liberalism persists and keep up with the rapidly changing times and tend to manifest themselves in various forms and manners. It is important to remember that terrorism and asymmetric warfare manners will remain operational and get inspirational resources from the more radical set of thoughts, namely chauvinism/nationalism merging with religious zeal and separatism.

As the bitter remark of Abdel Rahman al-Rashed, a Muslim scholar is echoed numberless times, 'it is certain that not all Muslims are terrorists but, – unfortunately and painfully enough – it is also true that almost all the terrorists prove to be Muslims'. Moreover, as the statistics of the major terror attacks of recent years also demonstrate, about 72% of assaults were Muslim-related or religiously-politically motivated, targeting major touristic sites, particularly in Europe and the USA, like London, Paris, Berlin, Barcelona, Boston or repeatedly New York City (START, 2016).

Terror and insurgency finds its way easily in regions and countries which are vulnerable and are at the verge of collapse, e.g. many sub-Saharan African states like Sudan, Congo, Central African Republic, Niger, Chad and Somalia or even seemingly powerful states like Nigeria, Pakistan or Indonesia. These failing or fragile countries and regions will act as time-bombs for future crises, fostering terrorism and effecting global security, too. According to the predictions of the above-mentioned Global Trends Report the present global security situation probably will not change positively in the forthcoming decades, but rather worsen providing breeding

ground for more terror activities and chaos with declining great powers like the USA, Russia, the EU and re-emerging super power block of the Far East led by China and India.

The classic idea of Clausewitz's grand war is not relevant anymore on the global theatre of international and military affairs, especially when dealing with ideological, religious and economic rifts among transnational and civilizational power blocks. Obviously, the hegemonic, unipolar power politics of *Pax Americana* is drawing to an end, consequently a multi-player, much less predictable and reliable global stage of affairs is shaping, and what is even more challenging there is no successor power on the horizon to fill the gap left by the inwardly looking USA or even EU, for the time being (N.I.C., 2012). Military strategists and security experts do claim that the so-called fifth generation of warfare and conflicts is about to unfold in the 21st century (Resperger et alia, 2015, 77) with loose global network of 'super-empowered individuals' — would-be insurgents and terrorists — facing big and rather clumsy conventional armed forces, fact that demands brand new strategy, tactics and military-security attitude, as well.

The clash and gap between the aging and spoiled people of the developed world engulfed in greedy consumerism and the billions of Asian, African, Latin American people struck by overpopulation, famine, fresh water shortages caused by global climate change as well as underdeveloped economic conditions is quite conspicuous and significant. These civilizational and economic fissures and trouble-zones tend to get broader and deeper in the forthcoming decades, and sadly enough for the humanity, there is no super-power authority or really feasible common will and sense in the international community to cope with this cluster of global problems and to find mutually benefitting solutions. The famous American philosopher comedian, George Carlin would put it wittily and quite bluntly that it is nothing wrong with our planet, only the people are nuts. (Carlin, 2006), This rather bleak scenario, dystopic yet realistic might look, unfortunately it has also prevailed almost along the entire course of human history, nonetheless it is the duty and task of the people with smart ideas and thoughts to actively turn it into a brighter future.

5. Literature

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