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# Terrorism: Two Complementary Approaches

## Terrorismo: Dos Miradas Complementarias

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### Abstract

Because of the terrorist attacks occurred in Norway on July 22, 2011, this article reviews some critical points of the phenomenon of terrorism. They have risen from social and clinical psychology. From the two disciplines of psychology they have been identified as socio-structural, psychosocial and individual, risk factors. However, in cases such as of Norway, there is a clear demand to the understanding and explanation of violent actions viewed from diverse areas (macro and individual levels) but at the same time complementary to psychology. That can contribute to prevent and/or detect potential attacks to destabilize or manipulate social behavior by using extreme and violent acts that infringe fundamental human rights.

*Key words:* Terrorism, violence, legitimacy, Norway

### Resumen

A raíz de los atentados terroristas ocurridos en Noruega el 22 de julio de 2011, el presente artículo hace una revisión de aproximaciones que sobre el fenómeno del terrorismo han sido planteadas desde la psicología social y la psicología clínica. Desde las dos disciplinas de la psicología se identifican algunos factores de riesgo de tipo psicosocial e individual. Sin embargo en casos como el de Noruega, hay una clara demanda a la comprensión y explicación de las acciones violentas, desde áreas diversas (en niveles macrosociales e individuales) complementarias de la psicología, que puedan contribuir a la prevención y/o detección de potenciales atentados que desestabilicen o pretendan manipular comportamientos sociales utilizando medios violentos, extremistas, que lesionan los derechos humanos fundamentales.

*Palabras clave:* Terrorismo, Violencia, Legitimidad, Noruega

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## Introduction

The constant conflicts between humans, the emotions generated within these conflicts and the behaviors within groups and individuals that rise from these conflicts mentioned before are some of the most interesting objects studied through psychology not only because of the collective implications from the conflict itself but because of the individual characteristics of whom are involved within. Clearly every conflict can be understood from different levels of analysis but apart from that, from different paradigms that even being so different from their theoretical construct, have the same intention on the end; understand the complexity of the human being (López-Zafra & Morales, 1999).

As indicated by Sabucedo, Blanco & De La Corte (2003), within human groups a wide variety of conflicts presents themselves and for several of these, exist a peaceful solution. However, there are certain cases where the paths of dialogue and reaching agreements do not reach the resolution of these conflicts. In these cases, some groups choose to recur to violence. Political violence is one of the clearest forms of degradation of a conflict and inside the most extreme expressions is the physical elimination of adversaries. Given the impact of such actions, the groups build explanations and justifications for their benefit allowing them to have a positive image of themselves.

Unfortunately, a big part of human history has been marked by events of extreme violence, where actions have been legitimized as female abuse, discrimination against sexual diversity, racist attacks, and segregation towards immigrants in Europe and the U.S., which in turn have led to the emergence of social groups that are opposed to these actions or perpetuate them. Javaloy (2003) gives several examples of the types of groups that deal with the rise of social situations that have not been resolved. Thus, against discrimination of afro descendents in the 60's in America, led to the rising of the Civil Rights movement, in the 70's against violations of human rights movements begin the Human Rights, in the 80's against the Westernization arise in the Arab countries and Islamic fundamentalist movements, finally in the 90's emerging anti-globalization groups, the right to a dignified death and others against genetic manipulation.

One of the characteristics of social movements is collective action of persuasion, in which "attempt to influence the beliefs and attitudes of people towards each social problem mentioned previously," legitimize their actions by damaging the reputation of the enemy (Javaloy, 2003, p.188; Sabucedo, Durán, Alzate & Barreto, 2010). For this, the terrorist groups, issued public statements, made propaganda, protests, and generally try to convey their message with all the burden of their ideological framework, as well as finding new followers of the movement.

Obviously many social movements have been responsible of the transformation of today's perspective appropriation or on behalf of a better society, as the case of the movement of peaceful resistance. However, other movements have degraded the image of their opponent and have dehumanized to the point that have chosen to communicate against the "others" with terrorist attacks.

Since September 11 of the year 2001, the word terrorism has a different meaning. This day, four commercial airplanes where hijacked and two of them where crashed into the Twin Towers in New York, one in the Pentagon and the fourth plane in an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. This attack killed approximately 3000 people, and beyond, countries like Russia, Iraq, Spain, Nepal and the UK were victims of the violent acts of groups that were once called revolutionary, fascist, anarchist, racist or fundamentalist (De la Corte Ibañez, 2001).

The autor say that in countries where the structural conditions of society are marked by armed conflict, inequality and social injustice, with expressions of state repression, terrorism of right and left wing groups and state agents, is not strange that groups emerge and whose primary means of communication were, for example, the activation of a car bomb or killing a leading representative (De la Corte Ibañez, 2001). But this does not mean that macro conditions are the only causes that affect the terrorist acts, rather than that in these kinds of contexts is a higher likelihood of the above crimes.

However, last July 22, 2011, Anders Behring Breivik, planned, organized and perpetrated to attacks, in a first attack he triggered a car bomb in Oslo's downtown, and then sailed to the island of Utoya to shoot consistently against a group of young Social Democrats, who were gathered there. These events generated several critics and opinions, even though this was not the first attack in the world or the most damaging. Though, it was the most unpredictable attack because of the characteristics of the Nordic country (El Tiempo, July 2011).

According to UNDP, in 2009 and 2010, Norway was the country with the highest human development index<sup>1</sup> in the world (PNUD, October 2009). In addition to this the Norwegian Embassy in Argentina, published on its web site, the same year, that the UNDP praised Norway's cultural freedom, and their work in terms of public policies toward ethnic integration and tolerance of immigrants (Norwegian Embassy in Argentina, 2009). But apparently none of those accomplishments were enough to prevent the so-called "best country in the world to live" to be exempt from the violent actions of Anders Behring Breivik.

<sup>1</sup> To define the human development index are taken into account life expectancy, literacy, school enrollment and gross domestic product (GDP)

According to the literature reviewed, psychology has been concerned to understand and explain the phenomena of terrorism, its agents, its multiple causes, the consequences of the attacks on the victims, why, what and how the complexity that surrounds and constitutes terrorism. With obvious limitations in generating empirical knowledge from different perspectives and psychological approaches. The approach to the phenomenon is a challenge for the discipline, as the attempt to cover most of the associated factors, and get out of the way any pathological explanation, attacks as the one occurred in Norway are causing confusion and a new invitation to rethink the knowledge constructed so far.

With this intention, below we will take some publications, from 2 perspectives: individual psychological and psychosocial, make possible the understanding of terrorist events and finally the production of some conclusions and hypotheses to stimulate research in this area, Obeying what ethically represents the role of research psychologist committed to the generation of knowledge, techniques and procedures that contribute to the welfare and quality of human life.

### *Definitions of terrorism*

According to De La Corte Ibañez (2001), the definitions of terrorism go beyond the destruction of property or violent action against life, beyond that, the strategies for implementing the violent acts include the consideration of psychological and social consequences, in that sense the number of casualties or physical damage to buildings, that are not part of the terrorist target, what matters is how meaningful and representative the target is, and how much unbalance is capable of generating the terrorist attack.

Nevertheless, a definition that covers all forms of terrorism, their motivations, their structures and their genesis, is not possible because there are many types of terrorism and different topographies of it, that changes over time and what the context demands; this variety in definitions, understandings and explanations brings, in words of Trujillo, Moyano, Leon, Valenzuela & Gonzalez-Cabrera (2006) "cognitive dissonance (p. 291)" or how Fernández (2007) explains a transition to the "psychology of ignorance."

Based on the statements by Fernandez (2007), and sharing his dismay over the difficulty in understanding and explanations of terrorism from psychology, we agree with their statement in which terrorism is an effective behavior to intimidate, cause fear, prevent actions to promote freedom and social justice, as the word says terrorize the survivors. It is no coincidence far leap to say that the terrorist actions to fulfill their function, because for more complex as these behaviors, their repetition over time, with different hues and intensities, (or in terms of behavior, with different topographies).

Examples of the erosion of confidence in the security agencies and their agents are a product of terrorism, from which in terms of justifying violent acts as the need to defend against "enemies" and the constant appearance of supposed heroes to "strike force and noble heart" will saved oppressed multitudes by small groups that called themselves: terrorists. In the case of Behring, the murder of at least 76 people were referred by him as "something dreadful but necessary" "because according to his logic issued on the Internet, Europe faces the threat of multicultural invasion".

Although as noted before, there are many forms of expression of terrorism, in this section we make special mention of state terrorism as one of the demonstration of violence in the most legitimate way and diffuse, in which they have silenced the voices of whoever is against the use of power in the political regime in power. Perhaps one of the most frightening features of this type of violent behavior is that the institutions that are responsible for defending citizens are directly or indirectly responsible for the disappearances and executions of their "protected ones." Then under the banner of defense, totalitarian governments have tried to resist change gestated by social movements, the brutal silencing of dissent, de-legitimizing their actions in the mass media and sending a message to all of those who oppose the form of government on which may be your nearest future: the disappearance or extrajudicial execution (Pilisuk & Wong, 2002).

So, defining terrorism as a label, which can be applied to different contexts and situations, does not result as useful as a functional analysis of the actions in a particular context, sitting on own ideologies of a group or individuals who commits the violent behaviors, behaviors that must be operationalized, otherwise, beyond explaining this type of action, which leads to the indiscriminate use of the word "terrorist" is tautological treatment of the problem and difficulties in the power of psychology in terms of detection and intervention.

### *Terrorism from a psychosocial perspective*

In this section we highlight the work done by De La Corte Ibañez, Kruglanski, De Miguel, Sabucedo & Diaz (2007). These authors present, after an interesting discussion between the levels of analysis the phenomenon of terrorism requires a proxy for psychosocial explanation, proposing seven principles: 1. "Terrorism should not be conceptualized as a syndrome (social or psychological), but as a method of socio-political influence" (p. 367). 2. "Terrorists attributes are shaped by processes of social interaction" (p. 368), 3. "Terrorist organizations can be analyzed with other social movements" (p. 268), 4. "Terrorism is only possible

<sup>2</sup> To see complete video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAwp2FnRmsE&skipconinter=1>

when the terrorists and their allies gain access to certain critical resources “(p. 369), 5. “The decisions that promotes and supports terrorist campaigns respond to collective ideological reasons “(p. 370), 6. “Actions and terrorist campaigns respond to strategic reasons, but the rationality with which terrorists operate is partial and limited “(p. 370) and finally 7. “The terrorist’s activities reflect the internal characteristics of their organizations”(p. 371).

Regarding the first principle, the authors explain that human behavior is “conditioned by the socio-frames” (p. 367) and psychobiological predispositions, as well as social influence; in general, it refers to an understanding of terrorism as a bio-psycho-social phenomenon, resulting from the interaction of multiple social processes. In this sense, terrorism’s main objective is to transmit a message, but not in any way, but strategically, in which a social group tries to modify the behavior of the other groups to exercise violence (De la Corte Ibañez et al., 2007; Lawal, 2002).

Going back to the terrorist event occurred in Norway and in connection with the principles above, there are several considerations to illustrate this case, published by the newspapers “El Mundo” and “El País” in Spain (Gallego, 2011, July 24 & Martinez, 2011, July 23) Behring said that his intention was “to send a strong signal to the performance of the Labor party, which has allowed Norway to be under a threat of being colonized by Muslim “Furthermore, and according to the fourth principle, which refers to different tips of resources; economic, technological, human and symbolic, that support terrorist activities (and even in the case of Anders Behring there are no evidence of their membership in a terrorist group), the media that documented the attack, said that he was preparing the assault for at least 9 years. Without committing any act that the law could have considered to be unlawful, Breivik purchased large quantities of fertilizers, chemicals and weapons in Norway that are not interpreted as signs of a terrorist act, but as a common behavior in farmers and hunters of the place (Herrmann, 2011, July 26).

About this case, the fifth principle suggests that Breivik actions were in fact supported by an ideology that justified the killing of 76 people, as we have said before, and according to the video that the same Breivik put on YouTube channel<sup>3</sup>, shortly before executing his plans and the manifesto that was broadcasted online, which explained is plans step by step, beginning from how to build a bomb, up to the most ambitious stage of his “conservative revolution”, this self-styled “gentleman”, express that his intention was to change the fatal destiny of Europe, invaded by Muslims and had made clear his rejection of the “cultural Marxism and

multiculturalism.” (Rodriguez, 2011, July 25 & Martinez, 2011, July 23)

Amongst the highlights section illustrated by El Mundo (Rodriguez, 2011, July 25; Gallego, 2011, July 24), taken from the manifesto where its clearly stated that: “the armed resistance is the only rational approach against multiculturalist’s regimes in Europe.” “Any Muslim may obtain forgiveness by 2020 if they decide to convert to Christianity.” Statements are still being made in Europe and in different topographies do not seem to be very different in content to some of those Latin American leaders at diverse times in our history.

Now, taking into consideration that the information is still vague about the possible connections of Breivik to Islamophobes terrorist groups and news that suggest that he would be the founder of the “European National Military Command” or “Justice Knight”, perhaps what we are witnessing today is one of the only forms of emergence of a terrorist group, whose resources are ideological (as mentioned De la Corte Ibañez et al., 2007) arguments and beliefs that allow us to understand why the Islamists are a threat to Europe. Similarly, in this specific case there is a clear identification of an enemy and a tarnished image of it, which is associated with the positive perception of himself (the terrorist) as a “misunderstood savior.” In addition, there is a logical evidence of an “the means justify the end” and hope to gestate “political solutions for the future of Europe” (Rodriguez, 2011, July 25; Gallego, 2011, July 24 & Martinez, 2011, July 23).

Other approaches from social psychology suggest that people who exhibit terrorists behaviors are those that in addition of being immersed in a violent culture, enter a time of crisis that makes them vulnerable to be recruited by terrorists organizations that link them to adopt religious, political or ethnic rules and potentiates the newest member of the group to develop beliefs and attitudes similar to those peers (Trujillo et al., 2006).

These authors notice that terrorist behavior is a clear justification and legitimating of violent acts, based on arguments so strong in the group’s eyes, avoiding cognitive dissonance and possible doubts about the means used to communicate terrorism (Barreto, Borja, Serrano & López-López, 2009; Ramírez & Levi, 2009; Trujillo, Ramirez & Alonso, 2009). Sabucedo et al., (2003) explains that in addition to legitimizing the terrorist group’s own shares, there is an external attribution of responsibility for violent actions, in which the enemy is responsible for the facts and these as well are the product of legitimate defense. This delegitimization and dehumanization include the allocation of negative values and negative qualities, or even the enemy’s association with Nazi, fascists and imperialists groups.

Other than what’s been said before, Trujillo et al., (2006) indicate that new terrorist individuals are instructed to maintain their functions and performance within the group

<sup>3</sup> To see complete video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAw2FnrmsE&skipconinter=1>

using strategies of cohesion and loyalty. As noted by Della Porta (1998 cited in Javaloy, 2003) in a so-called terrorist organization is an intergroup competition and also a strong bond marked by the ideology, objectives and a common goal. These features generate an intense depersonalization that takes place within the individual party member that may even risk his life for the group's well being.

### *Terrorism from an individual psychological perspective*

As the authors illustrate, structural and social vision of terrorism does not fully explain this phenomenon of terrorism or even an approximation to the possible causes of a social nature that increase the likelihood that such behaviors are violent. It is clear that in cases such as Norway these tests are an understatement and change from a macro-level to a more individual lever is required. However, the literature also shows that clinical approaches to terrorism have failed, partly because they have tried to explain terrorist behavior as a product of a pathological disorder. However, in the next chapter we will refer to some extent the intention to generate terrorism prevention measures that are considered individually (Gallimore, 2002; Fabick, 2002; McCarthy, 2002; Wessells, 2002).

According to studies done from a psychobiological perspective, annihilating aggression has different forms and types, depending on whether they are direct or indirect; it also depends on the actors involved in violence and other criteria of motivation. However, within the relevant results that have been made in this area and contribute to the understanding of the expression of individual violence, it has been found that there are neural mechanisms that regulate the violent behavior and it is possible to establish bases for treatment (in some types of disorders and some forms of aggression).

It is important to note, that pathological impulsive violence is correlated with factors such as; neurochemical, genetic, endocrine, ethological and neurobiological. In this order of ideas, studies have shown that in populations that have been called aggressive, there is a decrease in serotonergic system and at the same time an increased in the activity of the dopaminergic system, which apparently have a genetic origin (Gil-Verona et al., 2002). This reassures the hypothesis that the physiological states underlying aggressive responses and these stimuli covariance with stressors in the environment. Today we have found that the hypothalamus, caudate nucleus, amygdale and prefrontal cortex work together to display violent behavior, and the constant changes (stimulation or inhibition) and search for balance between the organism and the environment at specific times or various stimuli.

In another study made by Skeem, Johansson, Andershed, Kerr & Loudon (2007), with 367 Swedish prisoners convicted of attempted murder, manslaughter and involuntary

manslaughter, the researchers made a classification of its participants, including the so-called primary and secondary psychopaths. In the first case; the primaries talk of a hereditary deficiency. In the case of secondary, individuals have acquired affective disturbance from the environment. To the second group, the characteristics are attributed to hostility and cruelty, which has been made by environmental pressure to adapt emotionally to parental rejection and abuse throughout the life.

This study used instruments that explore the features of anxiety, psychopathic features, interpersonal behavior, borderline and narcissistic features, clinical characteristics and the response to treatment<sup>4</sup>. According to the results and the classification between primary and secondary psychopaths, the secondary exhibit more anxious behaviors and antisocial type psychopathic features. Secondary psychopaths show poor interpersonal functioning (irritability, social withdrawal, lack of assertiveness) and poor clinical performance (severe mental disorders, dysfunctional). In contrast, primary psychopaths were less anxious and more assertive than the secondary.

These results show us two important aspects to consider: first, violent behavior in general may be associated with the lack of socially accepted codes for the understanding and resolution of conflicts, and second, just as the hereditary characteristics (temperament) affect the expression of aggressive behaviors disproportionately.

In relation to the topic that we have been talking about throughout this article, this illustrates some of the possible bases for Breivik; The distant relationship of affection with his father and his social isolation. In particular, this last feature could be an indication that something unusual was brewing in the house of a "farmer". Only after the attacks of July 22, neighbors of Breivik, acknowledged that some of his behaviors were bizarre, like his discomfort to be visited without prior notice, and his distant or none relationship with others, however before he had committed the crimes, this man was almost unnoticed.

Among other interesting results, the matter of the individual characteristics of people who exhibit terrorists behaviors, has shown that impulsive aggression is not part of terrorist activities, precisely because the unexpected outbreak of anger could compromise the execution of the attacks or even draw the attention of military forces responsible for security (De la Corte Ibanéz et al., 2007). Indeed Breivik's case, it was not easy for his neighbors to identify (apart from the 2 behaviors mentioned before, in which the course are not sufficient to determine who is a potential terrorist) behaviors that give signal of his plans, as his attacks were carefully structured, and even more, considering he was the only one involved (known so far) in

<sup>4</sup> As the authors explain, the study participants attended the psychological service provided by the prison.

the attacks. He had to be forceful in his actions and to do so, took approximately nine years (Martinez, 2011, July 23).

For McCarthy (2002) one of the risk factors that potentiate terrorist behavior has to do with the fact that they were victims of an attack of the same nature, especially in adolescence. According to the author this is a transitional moment in the crossroads, both as an intense search for identity as for biological factors (such as hormonal changes, adrenaline increased, intense feelings and emotions, etc.). According to the learning acquired by young individuals in this transitional process and during their history, they are able to take attitudes towards groups (religious, ethnic, economic, cultural, etc.), and build their own stereotypes about them. These stereotypes are built through their experiences, modeling and information through various means to reach adolescents.

The problem with stereotypes begins when they produce a cognitive distortion, such as attributing negative characteristics to a specific person, and then generalize to a group with similar characteristics. As the author illustrates, some might attribute Muslims Dwellings characteristics involved in the attacks of 9 / 11, and behave aggressively towards all Muslims who are in their path. Another cognitive distortion is “defensive attribution” that explains how victims blame themselves for their own misfortunes, which decreases the responsibility that they share on the reality of others (McCarthy, 2002).

Apart from this, McCarthy (2002) refers to the brain function of categorization, as a tool that allows people to represent others as different from them, but also realize that their lives and their own dimensions, name, age, gender, religion, occupation, nationality, amongst others. As a result, the person is able to empathize with others and make trials to others outside their group. Most of the time, perceptions of “others” are less favorable.

In accordance with the statements mentioned before, Gallimore (2002) states that unresolved psychological traumas are a major fuel of cycles of violence and terrorism. This is because the victims (after trauma) experience feelings of fear, loss of control, helplessness and the feeling of being powerless over a situation. According to him, the trauma can be caused by disruptive events such as natural disasters, military combat, serious accident, a violent experience or a terrorist attack.

But after the trauma, in some cases, there is an intention of revenge, which is dehumanizing the enemy as he becomes a member of a group of “others” which can have any action to eliminate the enemy, and it is justified and legitimate. As it has been studied, many of the leaders of terrorist groups have been victims of personal traumas, such as the case of Adolf Hitler, who went through traumatic childhood experiences. In the case of Breivik there is no evidence on whether there was a traumatic event as such, however, the literature allows hypotheses on what may have been dysfunctional family relationships (Gallimore, 2002).

However, within the individual characteristics that describe a terrorist, Wessells (2002) and McCauley (2002), suggest that factors such as lack of care for others, or for themselves, the difficulties with empathy, intolerance towards the unknown, cognitive rigidity, lack of understanding of multiculturalism and ultimately dehumanizing perceptions of others, are aspects that are common among in those who embrace violence as a form of communication. To illustrate this we suggest you watch some of the images broadcast on the Internet, which appears Behring Anders Breivik or in which clearly shows his displeasure by Muslims in general and immigrants living in Europe today.

Similar to this, within the range of behaviors that can express an individual belonging to a terrorist group, the bond with the group plays an important role, in which determines a sense of certain level of obligation and responsibility to the group’s purposes. Sabucedo, Blanco & De La Corte Ibanéz (2003) explain that people can stay in a terrorist group to participate actively, i.e. by adding own resources as; time, money, skills, abilities, energies, and so on, and even risk or give their own lives if necessary.

Regarding this last argument Kfir (2002), states that paradoxically terrorists that blow themselves up for an ideology cause, have the conviction that they will be heroes and this way of dying is a way to live forever. For them, the idea of a struggle between good and evil or the polarity between “bad and good”, “bandits and deceived,” “the invaders and the invaded”. There is a strong belief for them that the vast majority of “the good, the misled and the invaded” are unable to fight in defense of their rights so the performance of extraordinary and beneficial feats against the villains who oppress the masses, is an honorable act, even if you have to annihilate yourself with them. For Fernandez (2007), this is similar to the Catholic religious “victims” and bomb individuals (or suicide bombers). On one hand the close mental perception<sup>5</sup>, and on the other hand the possibility to be considered in the future as altruists, cannot be explained solely by conditions, structural conditions of poverty, social processes of oppression, humiliation and social exclusion nor on a free and balanced rational choice (p. 117).

### *Terrorism in all its complexity*

According to the review presented, we want to emphasize that human behavior is a product of biological and social interaction, allowing that due to a history of learning the psychological emerge and be like a fingerprint for each subject. That’s why although the phenomenon of terrorism is studied by parts, by studying human behavior the complexity of this is aggravated. Ignoring individual factors or cultural and social development in attempt to understand

<sup>5</sup> Term that refers a closed mind, and which are taken for completion of information searches and testing of hypotheses (Kruglanski, 2000).

terrorism, can only reduce the vision that psychology can have on the subject.

Throughout this text we have referred to the attacks in Norway and his executor, since it is a case that can only be explained from an analysis of social psychology, but also refers to disciplines of clinical psychology to resume the work in research of this kind of disconcerting and unexpected realities. The invitation to understand the phenomenon of terrorists from a clinical psychology refers to a mechanistic and deterministic understanding of the phenomenon, but to improve the understanding of individual behavior in context (Cooper, Heron & Heward, 2007).

Like said before and according to what we found in our review, there are several works that reflect the intervention of social and clinical psychology in the moments after the exposure of a terrorist event (and/or violent), and although this work is critical in preventing future attacks (as we already saw), working with victims is not enough. Even more so if it only performed as a group and it ignores the individual interpretations of the events, the same meanings of the traumatic events and the grieving process and adaptation to new conditions.

We also emphasize that the understanding of terrorism and conceptualizations of the term may be sufficiently powerful and dangerous to legitimize or delegitimize the current actions of social movements and this is why the study of terrorism can only investigate conduct in context parsimoniously in a systematic, rigorous and as objective as possible, complementing psychosocial and individual looks that are juxtaposed to shape the phenomenon of terrorism.

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