

The Dirty Little Secret behind the “Global Terrorism Index” (GTI)

The Omission of Israeli Terrorism in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

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Global Research, December 06, 2014

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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The Global Terrorism Index from 2000 – 2013[1] was launched on December 5, 2014, endorsed by such luminaries as the Dalai Lama, Bishop Tutu and Jane Goodall; it describes itself as “a comprehensive study that accounts for the direct and indirect impact of terrorism in 162 countries.” The GTI not only lists the countries most affected by terrorism (Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan), and the major terrorists (Muslims: Al Qaeda, the Taliban, Boko Haram and ISIS), but also advises on the most effective ways of dealing with it, noting that terrorism is connected more to injustice than to poverty.

Produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), which also produces the Global Peace Index, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) is based on data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) which is collected and collated by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), which is supported by the Department of Homeland Security.

A Self-Serving Definition of Terror Incidents?

The Global Terrorism Index uses data from START’s Global Terrorism Database (GTD) which includes incidents meeting the following criteria:

1. The incident must be intentional – the result of a conscious calculation on the part of a perpetrator.
2. The incident must entail some level of violence or threat of violence — including property violence, as well as violence against people
3. The perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors. This database does not include acts of state terrorism.

In addition to this baseline definition, two of the following three criteria have to be met in order to be included in the START database from 1997:

....The violent act was aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal.

....The violent act included evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) other than the immediate victims.

....The violent act was outside the precepts of international humanitarian law.

There is a contradiction in the definition of terrorist incidents in the study. While the GTI claims that their database only includes acts which are contrary to international humanitarian law, the “two out of three” criteria allows for legal actions to be included. Legal actions included in the GTD database are Palestinian resistance attacks on the Israeli military. [2]

A unique feature of the GTI is described as a “lagged scoring”, or replicating a terror event for up to five years to weight the estimated psychological impact of a terror event. Examples of such scoring were given as the bombing of a marketplace or the 2011 massacre in Norway of 77 youth.

Global Terror Database Notes and Anomalies

A cursory look at the Global Terror Database[2] for Israel indicates various problems. Some of the listed incidents are inadequately documented, with “unknown” location. Actions attributed to Hamas are counted despite what should have been its state exclusion and the exclusion for legal actions. The “West Bank and Gaza Strip” is listed but the incidents involving Palestinians are far from complete.

The Terror Omission

It is only in Appendix C that the Global Terrorism Index mentions that despite a “*notable amount of terrorism*” in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), this region is excluded “*by Global Peace Index convention*”. Since the GTI was supposed to be using the START Global Terrorism Database, it is not clear why the Global Peace Index “convention” was relevant; also, the GPI’s source, the Economist Intelligence Unit, does include the Palestinian Territories. By excluding the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem, and pre-2006 Gaza Strip from the survey, the attacks by Israeli settlers are omitted.

It becomes apparent why the occupied Palestinian territories were excluded when the incidence of Israeli settler violence is examined. According to their definition of terrorism, the Israeli settlers’ violence not only qualifies as terrorism, but puts them near the top of the listing of the most violent terrorists. With over 1750 violent settler attacks fully documented from 2006 – 2013[3], the only group credited with more terror attacks was the Taliban, with 2757 incidents from 2002 – 2013. Al Qaeda’s 1089, Boko Haram’s 750 and ISIL’s 492 attacks aren’t even close.[4] When the numbers of settler attacks on Palestinians are combined with the number of non-military Israeli attacks on the Arabs *within* Israel, the problem of Israeli violence within the tiny state can be seen to be one of staggering proportions. *Yet, according to the GTI, Israel was not in the 20 worst states for terrorism.*

Moreover, the number of violent incidents, as the report points out, should be weighted by factors reflecting the psychological impact on a victim community. About half of the incidents listed in the GTI report were from explosions, which typically aim for a broader, less personal, target community. The settler attacks on Palestinians tend to be of a more personal nature: shootings, running down civilians with vehicles, beatings, and damage or destruction of civilian property, such as razing agricultural land and raiding houses. Children have been frequent targets, as are Palestinian farmers and workers. Because settlers are allowed to attack Palestinians with impunity from prosecution and often target those whose neighbouring lands they want, settler attacks tend to be more traumatic and should be accorded the full psychological weighting factor.

Are Israeli Settlers Comparable to Muslim terrorists?

Although the actions of Israeli settlers fit the definition of terrorism, can they be considered as comparable to the organizations accused of terrorism? The Muslim organizations accused of being terrorist are a variety of political and/or religious ideological movements that typically arose as a reaction to western power. Israeli settlers are by definition people who have chosen to violate international humanitarian laws by living on territory they have no right to; the settler movement is led by right-wing, religious extremists. That some settlers make the choice for economic motives is similar to the ISIS or Taliban fighters who join because they need the wages.

Additionally, settler attackers are doubly guilty of terrorism: the act living illegally on Palestinian land fits this definition of terrorism; subsequent attacks on Palestinians are further acts of terrorism.

The Global Implications of Not Naming Settler Attacks as “Terrorism”

The Israeli settlements — all of which are illegal — have been identified as a major impediment to peace. The refusal of a major “global” terrorism report to name the Israeli settlers as one of the groups most responsible for terrorism not only misrepresents a major source of regional violence but exposes the Global Terrorism Index as a propaganda tool that supports a U.S. agenda.

In recent years, governments have been attempting to thwart terrorism by blocking supportive fund-raising. When it comes to Israeli settlements, however, the US and Canada actually encourage fund-raising by giving organizations (such as Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC) and the Jewish National Fund) financial support in the form of donor tax-deductions.

Charities which provide funds for the Israeli settlements should be regarded as terror-financing organizations. They should not only lose their tax-deductible status, but they should be banned because they support the violation of international humanitarian law. The terror-financing laws that are being strictly enforced for Muslim charities should be applied to Christian and Jewish charities as well. Governments that do not recognize settler violence as terrorism are feeding what Naomi Klein once termed “the engine that keeps the War on Terror running”: injustice in Israel.

Notes

1. The Global Terrorism Index is at: http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/-Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report%202014_0.pdf
2. Global Terror Database on Israel: <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=-israel&sa.x=0&sa.y=0>
3. Annual reports of the Palestinians Center for Human Rights Gaza (PCHRGaza) at: http://www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=40&Itemid=172,

Israeli settler attacks from 2000-2013 accounted for 63 deaths, and from 2006 – 2013 at least 1766 violent attacks. (From 2002 – 2013, there were 35 deaths and over 1750 attacks documented.)

While PCHRGaza has published weekly reports that have included settler violence since 1997, it only started to compile the total number of settler attacks in their annual reports from 2006 onwards. One would have to examine the weekly reports for 2000 to 2005 to obtain the annual totals that should have been used for the Global Terrorism Index's 2000 - 2013 study.

The PCHRGaza noted on at least some of their annual reports that their totals for Israeli settler attacks were not complete because they included only those for which they had documentation. Al Haq and the UN also kept documentation of settler attacks, only some of which overlap PCHRGaza's.

4. Global Terrorism Index "Targets and Tactics, 2000 - 2013": totals of incidents by group p. 51

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