

ECO-TERRORISM: An Excuse for Terrorism

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ABSTRACT:

The concept dealt with in the article is relatively new and an evolving notion. The subject matter of the article was in the media spot light for a good number of days recently. It is much discussed yet mysterious topic. The discussion on the concerned subject matter was quite limited by the news agencies of our country. It was limited to only a hand-full of learned and scholarly people. All the debates and discussions held were beyond the understanding abilities of semi-educated and uneducated masses of our country. Hence, it becomes crucial to explain the topic in detail. The theme of the article has deep connections with prestige and national security of our nation. The article aims at bringing out the meaning and nature of eco-terrorism. It discovers the ways through which terrorism can be spread using natural environment. It also takes into consideration misuse of the concept in current world scenario.

Eco-terrorism also known as ecological terrorism is a relatively new concept. It basically means using environment or nature to cause terrorism. It involves causing voluntary as well as accidental harm to the environment, human life and destruction of property. The act of eco-terrorism is known as “ecotage”, it is a word formed by combination of two different words “eco” and “sabotage”. Hami Alpas has divided eco-terrorism into two different components. Firstly, where individuals or groups are environmental “activists”, carrying out actions against industries, companies or even governments that they believe are harming the environment, as a means to attract attention to their cause. Second is where the environment is used as a weapon to harm an opponent.¹

There are two aspects of this definition of eco-terrorism. The first aspect is positive to some extent, because it promotes protection of environment by nature lovers from the industries, companies and governments associated with commercialization of environment and exploitation of ecosystem for developmental activities. The second aspect is hazardous in nature, as it involves conversion and usage of natural environment as a weapon of destruction. The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation defines eco-terrorism as “ the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally-oriented, sub national group for environmental-political reasons, aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature.”² However, eco-terrorism need not necessarily be a voluntary action, at times it can be caused due to certain negligent acts or human errors.

Initially the acts of eco-terrorism were deliberate in nature against the individuals, organisations and governments involved in exploitation. As time advanced and modernisation took over the concept became broader and wider. There are several ways through which eco-terrorism can be spread. The main sources of

1. See, Hami Alpas, Environmental Security and Ecoterrorism, p.31.

2. <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/testimony/the-threat-of-eco-terrorism>

terrorism by the use of natural environment consist of wildfires, toxication of reservoirs, poisoning of food supply sources and house hold water bodies, etc. The act of eco-terrorism can also be committed trans-nationally. When a nation destroys or makes attempts to destroy the environmental structure of any other country using devastating ammunition through land, air or sea, the nation is considered to be spreading cross-border eco-terrorism.

There are many catastrophic events that have occurred in the past which hint towards real-life examples of eco-terrorism. In the year 1980, a group of environmental activists called “EARTH FIRST,” started a civil disobedience movement engaging in the activities like tree spiking. They hammered a nailin to the tree to prevent it from being cut down. Similarly, the faceless eco-terrorist group known as Earth Liberation Front (ELF) started its operations in the year 1992. They were involved in a practice which they named “monkey wrenching,” it consisted of deliberate actions to destroy public or private property and sabotage. The US Department of Homeland Security officials suspected that terrorist group Al Qaeda may try to poison food sources and water bodies in order to spread eco-terrorism within the territories of United States of America. The Bhopal gas tragedy which occurred in the year 1984 by the leakage of methyl isocyanate, lead to the death of thousands of people. The tragedy is categorised under eco-terrorism by many environmentalists. However, some people have argued that it was merely a mishap or human error.

I. ECOTERRORISM USED AS AN EXCUSE FOR TERRORISM

The word eco-terrorism made headlines after Pakistan government decided to accuse the Government of India for act of ecoterrorism. The decision came as a protest against the claims of the Indian Air Force that they conducted an air strike on training camps of Jaish-e-Mohammed, a terrorist group, using 12 Mirage 2000 fighter jets.³ The Pakistan government plans to lodge complaints of act of eco-terrorism with UN against India for air strikes. They are making all possible efforts to portray the strike conducted on training camps of JeM as an attempt to destroy environmental structure. In the past, India has accused Pakistan of infiltrating and operating militant groups in the territory of Jammu and Kashmir across the line of control. Pakistan has continuously denied the accusation for many years.

However, the Indian intelligence agencies had evidence to prove that militants groups and training camps had been operating from the territory of Pakistan. This time they were caught off guard as 12 fighter jets of the Indian Air Force located and targeted the JeM training camps in and around the borders of Pakistan. The people on the other side of the border do not agree to any of these claims by the Indian government. On the contrary, they are of the opinion that the fighter jets of Indian Air Force did not attack any JeM training camp but they

3. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1094307/india-pakistan-news-war-latest-attack-air-strike-border-UN>.

have destroyed a dozen of pine trees and caused eco-terrorism through air strikes within the territories of Pakistan.

The way Pakistan has handled terrorist funding accusations from the other side of the border has been quiet comical. The respective heads of Pakistan government, Pakistan military forces and the opposition has given different statements regarding the on-going crisis with an underlying essence of uncertainty. It appears that Pakistan authorities are trying hard enough to cover one obvious truth with a hundred illogical lies. The deceit game has reached to a level where truth has been split into two versions. The first version is the one which Indian government claims. It is backed by proofs and reasons. It is to an extent believed widely in the international scenario. The second version of truth is the one which is being portrayed by the government and military of Pakistan. It gives an impression of a well planned and strategically constructed form of truth. These two different versions of truth contradict each other at many points. The latter version of truth strikes as fake defence, on the other hand the former version seems to be authentic aggression.

Terrorism is a global evil; it should be dealt with on an intercontinental platform. It is not restricted to a person or an individual nation. It endangers the lives of mankind as a whole. Terrorism will cease to exist the day our thirst for peacefulness exceeds their greed for chaotic brutality. We will continue to loose against the annihilation as long as we think of it as an individualistic notion. India has made significant efforts to eradicate terrorist nests. Instead of looking at it as a traditional India-Pakistan conflict, the world at large should recognise the seriousness of matter and act energetically. Terrorism does not have a religion, a language or a nationality. It does not belong to an individual nation or community. The world needs to understand that it cannot not be friend to one and enemy to the other. It is the kind of disease which spreads rapidly irrespective of caste, creed, sex, religion and nationality. Any individual, organisation or government who believe that they are creators or administrators of terrorists, are blinded by a grave misconception. States toiling to conceal malicious extremists are ignorantly digging their own graves. If every country begins to provide safe havens to the terrorist organisations, a day shall arrive when the world would either be controlled by extremists or be brought to an end.

If international legal bodies and organisations will pay heed to such false accusation made with the motive to cover terrorists, other terrorist supporting countries would also use it as a defence. As a result of such acceptance, the disease of terrorism will become incurable. It will spread throughout the globe uncontrollably. The leaders of the world must foresee the threat which lies ahead and they must work in unity. We have a duty towards humanity; it should be recognised and abided by every human being who has taken birth. The world not only needs to fight against terrorism but also the individuals, organisations and governments who are involved in funding or supporting the terrorist groups around the globe. Defending the terrorists is a bigger sin

than actually committing acts of terrorism. Involvement of terrorist groups to resolve a conflict between nations is probably the worst decision that could be taken in favour of peace. Terrorism cannot be used as a secret weapon to spread guerrilla warfare across the border. The excuse of destruction of environmental structure to conceal existence of terrorism is the last thing expected from a democratic State.

Terrorism and democracy are two contrary concepts. They cannot exist together within a sovereign nation. It serves as the fuel in the fire that burns democracy. Housing terrorists hint towards failure of democratic structure. Condoning and justifying the life-threatening activities of extremists is an insult to the constitution of a democratic nation. Any nation of the world, which uses demolition of flora to protect the enemies of humanity, does not deserve to be called a civilized democratic nation. Nature should not be used as a false evidence for injustice to humanity. The legal institution or organisation that acknowledges this false accusation shall not be deemed fit to do justice to the human race.