
Terrorism vs Bioterrorism: Which One Is the Scariest?

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ABSTRACT

Over the centuries man has been warned about the threats of terrorism. It represents serious threat to the society and physically appeared as type of violence in form of war and attack. It also becomes major concern and challenge to whole life of people in the public security. Unlike terrorism, another threat which also demonstrates the threat to the whole life of people and increase the level of fear and panic was introduced as bioterrorism, a new form of threat. There was a belief that bioterrorism will not happen too soon and under prediction. Thus, the threat seems to be ignored and denied. However, the event of 11 September, 2001 had changed everything and it turns out to be a denial to the belief. Thus, this paper aims to discuss the aspect of terrorism and bioterrorism in the context of threats and challenges to the public society by looking into the differences and similarities between both especially in Malaysian context. This paper also attempts to give a look at the Malaysian experience with regard to the both.

Keywords: *(terrorism, bioterrorism, threats, public health, infectious disease)*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, people have been exposed to the threat of terrorism resulting from wars. However, in with the passing of times, a so-called modern terrorism has come into picture. Society is now being haunted by the fear posed by the emergence of bioterrorism as one of the modern form of threat and violence.

As the result, people are exposed to the serious threats through the emergence of infectious diseases which will result the bioterrorism. The emergence of infectious diseases that naturally occurring infectious diseases or re-emergence infectious diseases that will lead to the existence of bioterrorism will cause fear and panic among the public. The threat presents significant risks not only to the security but also to the public health.

TERRORISM AS A THREAT

The term 'terrorism' is always been debated not only at the domestic level but also internationally.¹ The diversity² in defining terrorism is caused by various factors. An attempt to reach a common definition has been made from various definitions that can be found on terrorism per se. However, there is still no comprehensive definition which can be ratified and well accepted by the majority.³ None of the definitions are absolute to be accepted worldwide in consensus.⁴

Generally, terrorism is always reputed conventionally through human criminal activities such as war and attack. Terrorism is defined by the United States government as the "...unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives." In fact, among hundreds definitions of terrorism, Jenkin defined terrorism as '*... the use or threatened use of force to achieve political end*'. While Laquer had added another element towards the definition given by Jenkin by adding '*...including the requirement of targeting innocent people*'. Both definitions are likely parallel by applying a violence approach to achieve their objective. At the end of the day, there will be victims who suffer the consequences.⁵

David J. Whittaker as given one complete definition of terrorism as '*...terrorism is the premeditated threat or use of violence by subnational groups or clandestine individuals*

¹ David J. Whittaker (ed.), *The Terrorism Reader Second Edition*, Routledge Taylor & Francis, London, 2003, p. 2.

² David J. Whittaker, *Terrorism: Understanding the Global Threat*, Revised Edition, Pearson:Longman, Britain, 2007, p. 9 – 10.

³ Richard A. Falkenrath, 'Problems of preparedness: u.s readiness for a domestic terrorist attack', 2001 *International Security*, Vol. 15, No.4, (147-186), p. 147 <http://www.jstor.org> 6 November 2010.

⁴ Charles Townshend, *Terrorism: A Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2011, p. 3.

⁵ Jonathan R. White, *Terrorism and Homeland Security*, Edisi ke 5, Thomson Wadsworth, USA, 2006, p. 4; David J. Whittaker (ed.), *The Terrorism Reader Second Edition*, Routledge Taylor & Francis, London, 2003, hlm 3; Charles Townshend, *Terrorism: A Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2011, p. 8.

intended to intimidate and coerce governments, to promote political, religious or ideological outcomes, and to inculcate fear among the public at large'.⁶ It means a denial to life, freedom, privacy and human rights. People may consider terrorism as a type of crime, injustice and the use of illegal force.⁷ However, in any cases of terrorism, people is inevitably become a victim to the act of terrorism itself.

THE PROSPECT OF BIOTERRORISM: A NEW THREAT

Bioterrorism had recently attracted the attention of the public about the threats. Bioterrorism is a form of terrorism where there is the intentional release of biological agents (bacteria, viruses, or other germs). In addition to biological agents, terrorists can also utilize chemical agents and nuclear bombs. While a biological agent may injure or kill people, animals, or plants, the goal for the terrorist is to further their social and political goals.

Many biological agents are found in nature; however, they can be modified by the terrorist to make them more dangerous. Some of these agents can be transmitted from person to person, and the infection may take hours or days to become apparent. Bioterrorism agent can be separated into three categories. It depends on how easily the agent can be spread and it what length it can cause illness and death to the pressroom infected to it. Category A agents are considered the highest risk, while Category B agents are the second highest priority because of moderately easy to spread and Category C agents are those which are considered emerging threats for diseases.⁸

There are many reasons why biological and toxin weapons are likely to become very remarkable agent especially to the criminals and terrorist lately. One of the main reasons is due to the biotechnological development; pharmaceutical advance, environmental and health care industries had amazingly developed. Furthermore, there a lot of people who become experts in the related areas. They know how to produce and disseminate these agents to affect the whole people at large. However, the fact that a biological attack has occurred would therefore not become known until sometime later due to some reason where it may be misdiagnosed in the first place. It is more important for the general public to understand the risk of bioterrorism and the appropriate response to a terrorist attack.

A lot of people become experts in microbiology and any related biosciences. Furthermore, the information on how is readily available in open sources and the produce of this pathogen can be easily hidden to cause a great effect to people become ill and die. In fact, this agent does

⁶ David J. Whittaker, *Terrorism: Understanding the Global Threat*, Revise Edition, Pearson:Longman, Britain, 2007, p. 10

⁷ Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism, Challenging, Perspectives and Issues*, Sage Publications, London, 2003, p. 7.

⁸ Department of Health of Human Science, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 'Bioterrorism Overview'.

not require sophisticated method to deliver and therefore, it is unlikely to discover when the terrorist or criminal produce, transport or use it as a biological weapon.⁹

GROWING THREAT BETWEEN TERRORISM AND BIOTERRORISM

The alarms about the range use of weapons have greatly grown. People had seen dramatic modifications in the diversity of weapons which available worldwide especially in the hand of terrorists to start the terrorism act. The range use of weapon in the hands of terrorist has turn out to be the most unthinkable nightmare to the people in the society. The effect of the weapons use is immediate and it will automatically create maximum fear and panic because that is the purpose of designing such a weapons. This is known as the use of conventional weapon. It will cause physical injury by hurting or harming a specific part of the body. In fact, the use of these weapons will increase a stronger reaction from the public.¹⁰ Public will feel the anxiety of the threat directly from the weapon.

However, there is another type known as unconventional weapon. For non-conventional weapon, there is no physical weapon involve. Unlike other mass casualty event such as nuclear, chemical and radiological, the bioterrorism encompasses the use of biological agent such as viruses and toxins. The agents that have been identified to pose the greatest threat are smallpox, anthrax, plague, botulism, tularemia, Ebola hemorrhagic fever, Lassa fever and Argentine hemorrhagic fever. Among these agents, the most potential agents are reviewed to be the best and greatest potential for weapon of mass destruction is anthrax and smallpox.¹¹ Other bacterial agents capable of causing maximum and credible affect are as plague and tularemia. However, not all microbes available can be used to create the event of bioterrorism. It depends on each characteristic of the agents such as pertain to virulence, infectivity, lethality, stable in storage, resistant and ease of production.

Historically, as early as 300 BC, the Greeks polluted the wells and drinking water supplies of their enemies with animal corpses. They used bodies of dead soldiers and animals to contaminate wells during battles. They also polluted potable water during the warfare to kill their enemy.¹² In that time, there was no physical weapons were used and it was proven that by using these biological agents, viruses and bacteria were more effective to achieve their target in killing the enemy as compared to conventional weapon of using physical weapons such as guns to shoot. Unlike bombing or gun which will cause an immediate and obvious effect, this method applied was very slow to show its effects and impacts, however, the victims will suffer all the consequences soon. Thus, unlike other threats of terrorism, biological threat has symptoms that

⁹ Pan Zhenqiang, Prof, Vice President of the Foundation for International Studies and Academic Exchanges on the paper 'Putting the Nonproliferation of Biological Weapons on the Right Track'.

¹⁰ Terrorism and Bioterrorism Communication Challenges [http:// www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/erc/CERC%20Course%20Materials/Instructor%20PPT%20Slides/Terrorism-Bioterrorism%20Communication.pdf](http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/erc/CERC%20Course%20Materials/Instructor%20PPT%20Slides/Terrorism-Bioterrorism%20Communication.pdf)

¹¹ Joseph W. Foxell, Jr, Trends in Bio-Terrorism: Two Generations of Potential Weapons in Alan O'day (ed), 'Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism' The International Library of Essays in Terrorism, Cromwell Press, 2004, Great Britain, p155-157.

¹² Nancy Khardori, Overview of Biological Terrorism: Potential Agents and Preparedness, Clinical Microbiology Newsletter, Elsevier, Vo. 27. No.1.

are not visible and it will only appear after a few days of suddenly emerged through the contact of infectious disease among the society.

In fact, medical and public health systems are usually the first to detect bioterrorism. It happened when there is a victim who suffered a serious undetectable and sudden illness and it may occur in cluster. Furthermore, a delay is likely between the release of the agent which has been used as weapon and the knowledge that the occurrence is a bioterrorist act. A short window of opportunity exists between the first cases and the second wave. Public health officials must determine from the beginning of the attack, to identify the organism, and prevent more casualties. Thus, it is undisputable to say that the threat of bioterrorism has grown. The most significant event that lead the major turning point as what happened on 11 September, 2001 has totally changed the majority point of view towards terrorism.

The table below show the differences between terrorism and bioterrorism.

TERRORISM	BIOTERRORISM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical act of violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New method used to create violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various definitions can be found – but none is absolute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is defined as the use of an intentional release of biological agents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a threat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a new threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of weapon in the hands of terrorist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of biological agents as weapon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known as conventional weapon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Such as gun, knife, riffle, bomb etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known as unconventional weapon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – no physical weapon is involved – use of biological agent such as viruses and toxins (smallpox, anthrax, plague, botulism, tularemia, Ebola hemorrhagic fever, Lassa fever and Argentine hemorrhagic fever, plague and tularemia)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cause physical injury directly by hurting or harming a specific part of the body – increase a stronger reaction – anxiety of the threat directly from the weapon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – very slow to detect – victims will suffer all the consequences soon – Symptom of infectious diseases – Decrease the public health system

MALAYSIAN LEGAL PROVISIONS ON TERRORISM

Looking from the Malaysian legal context, the Penal Code (Chapter VIA) illustrates the offence of terrorism. Terrorism is an act resulting from terrorist entity¹³ or terrorist group¹⁴ who commits the act of terrorist.¹⁵ This entity or group are moved by terrorist. According to Section 130B the Penal Code also, terrorist itself is defined as any person who commits or attempts to commit any terrorist act or to participate in or facilitate the commission of any terrorist act. Thus, Malaysian legal provisions with regard to the terrorism's perspectives became as an arising legal awareness as to the emergence of the threat. In fact, the use of law which discusses on terrorism did not begin until the event of 11 September 2001 in United States of America. The phenomena had widely opened the preparedness and prevention to the majority of countries in the world including Malaysia. It is proven from the amendment that has been made to the Penal Code throughout Section 130B which addresses the offences relating to terrorism in our Malaysian legal provisions.

To prove the effort in facing the issue of bioterrorism, Malaysia had signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (BWC) on 10 April 1972 and ratified on 6 September 1991. Furthermore, the famous incidents of bioterrorism known as anthrax which attacked the United States of America on September 11, 2001, caused a critical risk to the general population and intentionally create damage and unnecessary public alarm. In that sense, Malaysia also realized about the importance of facing the kind of outbreak.

Although, in reality, Malaysia does produce its own biological weapons but Malaysia had joined the Convention and becomes one of the parties to support the efforts by the international community to press for universal adherence to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and compliance with its provisions. Malaysia maintains its assurance that the BWC is essential for the maintenance of international and regional peace and security. In that sense, Malaysia is committed to undertake all possible efforts to fulfill its obligations under the Convention in order to ensure public health in whatever situations will be well protected.

¹³ Section 130B defines "terrorist entity" as any entity owned or controlled by any terrorist or terrorist group and includes an association of such entities;

¹⁴ Section 130B defines 'terrorist group' as:-

(a) an entity that has as one of its activities and purposes the committing of, or the facilitation of the commission of, a terrorist act; or

(b) a specified entity under section 66B or 66C of the *Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism Financing Act 2001;

¹⁵ Section 130B explains 'act of terrorist' as an act or threat of action within or beyond Malaysia where—

(a) the act or threat falls within subsection (3) and does not fall within subsection (4);

(b) the act is done or the threat is made with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause; and

(c) the act or threat is intended or may reasonably be regarded as being intended to—

(i) intimidate the public or a section of the public; or

(ii) influence or compel the Government of Malaysia or the Government of any State in Malaysia, any other government, or any international organization to do or refrain from doing any act.

[HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/MALAYSIAN_EXPERIENCE_IN_BIOTERRORISM](https://www.facebook.com/MALAYSIAN_EXPERIENCE_IN_BIOTERRORISM)

In order to differentiate between terrorism and bioterrorism, the issue of bioterrorism itself has never been specifically discussed in Malaysian perspective especially as to the existence of the threats. However, the connection between terrorism and bioterrorism have become significantly a major question since we do not produce our own biological weapon and no experience of any attack by using the biological weapons. Hence, Malaysia is assumed not to suffer from any kind of the emergence of infectious diseases resulted from the bioterrorism. However, the presumption is rebuttable because the threat of bioterrorism occurs in stages and it is not easy to be detected.

In fact, what Malaysian experiencing in the beginning form the occurrence of infectious diseases that can lead/cause into bioterrorism are still not at a high level. For example, there are opinions saying that the Nipah virus which emanates from pig farms in Perak starting from September 1998 until May 1999 was a potential agent that can cause bioterrorism. According to Profesor Lam Sai Kit,¹⁶ the agents that emerged from the emergence of Nipah virus was very trigger, generate, active and natural. The infections which originally from pigs infected humans especially the farmers. When it happend, it create the unstablity in human life, cause panic, trauma, fear, social and economic problems. Despite the effects, the infection from the viruses to human was the utmost frightening phenomena ever. When the disease began to spread and no measures are taken, then the level of public health became worse and unimaginable. Other occurrence of diseases such as Japanese Encephalitis (JE), Severe Acute Respiratory Systemn (SARS), H5N1, HIV, AIDS and many more which will emerge at anytime and anywhere.

CONCLUSION

Terrorism represents a serious threat to the society as well as to stability, peace, security, freedom and democracy. Since from the very beginning, the act of terrorism has been a battle of arms and fight against the state. The use of war to create terrorism by using all the method available such as weapons has been exploited by the terrorists to show their power. Indeed, the scariest and the greatest danger either terrorism or bioterrorism in the world today has triggered public fear and panic. It may start with the terrorism when the terrorist employ any element of surprise in delivering their method of attack to their best advantages. There will be no more specific, conventional and orthodox method to act.

The introduction of an innovative and advanced method has started a new form of terrorism by using biological agent as biological weapon. There will be more challenging to deal with since the consequences from such attack are commonly deferred because it is unnoticeable until the infection has spread. A few years back, an attack of biological agents would be the most unthinkable situation to happen. Now, the threat is real and it is growing from time to time. And it is proven today. Therefore, a question on how to develop biological agents has been arising.

¹⁶ Lam Sai Kit, Nipah virus – a potential agent for bioterrorism?, Antiviral Research No. 57 (2003), (113-119), p 113-114 <http://www.birdflubook.org/resources/lam113.pdf>

The deliberate use of biological agents and the emergence of infectious diseases which can produce harm to human health and give effects to the public health and security are well acknowledged.

Thus, it is important to the public be prepared to deal with any form of terrorism as well as bioterrorism whenever the threat will attack. As to the Malaysian legal preparedness, the amendment that was made to Penal Code (Chapter VIA (Section 130B) has shown the significant outcome of this threats of terrorism. By participating into BWC as member also has raised a major influence to show how Malaysia is taking a step towards preparedness and prevention in the aspect of terrorism and bioterrorism in the context of threats and challenges to the public society. Thus, from my view of perspective, the most scariest are both bioterrorism and terrorism. It is because bioterrorism is also a form of terrorism but in comes in a modern and different way of act of terrorism. The most significant is the effects from the both which represent serious effects. It may start with the terrorism when the terrorist employ any element of surprise in delivering their method of attack to their best advantages to lead into bioterrorism.

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