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Humiliation and Terrorism: Final Common Pathway or Lowest Common Denominator?

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Abstract. This article describes complexities in attributing a construct termed the primary causal factor to terrorist behavior perpetrated by espousers of variants of something called radical Islam against the interests of the United States Government (USG) and against something called the West.

Diverse political commentators, analysts, and authorities posit that humiliation is the primary causal factor behind terrorist behavior perpetrated by representatives of variants of radical Islam against USG and Western interests. The common narrative is that people comparing their sorry materiel - and, sometimes, sociocultural - lot with that of the US and the West experience humiliation and seek to attack the US and the West by any means necessary to attenuate their humiliation. In an anti-Bushian manner, preemption against what serves as a foil for one's humiliation is not possible because what has caused one's humiliation has already occurred.

Such positing becomes important in that antiterrorist and counterterrorist policies and programs logically stem from a causal hypothesis as to terrorist behavior's source. (However, there are schools of thought that presume that one can be successful against terrorism without knowing the source, much as a wonder drug can be successful against a disease without knowing how the disease is caused.) Risking the humiliation of various experts, one might also conclude that the closure on humiliation as primary causal factor is premature at best.

Humiliation has a cognitive, emotional, and motivational aspect that ultimately affect behavior and reciprocally interact. Moreover, behavior affects these three intrapsychic aspects. Supporters of humiliation have not specified the interactions that constitute the impelling of terrorist behavior. In fact, it may be that only certain types of humiliation-related psychology are at Issue.

Moreover, humiliation may be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for terrorist behavior. The weakness of inductive logic, in the face of the possibility of one instance disconfirming a generalization from a series of particular examples, suffices to render problematic both conditional hypotheses.

Antiterrorist and counterterrorist authorities may well hope that the positing of an intrapsychic phenomenon, humiliation, as the final common pathway for terrorism is problematic. This is because a phenomenological cause may not necessarily nor sufficiently be robustly affected by any material intervention, including those that are based on religious faith or on the radical reallocation of material assets.

Perhaps, the humiliation hypothesis is more projective in nature and captures two groups of the powerful who are powerless against the powerless. One comprises those who seek to eradicate but cannot. The other comprises those who seek to give power away but cannot find any takers. (See Lindner, E.G. (2002). Healing the cycles of humiliation: how to attend to the emotional aspects of 'unsolvable' conflicts and the use of 'humiliation entrepreneurship'. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 8, 125-138; McGee, J. P., & DeBernardo, C. R. (1999). The classroom avenger: A behavioral profile of school based shootings. *Forensic Examiner*, 8, 16-18; Schafer, R. (2002). Defenses against

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goodness. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 71, 5-19; Shelby, R.D. (2000). Narcissistic injury, humiliation, rage, and the desire for revenge: Thoughts on Drescher's Psychoanalytic therapy and the gay man. *Gender & Psychoanalysis*, 5, 275-289.) (Keywords: Humiliation, Terrorism.)