Diasporadic Minorities, Terrorism, and Great Powers' National Security Strategies

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Short abstract  
Great powers' national security, antiterrorism policies often focus on migrant and other ethnic minorities. Refocusing on classical diasporadic minorities, and perceived social injustices, is suggested to avoid costly if not fatal policy errors.

Abstract  
"Diasporadic studies" today encompass studies of all migrant ethnic minorities. Because of the threat of terrorism as a strategy for destabilizing even great powers, diasporadic studies have assumed new meaning for international security studies, in particular for reassessment of great power security policies towards their own and each others' ethnic minorities. For a variety of reasons, it is often tacitly if not explicitly assumed that migrant ethnic minorities are relatively more likely to harbor if not encourage or cultivate the formation and protection of terrorist organizations that share a common heritage. An alternative model is proposed here in favor of limiting such concerns to a much smaller number of migrant groups, viz., those who were forced by governments to migrate, who were not welcomed in the "host" or receiving societies, and who have not achieved an acceptable level of security. It is suggested that such diasporadic communities may be more likely than others to harbor and facilitate groups motivated to develop and use terrorist strategies. Such communities are more likely than others to remain cohesive because of external threats, more likely to harbor hostilities against host societies, and support leaders who desire political power to redress their grievances, since they are more likely to be subject to disrespect, injustice, and economic deprivations. Nevertheless, it is the latter, the fact of perceived subjugation or oppression, that ultimately is the prime motivator, not ethnic differences or ideologies per se. Hence security strategy would be better informed by careful analysis of such social fractures and the uses made of issues related to them by political organizers, than by studying resident, migrant, ethnic minorities in general. It is further suggested that internal political instability is more a function of government repression both short and long term, than of significant minority ethnic groups, even if diasporadic in nature.

Keywords: diasporadic politics, national security, strategic thinking, political stability, social injustice, oppression, terrorism

Introduction

In a recent conference on "Ethnic Minorities and Great Power Strategies in Asia," a usage of the term "diaspora" recurred frequently in connection with great power policies and strategic vulnerabilities to separatist movements and terrorism. One aim of the conference was to "facilitate a comprehensive examination of Great Power strategies in relation to ethnic diasporas and ethnic separatism in Asian countries." For instance, how have "diasporas" affected Russia’s, China’s and India’s security strategies, and how will they? What are their vulnerabilities to "diasporadic" separatist movements? Should the USA and Asia Pacific great powers be concerned with diasporadic ethnic minorities?

Implicit in the discussion seemed to be the assumption that diasporadic ethnic minorities are more likely than other groups to tolerate, harbor, or even actively support or cultivate terrorist organizations, separatist movements and the like; so for me, the question
became, what strategies might great powers undertake to increase their own security from such diasporadic organizations or movements?

But it seems to me this question begs another, which is: what is a "diasporadic" minority, simply any migrant ethnic group? Such appeared to me to be the common usage, with the tacit assumption that the government of origin would likely have future strategic advantages associated with common ethnic identity (language, culture and so on). Migrations, however, occur for many different reasons. For instance, the "Indian diaspora" refers to migrant communities from India independent of whatever time and for whatever reason the migration occurred, and to whatever foreign land in which they settled, whether it be in the USA, Sri Lanka, or as forced labor in Fiji, and with whatever consequences. In this usage, a distinction is not made regarding whether the migration was politically coerced or whether it took place as a result of individuals and families making decisions to move willingly to improve their standard of living, and whether the destination society was accepting or rejecting, or whether the immigrant ethnic group was or is being to a large extent assimilated into the host society. Thus the implicit assumption would seem to be that the migrants' sense of identity and hence loyalty to the origin nation is unaffected by the conditions of migration either by the circumstances of emigration or immigration.

This usage of the term, diaspora and diasporadic nationality or ethnic group—quite popular today—thus bears some critical analysis, not from the viewpoint of a conservative, linguistic perspective per se, but rather because it creates a category for study and policy analysis that is in all likelihood far too heterogeneous for its intended purpose of strategic policy analysis. This usage has the unfortunate potential for becoming a term of art referring to ethnic or nationality groups distinct from a host population and implicitly suspect of being vulnerable to possible manipulation in international power struggles by the government of the country of origin. For example, suppose “diasporadic minorities” become collectively the object of great powers' present and future antiterrorist policies because they are relatively more suspect of harboring terrorist organizations, and suppose the term “diasporic minority” becomes synonymous with any migrant nationality or ethnic group? This characterization would fit about 99% of the entire USA population (excluding the 0.8% or so of "native Americans"). Because of this core concern and its implications for strategic failures, the rest of this article argues for a restriction of the term "diaspora" specifically to ethnic groups against whom sovereign governments have exercised the power of the state to compel migration and who have migrated into lands in which they were treated with hostility by the host government or resident population, and who have not been assimilated into the dominant culture of their host country.

This suggested restriction in usage is consistent with the original coinage of the term in the Septuagint and with its traditional references. Specifically, the Babylonian exile of the Jews in 586 BC and their exile from Jerusalem in 135 AD both fit this usage. It is also consistent with its application to the African diaspora in the era of the slave trade. In this case African slaves were sold by Arab conquerors as well as by their own national leaders for profit and forced into servitude primarily in America and Europe. More importantly, it is consistent with limiting the application of diaspora to the many forced migrations perpetrated by colonizers over the last few centuries. What these applications of the term have in common is the use of force against a people, usually a nationality group, to compel them to be moved to distant lands in which they were also unwelcome immigrants. By extension, then, diasporadic migration of any ethnic group
implies a history of intentionally used state power to compel an ethnic group to leave the
territory on which they are settled, and to varying degrees displace a resident people
similarly pressured, at least initially, to receive them.

The reason for retaining these characteristics of compulsion is this; it draws our attention
to what is one of the key characteristics of modern terrorist organizations, namely the
willingness to organize and use violence systematically against civilian populations in
which they are embedded but with whom they do not share a common sense of identity,
with the intent to establish either their own sovereign state or equivalent control of an
existing state’s policies for the benefit of their own organization, albeit rationalized in the
interest of their major support group(s). In this formulation there is both a motivational
component to the hypothesis, and an opportunity component. I will contend that one of
the root causes of the use of terrorism as a strategy to acquire political power is that
those who permit or encourage the organization and use of such violence, themselves
act in the name of collectivities that are unaccepted, disrespected, and denied equality
by the dominant social structure within which they were at some point in their history
forcibly embedded. Thus the motivation is rationalized as social justice, bringing about a
vision of right overcoming wrong. Opportunity has two components: (1) a history of
violence being perpetrated on a self-identified people or socially meaningful grouping
(nationality, religion, race, and ethnicity are often used; but for that matter, gender, age,
disability, and chronic or intergenerational poverty could constitute these identities
although traditionally the latter are much less relevant than the former), and (2) an
ecological and/or technological situation that enables terrorist organization and activity,
such as a past history of terrorist behavior creating a knowledge base.

Let me illustrate the importance of this distinct usage of "diaspora" by contrasting
diasporic peoples with at least three other types of migrant situations: those who
migrate because they are attracted to another territory and who are willingly received
and accepted, those who migrate with the intent to subjugate and/or replace a
preexisting population, and those that are attracted by opportunity but received with
hostility. These distinctions are refined in the following typology. The two tables are
identical in terms of migration characteristics, but table one is about unsuccessful
resettlement situations and table two is about successful ones ("successful" meaning
assimilation into the host society adequate for economic and political participation,
broadly understood).
Table 1. Possible Implications of Migration Conditions with Unsuccessful Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrant Identities: unsuccessful resettlement</th>
<th>Migrants forced upon a resident population or state</th>
<th>Migrants invited/accepted by a state or resident population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrants compelled to leave homeland for economic, political, religious or other reasons</td>
<td>Diasporadic; strong sense of mutual alienation, predisposition to revolutionary or separatist politics, may be victims of genocide or forced to flee</td>
<td>Political; dual identity. Separatist or irredentist politics. Example: Dutch Muslims from Mideast, northern Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrants willingly leaving a homeland for opportunity (religious, economic, …)</td>
<td>Failed occupation and/or colonization, failed struggle for power, may become victims of counterterrorism. Example: colonial expatriates, Chinese Malaysians</td>
<td>Incomplete assimilation for various reasons such as racial distinctions and external threats. Example: Japanese Americans during World War II, Vietnamese Australians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Possible Implications of Migration Conditions with Successful Outcomes

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrants compelled to leave homeland, for economic, political, religious or other reasons</td>
<td>Diasporadic; some tension Examples: Indian Fijians (residual from failed British colonization)--tense but functional</td>
<td>Assimilated, distinctions blending into a cultural mosaic and common identity. Examples: many American immigrant groups; British Australians, Chinese Thais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrants willingly leaving a homeland for opportunity (religious, economic, …)</td>
<td>Conquest; colonizing identity, politics of oppression, successful struggle for power. Example: American Indian Wars</td>
<td>Assimilation; blended communal identity, predisposition to democratic politics. Example: Chinese British</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several examples of diasporadic migration have already been given. Regarding “dual identity” migrants, many American immigrant groups are illustrative, from the Pilgrims to the Irish, many eastern Europeans, especially Armenian and Jewish Americans, and so on. “Colonizing identities” would certainly include migration through conquest during the periods of early Spanish and Portuguese colonizations, the British Empire, French Union, Russian Empire, the USSR’s forced internal migration and so on. “Blended identity” would include many American minorities who came from Europe initially, then
worldwide, attracted by opportunity such as modern Indians from India, and many Latino immigrants.\(^8\)

Referring to all ethnic groups as diasporadic would serve only to confound and paper over these complex distinctions based on the often mixed motivations of emigrants and the receptivity of the host country. The likelihood of political stability, regime repression, and sense of social justice can immediately be intuited to be quite different in each category in the tables above.

By way of contretemps, few in an earlier era would have referred to British and French colonization as a “British diaspora” or a “French diaspora.” Today this is common and one speaks freely of a "Russian diaspora" to refer to the migration patterns of ethnic Russians within the former Soviet Union as well. Yet these are the migrations of colonizers, not the dispossessed minorities whose alienation they exacerbate.\(^9\)

This is not to say that over time the nature of these relationships is not likely to change. There are many historical examples of acceptance over time by populations that have been forced to migrate, such as with Americans of African descent and their sporadic, painful gaining of civil rights. And irredentism isn’t always the final outcome for those who flee into open arms. Consider diasporadic Jews in the USA for instance and the ideological chasms between them regarding Israeli policies; or the Americans of Irish or Scots-Irish ancestry and the split in their community towards relations between Northern Ireland and the UK. Such cases clearly show that dual loyalties are present; and that a strong commitment to act to redress past grievances is frequently engendered.

I conclude therefore, that in its present, broadened usage, the term "diaspora" has lost something essential. It is to this loss I point, and I make a case for retrieving it. What is lost is the nature of the motivation, motivational history, and outcomes for the migration of a people, independent of whether they are scattered or dispersed. If "diaspora" comes to mean little more than the migration of a portion of an identifiable group, then migration is without reference to the motivation for the migration. What traditionally made "Diaspora" (with a capital D) so distinct was its reference to the forced exile of Jews from Babylon, then to the Jews scattered around the world either by direct political and social oppression, or by the fear of oppression coupled with opportunities being presented for a better life elsewhere. Pogroms in Czarist Russia and the imminent fear in pre-Holocaust Germany exemplify this meaning. Similarly, some black African nations' leaders sold their political enemies into slavery, as did Arab traders who kidnapped blacks for the slave trade in the 16th-19th Centuries, and forced them to "migrate." In current uses, "diaspora" no longer has this sine qua non element of compulsion; it has, in effect, been depoliticized.\(^10\)

Why has this dilution of the meaning of "diaspora" occurred? Perhaps it is due to the lack of a word in English to adequately express the nature of much modern migration, which is motivated by a more complicated set of perceived opportunities and constraints that was characteristic of mass migrations of the past. Thus many writers speak of an "Indian diaspora" to the USA following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.\(^11\) But this involved an entirely voluntary mass migration of a portion of a people, both on the emigration and immigration side. Opportunity, not coercion, was the characteristic motivation. On the other hand, diasporadic migration occurred in India's period of British colonization during which thousands of Indians were forcibly move to Fiji for common
labor and to establish a political enemy that native Fijians would have to contend with long after the British returned sovereignty to Fiji.

The problem with broadening usage of the term is that it lumps together radically different migratory situations, as if all that mattered was the transporting of cultural groups to different locations, as if the primary characteristic of the phenomenon was ethnicity (language, religion, customs, ethnic and/or "racial stock"). I suggest that it is the sense of identity of a people—the shared history, vision, dreams, as well as language and culture—that is at the heart of the idea of ethnicity, not migratory status. Ethnic differences are important, but not per se. Rather it is the linkage of those differences with coerced vs. free migration that is important.  

It may be true that ethnic differences between groups coming to a given territory at different times is one of the key sets of features to be used in any explanation of their subsequent social relations to each other, the state, and their international relations. But it certainly is unlikely to be the only or even dominant explanatory set of factors.

To illustrate, let me offer up the relationships between ethnic migrations to what is now the USA, and compare just a few features of their similarity and dissimilarity with Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and India. In the USA, the initial wave of English and European colonization following the typical pattern of ultimately vicious, genocidal behavior towards the "natives" but something new also emerged, which came to dominate the American experience and character development. Large numbers of immigrants followed the initial settlements out of hope for a less oppressive and more economically rewarding future. The "New World" became revolutionary. Two revolutionary wars later, the Louisiana Purchase, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, the Alaskan Purchase, and the annexation of Hawaii, were all important to American growth, but underlying it even to this very day is a de facto open door policy to mass immigration for all those willing to sacrifice friends and family and in some cases religion, for economic opportunity. To characterize these mass movements as "diaspora" would miss three major points. First, they were motivated at least as much by the pull of opportunity as the push of hostile governments. Second, they were not whole people or whole societies that moved but rather portions, and usually maintained positive relations with the "homeland." Third, while some did flee for their lives to come to the USA, broadly speaking they found a welcome and an opportunity, not a politically hostile system. Each group had to struggle with residual prejudices and mutual fears, but each also saw the opportunity embedded in the ideology of equality and freedom. And the majority of immigrants, perhaps not willingly, sacrificed much of their culture and social organization as the price to pay for taking advantage of economic opportunity.

Contrast these experiences with those of Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and on the Indian subcontinent. Each was inflicted with wave upon wave of colonization and forced migrations both internal and external, sanctioned by governments and/or opposing revolutionary movements. Each ethnic group tended to organize itself politically, defensively, and some aggressively, in its own perceived self interest. When segments migrated, it was of necessity, coerced by the vicissitudes of government policies. Such "mini diasporas," different as they are from the Diaspora of the Babylonian Jews, have much more in common with each other than say the so-called "Indian diaspora" to the USA.
Diaspora on Its Head: Diasporadic Minorities and Democracy as Colonial Legacies

There is yet another type of migration. What shall we call the dominant, colonizing migrants? Shall the British Empire be rechristened the British diaspora, or the French empire the French diaspora, and so on (terminology already widely in use)? This is "diaspora" on its head. This is yet a third type of "diaspora" if you will, one in which we say euphemistically the spread of "civilization" takes place rather than simply an expatriate transplanting, or the transplanting of a people. Substantial portions of national populations have been uprooted and countries created in the processes of colonization and decolonization (e.g., the origins of Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as virtually all sub-Saharan black African countries).

Now we get to why these distinctions matter. Much is made of the spread of democracy worldwide. But democracy as a collective decision making process for selecting leadership groups has, I believe, very different significance for different cultural settings. For the Americans, it represents a reasonably safe (less murderous) way for political elites to compete and to both gauge and engage public support for their policies and promises, thus providing a measure of control on their power and ambitions. It is also a way of reasserting symbolically their satisfaction with the democratic form of governance. For many an Asian country however—from the Mideast to Taiwan—democracy is to some degree a colonial legacy but even moreso a substitute of the ballot box for guns, a less draconian guarantor of survival and security than to play sheep or grass or align with warring factions. As with bureaucratic politics, as Weber might say, it is more the "routinization of charisma" and a way of bringing some order and sense of legitimacy to the necessity of compromise for the sake of survival and security, than a routine testing of public support for public policies.

Diasporadic Politics, Political Stability, and Great Power Strategy

And what of terrorism? Great power policies toward diasporas in the traditional sense are and should be quite different from the issues related to voluntary immigration of ethnic groups for economic gain and political freedom (consider US policies towards diasporadic Jewish-Americans and Afro-Americans). Diasporas, at least as I would use the term, refer to the coerced migration of ethnic groups and hence to inherently disheartened and angry, and usually anxious if not fearful, peoples. Such groups would tend to seek security, retribution, and if it were feasible, revenge against their oppressors. Most other migrant groups would seem to me best characterized as the inevitable consequence of the international division of labor, as differently skilled populations at different standards of living who continue to find, or be shown, opportunities for livelihood and assimilation, and move to take advantage of them. Diasporadic migration needs to be distinguished from voluntary migration, and for that matter, colonial migration, both because of the radically different motivational structure of the migrants, and because of the consequences for political stability.

Political stability is a function of two major factors, social justice and fear as feedback from repression. The more social justice, the higher political stability. Unfortunately it seems to be a universal tendency for governments to engage in repression as political stability declines, but since repression leads to fear, it can contribute to political stability at least on the surface. On the other hand, repression decreases the sense of social justice and so completes a negative feedback loop. As a result, governments tend to
oscillate between high and low stability as repression contributes to fear on the one hand
and declining social justice on the other. Diasporadic and colonial migration would
heighten the repression and fear components for all, oppressed and oppressors alike.
Voluntary migration would heighten the social justice component. Diasporadic migration
is the great danger and often a consequence of colonial migration, a close second in
importance, but voluntary migration is in general a great political and economic asset,
often a significant power asset in traditional realist terms.

If these insights are applied to great powers' strategic thinking about ethnic minorities, it
should become apparent that the potential power base or national climate on which
terrorists rely if for nothing else than cover from state scrutiny, is radically limited to a
much small number of such sources than would seem to be the prevalent view. At a
minimum, basic quantitative research on these distinctions and their security policy
implications should be undertaken, and results more carefully modeled than heretofore
seems to have been the case.

1 This research owes its origin to my attending (as an observer) an excellent conference on
"Ethnic Minorities and Great Power Strategies in Asia," held October 12-14, 2004, at the Asia
Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS). I am indebted to the many participants and staff
with whom I shared ideas, for many thoughtful and challenging dialogs. This is the first time I am
venturing into this subject matter, so the article is definitely a "work in progress;" I would very
much appreciate critical reviews and suggestions before I submit this article for journal
publication.
2 The conference was held 12-14 October 2004 at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies,
(APCSS) Honolulu, Hawaii.
3 Rouben Azizian and Robert Wirsing, "Conference Executive Summary: Ethnic Minorities &
4 The adjective form, "diasporic," was used throughout the conference. "Diasporadic" is my
preferred usage throughout this article.
5 Cf. the APCSS executive summary, op. cit.
6 Cf. Lasswell's definition of a politician as someone who displaces private motives onto public
objects rationalized in the public interest. See Harold D. Lasswell (1930), Psychopathology and
useful data set is Ted Gurr's Minorities at Risk Project, currently available at
http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/. This project currently tracks 284 minorities with a population
of half a million or more. Not to miss the irony: states are far more capable and active in brutally
suppressing minorities than terrorists are in defending or advancing the interests of any of them.
No reference I can recall was made to this "elephant in the room" nor to Gurr's project. For
similar treatment of states' suppression of their own populations, see Rudolph J. Rummel's
website, http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/. For an excellent contretemps source of terrorist
incidents see the Terrorism Research Center website.
8 Several classes of oppression are not included in this typology, notably preexisting territorial
populations who have nowhere to go, the victims of colonization, such as native Hawaiians.
Another whole class of oppression involves the changing roles of men and women in industrial
and postindustrial societies. This article does not deal with all types of oppression, but rather
addresses the specific issue of diasporadic minorities and national security concerns related to
terrorism.
9 In the recent International Studies Association convention, a panel on "Human Security,
Migration and Informal Diaspora Communities in Global Perspective" chaired by my respected
friend and scholar Kihide Mushakoji, it was suggested to me that the term "diasporic minorities"
can be usefully constructed as alienated minorities, not as specific, historical peoples and events.
These usages, common on the panel presentation, miss the point. Groups can be alienated for
many reasons. The British, French and Russian colonial hegemonies were not motivated by alienation; they caused it. To lump them together with diasporadic communities is to equivalence them in two obviously incorrect ways since they are neither alienated nor being alienated, but rather causing the alienation in others. Further, in some works the term "compatriot" is used to refer to such hegemonic settlers in relation to their homeland. "Expatriate" seems to be falling into disuse as ever more "terms of art" are generated to distance current practices from the legacy of colonialism. Some writers focus on the alienation problems of "ex-pats" vis-à-vis their home country rather than on the alienation of the colonized.

10 I am using the term "politicize" in a manner consistent with Harold Lasswell, who was principally concerned with power as coercive influence, that is, influence based on the fear of deprivation. He characterized the politicization of a relationship as introducing into it a severe threat to something highly valued. Politics then, was about the management of coercive relations. See Lasswell, Harold D., and Abraham Kaplan, *Power & Society: a Framework for Political Inquiry*. 1950: Yale University Press, New Haven.


12 Cf. Coerced and Free Migration.