

Perceptions of Japanese Students on Terrorism and Other Security Problems: Initial Results from a Pilot Study

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Abstract

This paper is part of an international collaborative research project involving researchers from India, England, Japan and the United States. International terrorism has emerged as a major human concern after September 11, 2001 and an understanding of this against the backdrop of related security problems has emerged as a priority research area.

This paper presents preliminary findings of an exploratory pilot study. In the spring semester of 2002, undergraduate students in a Japanese college were surveyed about their views following the two major terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (New York and Washington) and December 13, 2001 (Indian Parliament). A total of 75 undergraduate students completed a self-administered questionnaire.



Introduction

International terrorism has become a major concern following the September 11, 2001 attacks and it is relevant to know the perceptions of youth around the world in this regard. An exploratory pilot study was undertaken to conduct a survey. A significant component of this pilot study is a collaborative research team with researchers from India, England, Japan and the United States. The objective of this exploratory research was to examine the perspectives of undergraduate students in Japan towards selected dimensions of contemporary international terrorism as well as other problems of concern. The study was completed in a short span of about 15 weeks.

Literature Review

There is a large body of literature available on international terrorism. Following September 11, 2001, a number of public opinion polls were conducted about international terrorism (CNN, Pew et. al.). Recently, the National Science Foundation funded a few social science research projects with a focus on international terrorism. These include Prof. Ronald Inglehart's project titled *Islam and the West: Clash of*

Civilizations or Traumas of Modernization?, Prof. Kathleen Moore's project titled *How Support Organizations Respond to Crises: Middle Eastern and Southern Asian American Organizations in the Aftermath of September 11*, Prof. Andrew Conway's project titled *A Test of Flashbulb Memory: Tuesday, September 11, 2001* and Prof. Mehdi Bozorgmehr's project titled *How Support Organizations Respond to Crisis: Middle-Eastern and South Asian American Organizations in the Aftermath of September 11*. Prof. Ronald Inglehart's project involves surveys in Pakistan and Bangladesh to measure public disapproval of the 9/11 attacks (Inglehart, 2001, #0140566). Prof. Kathleen Moore's project explores public attitudes towards immigration and civil liberties following the 9/11 attacks (Moore, 2001, #0140271). Prof. Andrew Conway's psychology research assesses popular memory of 9/11 (Conway, 2001, #0139292) and Prof. Mehdi Bozorgmehr's project explores the attitudes of the leaders of national ethnic and religious organisations.

Data Sources

A total of 100 self-administered questionnaires were used in a graduate level college in a town in Japan in the spring semester from May 9 to 14, 2002. These questionnaires were distributed and collected in a classroom setting to eliminate the possibility of students consulting with each other or with members in their household. The academic orientation of this US-Japanese collaborative research was emphasised in the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were returned to the author for data analysis. This paper tabulates 75 questionnaires that have been coded and computerised.

Student Profiles

Table 1 provides a summary of student profiles. The questionnaire was administered in the co-educational college, shows a diversity of views among the survey participants.

Table 1: Profile of Survey Participants

Gender		Per cent	Enrollment Status		Per cent
Male		55	First Year	5	6.4
Female		45	Second Year	15	19.9
			Third Year	50	66.9
			Missing Data	5	6.8
Total		100	Total	75	100

Contd

Table 1: Profile of Survey Participants (.... Contd)

Age		Per cent	Religious Background		Per cent
18	10	14.3	Buddhist	48	63.9
19	60	79.2	Shinto	20	26.9
20	3	3.9	Christian	4	5.3
21	1	1.3	Orthodox Buddhists	2	2.6
22	1	1.3	Others	1	1.3
Total	75	100	Total	75	100
Father's Occupation			Mother's Occupation		
Business	34	45.4	Employed	12	83.7
Government Service	10	13.5	Housewives	62	15.9
Other Service	5	6.6	Missing Data	1	0.4
Agriculture	23	30.6			
Teacher	2	2.6			
Medical	1	1.3			
Total	75	100		75	100

Preliminary Findings*Japanese Students' Perceptions of Terrorism and other Issues Faced by Japan*

The questionnaire listed 17 issues faced by Japan and elicited importance ranking by the students. The list of problems and the student rankings are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Student Responses to Problems Faced by Japan

Problems	Rank	Problems	Rank
International Terrorism	2	Political Corruption in Tokyo and other Prefectural Governments	7
Commercialisation of Japanese Society	3	Military Threat from China and North Korea	13
Domestic Terrorism	1	Crimes Against Women	6
Japan's Constitution particularly related to SDF	5	Economic Downturn and the End of Bubble Economy	8
Frequent Change in LDP Leadership	4	Influence of Mafia (Yukaza) in Big Cities	9
Japan's Aloofness in World Affairs	11	Continuing US military Base in Okinawa and Other Islands	10
Natural Disasters such as Earthquakes and Typhoons	12	Japan's Ageing Population	14
Discrimination towards Burakumin Underclass and Long Term	15	Japan's Radical Right	17
Discrimination towards Ainu and the People of Okinawa	16		

In the perception of a majority of students, domestic terrorism has the highest importance ranking (1) in Japan. It is very likely that the sarin gas attack of 1995 in the Tokyo subway influenced their perception and they are apprehensive over the possibility of copycat attacks after September 11. A majority of the students also ranked international terrorism as having the second highest importance.

Interestingly, the students have assigned Rank 3 to commercialization of Japanese society and Rank 4 to frequent changes in the LDP leadership. Issues related to the Constitution and the Self-Defence Force (SDF), crimes against women and political corruption received Ranks 5, 6 and 7 respectively. The Japanese economy was given Rank 8 and mafia influence in big cities Rank 9.

The military threat from China and North Korea (Rank 13) ranks lower than problems arising from US bases in Japan (Rank 10). Japan being 'aloof' in international affairs was accorded Rank 11.

Natural disasters, treatment of minorities and the radical right get very low rankings.

Japanese Students' Perceptions of Terrorism and other Issues Faced by USA

The list of issues for USA in the questionnaire given to the students is a variation of the basic list for Japan given in Table 2. It includes some US-specific issues. The list is given in Table 3, along with the importance rankings given by the students.

The students feel that international terrorism, cyber terrorism and homeland security have ranks 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Military threats to US interests gets Rank 4 and the economy Rank 5. Corporate crimes get a relatively high Rank 8. Surprisingly, pollution gets Rank 6, above military budget and inner city crimes.

Also, surprising is the importance ranking given to foreign visitors to US; Rank 17 (lowest). Perhaps this aspect can be explained by the fact that Japanese visitors in general, and Japanese students in particular, do not face any overt form of discrimination or harassment in USA.

Table 3: Student Responses to Problems Faced by USA

Problems	Rank
International Terrorism	1
Homeland Security	3
Cyber Terrorism	2
Foreign Visitors to USA	17
Military Threat to US Interests	4
It is Economy, Stupid	5
High Budget for the US Military	9
Increasing Numbers of Ageing Population	16
Teenage Pregnancy and its Social Implications	15
Corporate Crimes	8
AIDS	7
Crimes Against Women	13
Declining Educational Standard in US Public Schools	14
Rising Cost of Quality Health Care	11
Pollution and Global Warming	6
Crime in the Inner Cities	10
Discrimination towards Blacks, Latinos, and Asians	12

Japanese Students' Perceptions of Terrorism and other Issues Faced by India

The issues posed in the questionnaire for India are, of course, India-specific. Table 4 gives the list and the importance rankings assigned by the students.

Interestingly, communal conflicts in India are perceived as Rank 1. This is, possibly, due to the high coverage of the Gujarat riots of 2002 in Japanese media, both print and electronic. Indo-Pak tensions weigh in at Rank 2.

Surprisingly, *domestic terrorism is assigned Rank 3 while international terrorism is Rank 14*. The perception, possibly, is that the terrorism witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir is domestic in nature. This may imply that India's projections of cross border terrorism have not touched the minds of students in Japan.

The issue of Hindutva, again, receives a high Rank, 4. Perhaps the media exposure after the Gujarat riots has left a residue of concern about potential damage

to India's diverse social fabric from divisive politics. Population growth comes in at Rank 5 and environmental degradation at 6.

Nuclearisation is ranked 7 in importance and is, obviously, not rated high. This is, possibly, indicative of increasing acceptance of India's nuclear status across many sections of Japanese society, including the student community.

The poor-rich disparity is ranked at 10. Issues like economic liberalisation, the coalition government at the Centre, discrimination and corruption came at the tail.

Table 4: Student Responses to Problems Faced by India

Problems	Rank
International Terrorism	14
Economic Liberalisation	13
Domestic Terrorism	3
Anti-Globalisation	12
Coalition Government at the Centre	15
Disparity between the Rich and the Poor	10
Natural Disasters such as Floods and Cyclones	11
Increasing Role of the Mafia	9
Discrimination Based on Caste and Religion	16
Communal Conflict	1
Ongoing Tension between India and Pakistan	2
Crimes Against Women	8
Hindutva Ideology	4
Nuclearisation of India	7
Rising Population	5
Environmental Degradation	6
Corruption in Public Life	17

Self-Reported Feelings of Students about the 9/11 and 12/13 Terrorist Attacks

Tables 5 and 6 show selected direct quotes from the student respondents about these terrorist attacks.

Table 5: A Sample of Self-Reported Feelings About the World Trade Centre attack on September 11, 2001 (N=75)

I was angry.	I thought I was watching a horror movie from Hollywood
It is terrible.	Traumatic experience.
It was a cowardly attack.	If the terrorists could do it to the US, they could do it anywhere.
It was like massacring people.	Attack on democracy and open society.
It was horrendous.	Attack on American way of life.
Inhuman, to say the least.	Terrorists are anti-Christians.
Unjustified act.	All terrorists should be put to death.
I was shocked and surprised.	USA should be careful about persons from the Middle-East.
I felt very upset.	It was like the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbour.
Death toll made me feel shaken.	My heart goes out to the American people.
I felt it is a problem of the advanced world.	President Bush acted courageously.
I was very hurt.	I wish President Clinton were there as US President to handle this crisis.
I felt very sorry for the American people.	Terrorists took advantage of division in US society.
It was an act of brutality.	US should give more aid to less affluent nations.
I was stunned that it could happen in America.	US should be wary of dictators around the world.
Attack on free world.	Terrorists hit New York as it was the symbol of American capitalism.
I thought terrorists could also attack Japan.	World heritage sites such as the Statue of Liberty should be protected at any cost.
I felt extreme pain from inside.	God save US

Table 6: A Sample of Open-Ended Comments on the Attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001 (N=75)

I felt security was bad in India.	India must attack first and destroy the terrorist network.
Terrorism is an issue everywhere.	Indian leaders acted with restraint.
Blot on Indian democracy.	India is too heavily influenced by USA.
Deplorable act.	People of India are very peaceful as it is the birthplace of Buddha.
It was an act of frustration.	War must be avoided at any cost.
Another shocking news.	There is need for meaningful dialogue with Pakistan.
I felt very sorry.	India should talk to Pakistan as early as possible.
Whoever is responsible should be brought to justice.	I fear for the worst - a nuclear war between India and Pakistan.
Terrorism must be condemned in all forms.	Japan must stop giving ODA aid to Pakistan.
It was a very dastardly act.	Japan must join hands with India in combating terrorism
Defence in and around Delhi needs to be improved.	Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi must visit New Delhi to show Japan's support
It shook the bedrock of Indian democracy.	All political leaders of Japan should support India.
It was aimed at killing elected leaders of India.	Terrorists hit India as it has most stable democracy in South Asia.
I felt another terrorist attack could happen.	ASEAN countries must support India.
It is just like sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway	India and Japan must forge closer defence collaboration.
Why India? I do not get it.	China must stop giving military aid to Pakistan.
India should teach Pakistan a lesson.	India's capital should be relocated from New Delhi to a safer place

These preliminary responses indicate some variations in orientation towards these two incidents of international terrorism.

Attitude towards International Terrorism

The students were given a series of propositions involving international terrorism to survey their attitudes. The propositions and responses are given in Table 7.

Table 7: Attitudes Towards International Terrorism (N = 75)

Statement	Agree %	Dis- agree%	Not Sure%	Missing Data%
In the contemporary world international terrorism is the greatest threat to human civilization	86.4	3.9	9.3	0.4
The US approach to combat international terrorism will also help Japan deal with cross-border terrorism	53.2	30.3	15.2	1.3
The Madrassas that teach anti-Americanism and terrorism should be reformed.	9.3	63.2	24.9	2.6
The Palestinian people should have their own state and live side by side the Jewish state of Israel.	90.4	2.6	5.7	1.3
The arrested terrorists of Afghanistan should be treated as prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention.	93.5	2.6	2.6	1.3
All college students should learn more about the causes of international terrorism	98.7	1.3	0	0
All college students should know more about strategies of combating international terrorism	92.2	2.6	2.6	2.6
Some international terrorists hate America because it is a rich country.	64.8	19.3	14.6	1.3
Some international terrorists hate America because of its foreign policy supporting the Jewish state of Israel.	70.4	12.4	13.3	3.9
Some international terrorists hate America because it promotes democratic values and minority rights.	57.1	13.5	23.9	5.5
Some international terrorists hate America because of its support for India's policy in Kashmir.	77.5	9.3	10.6	2.6
Some international terrorists hate America because it promotes rights for women to be free.	35.3	59.5	2.6	2.6

Over 80 per cent of the students agree that international terrorism is among the greatest threats to civilisation. There was a strong view (65 per cent) that terrorists hate America because of its wealth.

The responses reveal their very high interest, also, to learn more about the causes of international terrorism (99 per cent) and how to combat it (92 per cent).

Attitude towards Afghanistan

The students were also given a series of statements involving events in

Afghanistan to elicit their attitudes. The propositions and responses are given in Table 8.

Table 8: Attitudes Towards Events in Afghanistan (N = 75)

Statement	Agree %	Dis-agree%	Not Sure%	Missing Data%
Afghanistan is the biggest issue in the world	57.1	13.5	23.9	5.5
US military actions in Afghanistan will reduce incidents of terrorism	64.8	19.3	14.6	1.3
The Taliban is the most radicalised form of Islam who are bent on destroying the West	70.4	12.4	13.3	3.9
The Taliban get support from the regimes and fundamentalist elements in Pakistan	90.4	2.6	5.7	1.3
The Taliban are the products of Pakistan's ISI.	93.5	2.6	2.6	1.3
Japan should maintain its links with Pakistan vis-à-vis its close relationship in Afghanistan	98.7	1.3	0	0
All college students should know more about events in Afghanistan.	92.2	2.6	2.6	2.6
Japan should give more ODA aid to the new Hamid Karzai government.	98.7	1.3	0	0
Japan should play a more proactive role by hosting another Tokyo round of talks among donor nations.	92.2	2.6	2.6	2.6
Japan should not take any side among the warring factions inside Afghanistan.	98.7	1.3	0	0
Japan should encourage a broad dialogue with both Pashtuns and Afghanistan's dominant tribe as well as with other minority tribes.	93.5	2.6	2.6	1.3
Japan should not give a blank cheque to US whenever it attacks another country	98.7	1.3	0	0

A very high percentage of the students (over 90 per cent) feel that Taliban is the product of Pakistan's ISI; and, that it got active support from the government and other fundamentalist elements. However, an overwhelming number of respondents (nearly 99 per cent) is also in favour of maintaining links with Pakistan so as to be engaged and exert maximum possible leverage. They were in favour of giving more ODA aid to bolster Karzai's government. Further, there is near unanimity that Japan should not side with one faction or another in Afghanistan.

Surprisingly, there is unanimity that US should not be given a free hand to attack another country at will. This implies that the US doctrine of pre-emptive strikes and extended self-defence does not find favour with this set of Japanese students who would like to see more of a proper and clear international endorsement in the application of military force.

Conclusion

This is an exploratory study with a small sample population size and indicates the need for larger, comprehensive surveys in the Japanese student community as well as similar communities in other countries.

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