



## **Full Length Review Article**

### **THE ROLE OF "POSITIVE ACTION" IN COUNTERING TERRORISM**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The issue of terrorism as a global problem occupies a large space in everybody's lives nowadays. Thus, many researchers from different disciplines try to understand its origins, causes, objectives, effects and means of countering it. In countering terrorism, initially hard power has been used by countries all over the world as the main strategy for a long time. Turkey also has tried this strategy and it is found to be ineffective. Then, the countries decided to try soft power as an alternative approach for countering terrorism. To some extent, the use of soft power has been found effective for countering terrorism but the desired outcome has not been gained. With the increase of terror threats at global and regional scale researchers started to search for more effective methods in the fight against modern terrorism, which is really complicated to counter. In this context, this paper is an attempt to provide a new approach in countering terrorism, which is "Positive Action" proposed by the scholar Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. The Positive Action proposes that various instruments for fighting against terrorism should be used in a planned and coherent way within the framework of democratic, ethical and human values. It is believed that the positive action approach will be viewed by the people and the states as fruitful and will be credited with saving the countries and their people from terrorism. For this purpose, brief definitions of terror, terrorism, soft and hard power will be given. Then, the origins of terror according to Nursi will be mentioned. Finally, the role and principles of positive action in countering terrorism will be presented with practical recommendations.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of terrorism as a global problem occupies a large space in everybody's lives nowadays. As terror turn to one of the basic threats for the states and societies, it became the mostly spoken issue in the world's agenda. After September 11, it is clearly seen that no single approach or country is able to solve terrorism problem on its own. Thus, many researchers from different disciplines have tried to understand its origins, causes, objectives, effects and means of countering it. In countering terrorism, initially hard power has been used by countries all over the world as the main strategy for a long time. Turkey also has tried this strategy and it is found to be ineffective. Gallarotti (2015) states that fighting terrorism using coercion and conventional military strategies has come at the expense of more progressive tactics.

Moreover, such approaches at best have fared poorly and at worst have proved counter-productive. In other words, military responses against terrorism have seen only limited and short-term success. According to Çengel (2016:57) the biggest mistake in combatting terrorism is to think that terror can be prevented by military and security measures. When it is noticed that military measures (hard power) against terror did not function in many countries effectively, the countries decided to try soft power as an alternative approach for countering terrorism. To some extent, the use of soft power has been found effective for countering terrorism. But with the increase of terrorism threats at global and regional scale researchers started to search for more effective methods in the fight against modern terrorism, which is really complicated to counter. Now it is clear that the struggle with terrorism is a field of specialization. Some ways of struggle even if using soft power might lead to the increase of terrorist actions as some evil people can also use the ability to attract others via culture, media and etc. and cause them to act negatively. In other words, manipulative soft power can also be used for getting people to do wrong things. As it is realized that hard

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and soft power alone cannot solve today's modern terrorism problem, the importance of an alternative approach, namely "Positive Action" (Müsbet Hareket) started to be understood. In this context, this paper is an attempt to provide a new approach in countering terrorism, which is positive action proposed by the scholar Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (henceforth Nursi), who was very concerned of peace and security of people to which he devoted his whole life. In this article it is believed and proposed that positive action should be preferred to soft and hard power as power whether soft or hard can be used negatively and they are for short term solution to terrorism and insufficient as a means of acquiring desired influence. Hard or soft power sound good but not enough for future as they contain the elements of power. Another rationale for preferring positive action is that the ultimate aim of positive action is to bring peace and prosperity not only in this world but also for the HereAfter by winning the "hearts and minds" of all people voluntarily and eliminate the causes of terrorism in the world. Thus, it is believed that using positive action effectively will be a long term solution to world's terrorism problem. For this purpose, brief definitions of terror, terrorism, soft and hard power will be given first. Then, the origins of terror according to Nursi will be mentioned. Finally, the role and principles of positive action in countering terrorism will be presented with practical recommendations.

### Terror and Terrorism

There is no universal agreement regarding the definition of terrorism. In the literature it is seen that the concept of "terror" is used synonymly with the words violence, political violence and even anarchy. The term "anarchy" has been used for the equivalent of terror for years and the name given for the terrorists in common language has been "anarchist" for a long time in Turkey (Yayla, 1990:335). The concept of "terror" coming from Western languages means almost the same meaning to the word "anarchy" coming from a Greek root. In Islamic literature the equivalent word for terrorism and anarchy is "sedition", that is "Fitnah" (Yılmaz, 2012). Nursi's use of anarchy means terror in this paper. Yet, literally there may be some differences between the words terror and anarchy. Some authors also make a distinction between the words "terror" and "terrorism". The United Nations General Assembly has been negotiating a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism since 2002. The draft definition of terrorism reads as follows in Article 2:

"Any person commits an offence within the meaning of this Convention if that person, by any means, unlawfully and intentionally, causes:

- Death or serious bodily injury to any person; or
- Serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a State or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or the environment; or
- Damage to property, places, facilities, or systems referred to in paragraph 1 (b) of this article, resulting or likely to result in major economic loss,

when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act" (UN, 2002:6).

Accepting the fact that it can be hard to define terrorism, the international community must be able to agree on a definition of terrorism to combat it effectively. Recently, the Islamic World Organization has made a definition for terrorism and asked the whole world to adopt its definition:

"Terrorism is an atrocity committed by individuals, groups or states against the human being (his religion, life, mind, property and honor). It includes all forms of intimidation, harming, threatening and killing without a just cause and all acts of banditry and violence that take place in the wake of an individual or collective criminal plan aimed at spreading terror among people by exposing their life, liberty or security to danger, including the harm inflicted to the environment or to a public or private utility, or exposing one of the national or natural resources to danger" (Makkah Declaration, 2002). It is obvious that terrorism is a global problem towards humanity and it must be made clear that terrorism does not belong to any culture, religion or political system thus no prefix should be used with terrorism. The deliberate connection of the terror with the Islam, which contains love and peace at its core, cannot solve the terror problem but deepens the problem. The Islamic Fiqh Council (2003) therefore condemns the attempts to associate the religion of Islam with terrorism or to accuse its followers, of extremism and violence, for Islam is a religion of mercy, love and peace. According to Çengel (2016) fighting terror is only possible by identifying and calming the feelings that move and feed the tendencies of destruction and hostility in people, who are at the highest level of creation. This can be made possible by true Islam that upholds justice, assistance, and love, and respects the rights of all creatures.

### Hard Power and Soft Power

The capacity to influence others and shape their preferences using some instruments in hand is defined as power. In other words, power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get a desired outcome, which can be done in three main ways: by threatening coercion (sticks), by offering inducements or payments (carrots) and by making others want what one wants (Nye, 2009; Nye, 2008:27; Nye, 2004:5). In this regard, hard power rests on inducements (carrots) or threats (sticks) and soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. Soft power does not belong to the government in the same degree that hard power does. Soft power resources are separate from the direct control of the government and are only partly responsive to its purposes. Firms, universities, foundations, churches and other non-governmental organizations develop a soft power of their own that may reinforce or be at odds with official goals (Nye, 2004).

As states care about their own survival, they do not recognize any superior authority except for them. This driving force influences their behavior and ensures states use hard power. Hard power is defined as the capacity to get what you want through the use of economic power or military force by threatening others that you will use your economic superiority or your coercive capabilities against them. That is, hard power rests on military force, economic strength, natural resources, the size of population and territory and social stability (Nye, 2004). Hard power would come to the fore if military and other coercive methods were used. In sum, hard power is the capacity to resolve problems through the use of violence, the employment of force and ultimately through the recourse to

war. According to Nye and Armitage, if the misuse of hard power creates more new terrorists than the US can kill or deter, it will lose (Armitage and Nye, 2008). Drawing lessons from this it is understood that it is not possible to arrive at solutions against terrorism simply through hard power, soft power also need to be used in the fight against terrorism. The concept of soft power is “more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument”. It includes culture, political values, and the legitimacy and morality of foreign policy, (Nye, 2004:3-6). Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when the country lives up to these values at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when other nations see the country as a legitimate and moral authority) (Nye, 2009; Nye: 2004:11). For individuals, charisma, vision and communication are key soft power skills; for nations, soft power is embodied in their culture, values and legitimate policies (Nye, 2008). The use of information and diplomacy referred to as soft power may be considered a part of the information war. The soft power also includes propaganda, but it is wider than the propaganda itself. It includes real power or the ability to achieve a goal via persuading other countries into the accuracy of its ideas and values (Nye, 2004). In sum, soft power is the ability to shape the preferences of others without using force, coercion and violence.

### Origins of Terror According to Nursi

We should clearly understand the main reasons and other reasons which support the main reason of the terrorism in order to struggle against terrorism effectively (Bakkal, 2006) while discussing the measures to be taken against it. Effective and lasting fight against terror is only possible by eliminating the causes that awaken, feed, and stir the senses of destruction and hostility in people (Çengel, 2016). In literature, it is generally maintained that social inequalities, lack of education and poverty help the terrorist groups to gain followers. It is stated in the OSCE Action Plan on Combating Terrorism that “No circumstance or cause can justify acts of terrorism. At the same time, there are various social, economic, political and other factors, including violent separatism and extremism, which engender conditions in which terrorist organizations are able to recruit and win support (OSCE, 2001). It is accepted that there are some conditions conducive to terrorism and terrorism’s root causes such as social, economic, political and other factors. Unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, lack of rule of law and violations of human rights, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance can be seen as root causes of terrorism (UN Global Strategy for Fighting Terrorism, 1996).

Nursi had expressed İslam’s and his point of view on terrorism in the best way by stating that a true Muslim, a sincere believer never supports anarchy and terror. The thing that the religion fiercely condemns is strife and anarchy as anarchy recognizes no rights (Nursi, 2010a: 566). According to Nursi, the Great Dajjal has prepared the ground for terror and anarchy by destroying the bonds in accordance with which the life of Christian society is administered (Nursi, 2010b: 114). In other words, destroying the bonds that administrates the social life between people prepares the ground for terrorism. The most

effective treatment against pests like anarchy and terror that threaten today’s civilization is to dry up the swamps of selfishness, exploitation, and injustice that produce and feed them by the medicines of compassion, assistance, and justice (Çengel, 2016). Another reason for the terrorism is “disbelief”. According to Nursi, disbelief destroys the sense of respect and compassion and the one who loses the sense of compassion does all kinds of evil including terror. “For if respect and compassion quit the human heart, those with such hearts become exceedingly cruel beasts and can no longer be governed through politics” (Nursi, 2010b: 109). That is to say, Nursi states that disbelief leads to anarchy and destroy of civilization (Nursi, 2010c: 63). Furthermore, the gap between the rich and the poor that cause young people to be easily captured by the terrorists groups can only be closed with the true knowledge and practices of religious principles. The safety and security of society is dependent on there being no vacuum between the classes of people. This can be realized by closing the economic gulf between the rich and the poor used by terrorists to deceive the young through the prohibition of usury and interest (hurmet-i riba) but applying the Qur’anic injunction of almsgiving (vücut-u zekat) (Nursi, 2010d: 45-46). The root causes of anarchy and terrorism is summarized by Karaka (2006) as the following<sup>1</sup>:

- Weakening and breaking of people’ ties with true religion,
- Racism - Nursi accepts positive nationalism but rejects negative nationalism- (Nursi, 2010e: 322-324),
- Shortage of Murshids or breakage of their effects on people,
- Strength given to the disbelief movements,
- Shake of moral principles such as respect and compassion

States in the world, especially America, has been using both hard and soft power for a long time and nowadays trying to use smart power, which is the combination of hard and soft power. But when you think the crisis in the Middle East, especially in Syria, you would say that there’s an urgent need for an alternative approach, namely positive action as people and states begin to realize that hard, soft or smart power is not able to bring peace and prosperity and not sufficient to solve the current problem of terrorism.

### Positive action in countering Terrorism

Positive action is not a form of power and does not depend on any power. It is an alternative approach which has specific rules and features. Therefore, positive action needs to be properly understood in order to be efficiently employed. Literally, positive (müsbet) means established, proved, repairing and affirmed, and negative (menfi) means expelled, banished, denied and negated. Although positive means constructive, negative means destructive. Examples of positive action can be service of belief, the maintenance of public safety and security, reliance on Allah, patience and thanks.

On the other hand, to work for disbelief, misguidance, sins, interfering in Allah’s business, causing conflict and differences, disturbing public order and security, and

<sup>1</sup>See also Yılmaz, M. K. (2012). Risale-i Nur’un İddet ve Terörü Önleme Tarzı. İddet ve Tedavisinde Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’nin Müsbet Hareket Yaklaşımı, 2. Bediüzzaman Said Nursi Sempozyumu, 25-27 Mayıs 2012, Isparta.

impatience and rebellion can be given as examples of negative action (Ba ar, 2016; Ba ar, 1995; Torun, 2016). The concept of "positive action" was defined by Nursi as a method of service towards Iman and the Quran and the foundational principle of his movement. According to Nursi, keeping public order, safety and security up is deemed as positive action while negative action includes the conflicts, wars, disturbing the public order and security (Ba ar, 1995: 148). Nursi clearly cautioned his readers and followers to avoid any sort of action or behaviour that would lead to social discord, discrimination among people or anything that affects public order and security (Turner and Horku, 2009: 100-101). Throughout his life Nursi applied positive action as a key principle for his movement and summarized this principle as "Our duty is to act positively; it is not to act negatively. It is solely to serve the cause of belief in accordance with Divine pleasure, and do not interfere with Allah's concerns. We are charged with responding with patience and thanks to every difficulty we may encounter in the positive service of belief, a consequence of which is the preservation of public order and security" (Nursi, 2010f: 241). These sentences set out for us the most important element of positive and negative actions. For instance, the maintenance of public order, safety and security is positive; causing conflict and differences, and disturbing public order and security is negative (Ba ar, 2016:20-21; Ba ar, 1995).

The term "Positive Action" used in Risale-i Nur Collection sometimes refers to the preservation of public order, safety and security. Nursi strongly advised his students to maintain and preserve public order. In his words: "The Risale-i Nur teaches the lesson of belief through investigation. It restrains its students from all types of harm. It imbues the hearts with righteousness. With the understanding of righteousness such a heart can no longer commit evil. For this reason, today Risale-i Nur students throughout the country are the spiritual guardians of security and order. Thus far no righteous Nur student has been seen to do harmful action against the public order; rather Nur students are the spiritual helpers of those who police the nation" (Nursi, 2010d: 227). Nursi saw Nur students and himself as the spiritual guardians of security and order throughout the country stating that he is ready to sacrifice his life and his honor a thousand times in order to preserve public order and security (Nursi, 2010a: 531; Nursi, 2010g: 30). Thus, it can be stated that the eminent aim of positive action is to preserve the public order, safety and security (Nursi, 2010a: 216, 531, 628; Nursi, 2010b: 387; Nursi, 2010d: 227; Nursi, 2010e: 268; Nursi, 2010f: 199, 241-242) using persuasion, good manners and examples through winning the minds and hearts of all people voluntarily and eliminate the causes of terrorism in the world. Therefore, it is believed that using positive action effectively will be a long term solution to world's terrorism problem. Nursi states that five principles are necessary and essential to get rid of terror and anarchy. These are "respect, compassion, refraining from what is prohibited (haram), security (safety), the giving up of lawlessness and being obedient to authority. "The evidence that when the Risale-i Nur looks to the life of society it establishes and strengthens these five principles in a powerful and sacred fashion and preserves the foundation-stone of public order, is that over the last twenty years the Risale-i Nur has made one hundred thousand people into harmless, beneficial members of this nation and country" (Nursi, 2010b: 372). We can say that Risale-i Nur helps people to be volunteer civil servants of safety and security within the country. In sum, the main

principles of Positive Action in countering terrorism can be listed as follows:

- Positive action requires that people should be equipped with true faith against terror, which should not be done through the use of force but through convincing and persuading others (Nursi, 2010h: 78). In other words, the mere remedy for terrorism is religiosity. Nursi firmly states that the happiness of humanity in this world and the Here After depends on their faith saying that "Be certain of this, that the highest aim of creation and its most important result are belief in Allah. The most exalted rank in humanity and its highest degree are the knowledge of Allah contained within belief in Allah" (Nursi, 2010e: 265). In fact, what makes human into human is true faith and guardian of faith in the hearts of the people is opposed to terrorism.
- Positive action requires that people should be kept away from brutishness and harshness to preserve public order, safety and security and asserts that terrorism can only be solved with true understanding of love that takes the right to life of people into account (Nursi, 2010a: 653). According to Nursi, one of the requirements for the prevention and fight for terror is to widespread the good moral values based on religious references among people through forming an environment of love, peace and security based on Qur'an stating that "we are the guardians of love, we have no time for enmity (Nursi, 2010a:60). The bonds of love, friendship and affection that connect people should be placed within the community to fight against terrorism.
- Positive action requires that legal and social justice should be maintained. The fight against terrorism can be possible by means of realizing legal and social justice among individuals. One cure for social justice is to close the economic gulf between the rich and the poor through the prohibition of usury and interest (hurmet-i riba) but applying the Qur'anic injunction of almsgiving (vucub-u zekat) (Nursi, 2010d: 45-46). According to Nursi, the path of the law must be adhered to regardless of the claims and requests of others (Bakkal, 2016:11).
- Positive action requires that innocent people cannot be punished together with the criminals, which the present-day terrorists ignore. According to Nursi, one cannot be blamed for the crimes of others (Nursi, 2010a: 619, 653).
- Positive action requires that morals of Qur'an which forbid all kinds of evil and mischief but order love, empathy, peace, forgiveness, compassion and mercy must be put into practice in the fight against terrorism. Now, the only remedy for terrorism, which is the biggest danger at this time, is to embrace the truths of the Qur'an (Nursi, 2010f: 54).
- Positive action requires that art and ingenuity through education, and the power of alliance should be used to fight against terrorism. According to Nursi, our enemies are ignorance, poverty and conflict. We will fight against these three enemies with art, ingenuity and alliance (Nursi, 2010c: 15). The largest feeder of terrorism is ignorance. The awareness of the public against terrorism thought education based on religious and civilized sciences is very essential. Nursi states that "The light of conscience is religious sciences (ulm-u

diniye). The light of the mind is civilized sciences (funun-u-medeniye). Reconciliation of both manifests the truth. The student's skills develop further with these two (sciences). When they are separated, from the former superstition and from the latter corruption and skepticism is born" (Nursi, 2010i: 86). The vision of education proposed by Nursi against disbelief, anarchy and terrorism is called "Madrastat-uz Zahra".

- Positive action requires that there should be clear difference between the terrorists and the opponents of the regime in a country as Nursi stated that there are some opponents in every government. These opponents are not intervened legally provided that they do not interfere public order, safety and security (Nursi, 2010a: 571). So, the Turkish government should make a clear distinction between PKK terrorists and ordinary Kurdish people. One thing to remember is that there is an obligation to ensure that all domestic counter-terrorism measures are human rights compliant.
- Finally, positive action teaches all people to treat others the way they want to be treated. Namely, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

## Conclusion

Affecting humanity everywhere terrorism is a complex problem that should be handled carefully. The international community should first clearly define terror/terrorism and confide and support each other to fight against terrorism. In the fight against terrorism, positive action is really a promising approach and offers something different from hard, soft and smart power. In this regard, the positive action proposes that various instruments but peaceful means for fighting against terrorism should be used in a planned and coherent way within the framework of democratic, ethical and human values. It is hoped that the positive action approach will be viewed by the people and the states as fruitful and will be credited with saving the countries and their people from terrorism. It is believed that positive action will have a great and irreplaceable role and will represent the most powerful tool of every country in the fight against modern terrorism. It is also believed that Turkey should play a responsible and proactive role in the maintenance of national and international peace that is free from terrorism through applying positive action in the world. Turkey has an excellent position to implement positive action in its geography and should recommend the use of positive action to all countries.

Positive action seeks leaders and supporters. In this sense, Nursi applied positive action as a key principle throughout his life and he has seen the Nur students as spiritual guardians who provide public order, safety and security. This being the case, can a true believer with a sound mind disregard the severe threat of Qur'an "...that whoever slays a soul, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men..." (Qur'an, 5:32) and risk his Here After by resorting to terrorist acts? Thus, it should be declared from the highest positions of the Islamic world to the entire world with the loudest voice that: "We as Muslims condemn the use of terror under all conditions; we view the murder of an innocent as the greatest cruelty and as a crime committed against humanity; and we consider those who attempt to use terror as the lowest and the cruelest of all people" (Çengel, 2016). We as believers should be representatives of love and public order, safety and security. Nursi states that the time of physical war

in the name of Islam ended, now and onward the time of spiritual struggle (jihad-ı manevi) will be in action, it is not time of jihad by swords but it is time of jihad by words. In this context, the right to life is given particular significance in positive action because all other rights are rendered meaningless in its absence. Finally, it is strongly believed that positive action is extremely important for Turkey's domestic and foreign policy and its fight against terrorism.

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