

US and International Terrorism

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Terrorism is a multi-faceted and dynamic phenomenon, which defies description. It employs extreme physical violence to shock the targeted audience, but the psychological impact upon the people at large matters more to them than the physical attack on victims. Terrorism appears to have increased markedly in recent years. It poses a serious challenge to democratic societies by putting their liberal systems under stress. The freedom of action of the common citizen is restricted under terrorist threats. This may result in militarization of certain countries and in the weakening of democratic processes in others.

The Americans of late have worked themselves in to a tizzy over terrorism. Like nuclear winter, Islamic fundamentalism and global warming before it, terrorism in the later 1990's has lodged itself in the national psyche as a seemingly existential threat. Incidents like the World Trade Centre (1993), Oklahoma City (1995), Atlanta's Centennial Park (1996), Khabar Towers (1996), US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (1998) are cited as evidence that terrorism is on the rise and becoming ever more deadly. According to a report of the congressional research services, "the next great challenge for the US is to combat international terrorism". Terror, in the words of the Secretary of State, M. Albright, is "the war of the future". The State Department defines terrorism as 'premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine state agents, usually intended to influence an audience'. Washington's newest nightmare is the threat of a massive terrorist attack with chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons. The recent events appear to have convinced the policymakers elite and the general public that a disaster is imminent. Defense Secretary, William Cohen, summed up well the prevailing mood surrounding mass destruction terrorism: "The question is no longer if this will happen, but when."

Since the Clinton Administration issued its Presidential Directive on terrorism in June 1995, the US federal, state and local governments have heightened their efforts to prevent or respond to a terrorist attack, involving weapons of mass destruction. In his 1998 state of the Nation Address, President Clinton promised to address the dangers of biological weapons obtained by outlaw states, terrorists and aggrieved criminals. Indeed the President's budget for the years 1999, denotes hundreds of millions of dollars to super-terrorism response and recovery programmes, including large decontamination units, stock-piles of vaccines and antibiotics, improved means of detecting chemical and biological disease outbreaks, and training for special intervention force. To fight terrorism, the US Administration has jettisoned traditional US policy that categorized terrorists as criminals and defined terror as a law enforcement issue. In its place, President Clinton has

instituted a new comprehensive strategy, global in scope, proactive in approach, and tapping the resources of agencies across the federal government. The aim of this strategy is not simply defensive. It aims to pre-empt terrorist action to identify and dismantle terrorist networks, and ultimately to eradicate the threat altogether. Rather than reactive, the strategy plans to seize the initiative. Seizing the initiative implies a great reliance on military power. In President Clinton's war against terror, the Pentagon plays a leading role, employing its high-tech arsenal not only to exact retribution but also to take the offensive. This new stress on the use of US military power does not imply that waging war on terrorism is exclusively the government's affair. According to President, Clinton, a full-fledged national mobilization is in order. In the fight against terror, "every American counts".

From the above, it is evident that the US is engaged in a long-term struggle against international terrorism. It uses a variety of foreign policy tools, from military force when necessary, to vigorous diplomacy, law enforcement, improvement in US security and the development of new technology. Two Presidential Directives were issued in 1998 to coordinate efforts to prevent and respond to unconventional attacks, and to shield information and transportation facilities. In July 1999, President signed an Executive Order imposing financial and other commercial sanctions on the Afghan Taliban for its support for Osama Bin Laden and his terrorist network. In addition the State Department designated thirty foreign terrorist organizations, making it illegal for US citizens and institutions to provide funds or other forms of material support to such groups. The US is engaged in vigorous campaign to promote by the year 2000 the universal adoption and ratification of all eleven existing international terrorist conventions.

The terrorist threat to the US and its interests is real. The post-cold war world swarms with shadowy extremist groups, religious fanatics and assorted crazies eager to launch a major attack on US territory. Walter Laqueur, terrorism's leading historian, recently wrote that "scanning the contemporary scene, one encounters a bewildering multiplicity terrorist and potentially terrorist groups and sects". Senator, Richard Lugar, argues: fanatics, small disaffected groups and sub-national factions who hold various grievances against governments, or against society, all have increasing access to, and knowledge about the construction of weapons of mass destruction... Such individuals are not likely to be deterred by the classical threat of overwhelming retaliation". Many of the counter measures taken by the US government are likely to be ineffective because the level of rhetoric and funding devoted to fighting terrorism may actually advance a potential terrorist broader goals: sapping the resources of the state and creating a climate of panic and fear that can amplify the impact of any terrorist act. President Clinton, his secretaries, officials and journalists must tone down the rhetoric feeding today's super-terrorism frenzy. All terrorists benefit from such heightened attention and fear. The Americans fail to distinguish among four different types of terrorism; mass casualty terrorism, state-sponsored chemical or biological weapons terrorism, small-scale chemical or biological terrorist attacks, and super-terrorism. Today's prophets of doom blur the levies of these four distinct categories of terrorism. As a matter of fact these four types of terrorism are unrelated. The threat of conventional chemical biological terrorism requires neither massive preparations nor large intervention forces. It calls for neither costly new techniques, nor a growing number of insurgency coordinating tactics. The decision to form and train joint response teams in major US cities, prompted by 1995 Presidential Directive, will be productive if the teams are kept within proper preparations. The ideal team should be streamlined so as to minimize the interagency rivalry that has tended to make these teams grown in

size and complexity. The intelligence community should assume the most significant role in any productive campaign to prevent chemical and biological terrorism. New early warning indicators that focus on radical group behaviour are urgently needed. The most neglected means of countering chemical biological terrorism is psychological research. Terrorism scholars and US intelligence agencies have so far failed to discern the psychological mechanisms that compels terrorists to contemplate seriously the use of weapons of mass destruction. The US response to terrorism should distinguish between threats demanding military action and those of which an alternative approach may make more sense. American military power may be less effective against terrorists themselves than against states that sponsor terror or offer terrorists sanctuary.

The US campaign against terrorism rests on a flawed conception of international politics, of America's role in the international system and of the consequences that derive from that role. As a matter of fact Clinton Administration's growing preoccupation with terrorism reveals less about an actual threat than about the premises of American foreign policy in the Clinton era. The essence of the President Clinton's views on international politics can be summarized briefly. In the aftermath of the cold war, the inexorable logic of globalization is transforming the international order. Democracy and free market principles are on the march. The worldwide embrace of political values and economic policies favoured by Americans is both inevitable and irreversible. There emerges as a result an international order whose abiding characteristic is openness, with trade, capital, people and ideas all moving freely across borders. This openness will yield a world that is both peaceful and prosperous and in which old notions of politics as a competitive quest for power lose their salience. The result, predicts President Clinton, will be a new era of interdependence where nations work together – not simply for peace and security, but also for better schools and health care, broader prosperity, and a cleaner environment". However, terrorism represents the continuation of politics by other means. The survival of terrorism in the era of globalisation illustrates the persistence of politics beyond the end of the cold war. The matters of fundamental importance and concern remain unresolved. Prominent among them are disputes over the sanctity of life, the meaning of freedom, and the definition of justice. The survival of politics implies that an effective strategy against threats manifesting themselves as terror must itself be broadly political. Most terrorists possess political objectives, whether Basque independence, Kashmiri separatism or Palestinian nationalism. Terrorists strive to gain sympathy from a large audience and wish to live after carrying out any terrorist act to benefit from it politically. As terrorism expert Brian Jenkins, has remarked: "terrorists want lots of people watching, not lost of people dead". Terrorists who threaten to kill thousands of civilians are aware that their chances for political and physical survival are exceedingly slim. Their prospects for winning public sympathy are even slimmer. Then, terrorists take time to become dangerous, particularly to harden themselves sufficiently to use weapons of mass destruction. Groups such as Hamas, Hizbullah, and Islamic Jihad, which so many Americans love to revile and fear do not make the list of potential super terrorists. These organizations and their state sponsors may loathe the Great Satan, but they also wish to survive and prosper. Their leaders understand that a Hiroshima like disaster would effectively mean the end of their movements. Insisting that terrorism is irrational and atavistic, the Clinton Administration robs it of political context. The possibility of terrorists using weapons of mass destruction exists and cannot be ignored. Yet an effective response to terror should entail not all out war in a pursuit of utopia, but a differentiated strategy that tailors a particular response to a specific threat. Such a strategy should recognize that the underlying problem is not terror as such, but the grievances, ambitions, and apprehensions that propel groups

or individuals to violence. An effective strategy may well entail the unilateral use of force to deflect a challenge to American interests and ideals emanating from a particular quarter. It may also mean a response that relies on other methods: contemptuous disregard, containment, mutual concession, contracting third parties to do the dirty work, or even appeasement.

The US, in its legitimate concern about terrorism worldwide, and particularly in West Asia, should realize that terrorism as we know it today was introduced to the Arab and Muslim worlds by the Zionists who founded the State of Israel. The 1947 dispatch of letter bombs to British cabinet ministers, the bomb attacks of December 11, 1947 in Haifa, terrorizing Palestinian civilians, the blowing up of the Arab-owned Semiramis Hotel in Jerusalem, killing innocent civilians including viscount de Tapia, the Spanish counsel, the famous April 9, 1948 massacre of Palestinian old men, women and children at the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin near Jerusalem, the assassination on September 17, 1948 of UN Palestine mediator count Folke Bernadette and his aide, Col. Andre Pierre Serat, the series of bombs in Baghdad in 1950 by Israeli agents to terrorize Iraqi Jews into immigrating to Israel are some of the innumerable instances. The irony is lost on Americans that the very terrorism unleashed by the state of Israel has become the "role model" for outbreaks of Arab and Iranian terrorism. If Americans are really concerned about terrorism, they by all means should be concerned about curbing Israeli State terrorism, whether it is against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, Lebanese in Southern Lebanon, or Syrians in the Golan Heights.

The US national interests require that it should remain engaged in global affairs, not as the world's policeman but as the major catalyst for an emerging new international order. The US must adopt a more transparent policy towards international terrorism, if it is to enlist the cooperation of other countries of Asia and Africa in this effort. The US had been concentrating on Iran, Libya and Syria on the issue of international terrorism, and playing down the extremist activities directed from Afghanistan and Pakistan in view of its own past association with these extremist groups. In fact the US has been far too permissive of international terrorism centered in and directed from this region. Now the time has come for the US decision-makers to make a more objective assessment of the terrorist campaign through out the world including Kashmir and Palestine.

Washington needs a complete reappraisal of the geopolitical strategies that it had followed since the end of the cold war. If Washington is serious of fighting international terrorism it must abandon obsolete shibboleths. It must break the Pakistan-Afghanistan axis. The US will have to co-opt a number of states in the near vicinity of Afghanistan and Pakistan, like central Asian Republics. President Clinton is not wrong in sensing that terrorism poses a grave danger but campaign against terror is the wrong war against the wrong enemy. Given an ample investment of American energy, know-how and technology, the war on terror may produce the share of tactical successes but in the ultimate analysis, tactical dexterity will not compensate for the faulty premises on which the war is based.