

The WAR ON TERROR is the wrong war leading us in the wrong direction

NOTES FOR A LECTURE

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INTRODUCTION

The chimera of 'Global War on Terrorism' has led us along the wrong path. 9/11 was a local attack, not a "global attack". REP thinks we may be misreading the lessons of 9/11.

I teach a course on TERRORISM at the Virginia Commonwealth University, so the problems of terror are right in the front of my brainbox! I have lived and worked in Afghanistan – which most of you have heard of (although that may not have been true 5 years ago). I have also worked in countries where terrorism became a daily problem: Cambodia, Sierra Leone, and Great Britain where we lived through a thirty-year campaign of IRA bombings and assassinations (including one bomb in a hotel in Brighton that nearly killed the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher).

So I do not take TERRORISM lightly.

And I still think that the WAR ON TERROR is a huge mistake.

- 1) USA is losing the plot; our 'capitalism' needs an enemy ("Communism" has vanished, so the National Security Council needs a new enemy, an new ISM) - but Terrorism is not about 'ism'. Terrorism is not an ideology, it is an action. Terrorism is not a concept, it is a political response. Acts of Terror are mostly a response to local problems of poverty and exclusion.
- 2) Calling it a 'WAR' may be clever domestic politics, but it leads to a colossal waste of resources and huge number of catastrophic policy errors.

Going after terrorists with bombs and tanks is like trying to eliminate malaria by killing mosquitoes with a hammer. Do not laugh, please, at the mention of mosquitoes: Malaria is the biggest killer disease in the world. Malaria fevers - and there fore mosquitoes - kill a thousand time more victims that terrorism. I have had malaria too.

If you want to tackle malaria, you need to develop the same sort of strategy that you need for dealing with terrorists. You need to know where they breed and how they breed (for mosquitoes you look for in ponds and mounds of used tyres; for terrorists you look for places where young people suffer from poverty, exclusion, anger and frustration). You need to know how they move and where they attack (mosquitoes are dangerous at night, and it is the FEMALES you need to worry about; for terrorists it is usually the males, and they seek easy targets that make big media events – for the international media is one of the force-multipliers of terrorism).

- 2) We skip this 2!!
- 3) We need a more subtle approach to combating terrorism than what we are offered. A CAMPAIGN against terrorism: good idea. A War on Terror is stupid
- 4) The concept of a 'global war' on terrorism misses this essential point. By focusing on a supposed GLOBAL threat, we are missing key issues of LOCAL politics and LOCAL failed states that actually caused the problem. Chechnya, Philippines, Indonesia, Afghanistan have rebellions, and they may well have been encouraged by Osama bin Laden, but they are local independence movements (like Vietnam: it was nationalism, not communism that drove the war in North Vietnam, and US politicians failing to understand the motives of Ho Chi Minh explains why America lost the war).
- 5) The coherent Nation State is the building block of our current system. If the Nation State breaks down, chaos emerges and we don't like chaos. Afghanistan was a failed state. So were other countries that became places of terror: Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo-Kinshasa ... and soooooon, so may be Nepal and Iraq where law and order are destroyed and the institutions of state hold no respect from the population.
- 6) These days, with modern communications, local conflicts have a habit of spreading. Africa is the obvious example. Mali & Niger survived, Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone didn't - economic interests often encourage the wars. "Security is a shared risk" and therefore we need to encourage stability and peace among our neighbors. In the global economy, the 'neighbors' are no longer only the people next door. Power vacuum gives space for criminal activity: drugs and gun, money laundering, people smuggling, and lack of legal restraint to illegal corporate activity are greater 'global' threats than 'Terrorism'.
- 7) Afghanistan was incidental, but it should teach us a lesson: that failed states can cause us problems. It was the Afghan failed state that provided ObL with the freedom to export his version of criminal violence. . ObL became a leader only in 1996, he became a world figure only thanks to GWB and CNN.
- 8) SO WHAT ARE THE RIGHT LESSONS ? Afghanistan is now again becoming a failed state; DITTO IRAQ. A battle has been won but the peace is being lost.... And that means the US and the UK and their allies will lose the war.
- 9) In which case terrorism will reoccur. Violence engenders violence. War engenders more war. The "War on Terror" is a flawed concept that will simply increase terrorism.