

The Roots of Terrorism: Probing the Myths

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AN effective counter- and anti-terrorist campaign must be holistic, and incorporate a spectrum of activities that attack both symptoms and causes. Dealing with symptoms involves military, intelligence, financial, legal and police activities to 'root out terrorists'. These may be extremely challenging, but they are still relatively straightforward. Terrorists will be pursued through a mixture of 'high-tech' and 'low-tech' means, removed from society, and their operations blocked, whether they are in Kandahar, Paris or Minneapolis. The US government has acknowledged that all this might take years, without necessarily succeeding in eradicating all members of al-Qaeda and affiliated organisations, or preventing all future acts of terror. But there is a steely determination—by the US government and dedicated members of the coalition—that these 'rooting out' activities will be *the* priority in the years to come.

These same determined actors are categorically less decisive, however, concerning the other end of the spectrum, that is, how to attack the 'roots' of 'new terrorism'.¹ Whereas in the aftermath of 11 September governments focused on immediate responses, by the time nearly a year had passed more energy was being dedicated to trying to understand why al-Qaeda and related groups hate the 'American way' so much that they desire to destroy thousands of innocent civilians, cause immense economic damage and kill themselves in the process. If we can determine what drives people to commit such heinous crimes, it is suggested, perhaps we can change their behaviour. Or, if their grievances really are just, perhaps we can change ours.

Beyond the more radical elements of the al-Qaeda platform, which are considered non-negotiable and fanatical, other alleged underlying causes can be tackled if true, or debunked if myths. One such argument—pertaining to America ignoring the plight of Palestinians in the Middle East—though still heard in certain circles, has been mostly discredited. As Simon and Benjamin explained, the terrorists would not be mollified by

a change in US policies toward the Muslim world . . . The 11 September attacks . . . were being planned when Ehud Barak had been elected in Israel on a peace platform. Previous attacks were planned and carried out in periods when the peace process was advancing. Rather, al-Qaeda is bent on Israel's elimination and humbling the United States into insignificance as a global military, economic and cultural power.²

That said, a resolution to the crisis in the Middle East would go some way towards removing an obstacle and perceptions of inequity by many Arabs

and Muslims, keeping in mind that other radical groups, such as Hamas, object to Israel's existence entirely.

Two other theories circulate as received wisdom. The first is that poverty is at the root of terrorism; and the second is that 'failed' or collapsed states are breeding grounds and safe havens, where terrorists establish training camps and trade illicit goods with ease. These arguments contain partial truths, and thus require closer consideration. Only when we have a more precise understanding of causality can an effective campaign be developed to address root causes.

The poor

Since 11 September a number of politicians, including President Bush, have linked poverty with terrorism. At the March 2002 World Development Summit in Monterey, Mexico, leaders declared that the fight against poverty was intrinsically linked to the fight against terrorism. Earlier, on 6 February 2002, in criticising US policy, the then French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine remarked:

We are today threatened by a new simplism [*sic*] which consists in reducing all the world's problems to the battle against terrorism. That's not a responsible approach . . . We must tackle the situations of poverty, injustice, humiliation, etc. Today there is clearly a radical difference between our approach and that of the US administration.³

Common sense would dictate that there is a direct correlation between poverty and terrorism; yet the evidence gathered thus far does not lend credence to this proposition, and if anything, supports the opposite.

The nineteen hijackers who committed the 11 September atrocities, and their spiritual father bin Laden, were neither poor nor uneducated. Others noted that a large percentage of the Egyptians who belonged to one of the groups affiliated to al-Qaeda came from 'stable middle-class homes and were university educated'.⁴ If poverty really were the root cause of terrorism, more terrorists would come from the poorest part of the world, sub-Saharan Africa; and this, so far, is not the case.

Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova studied Israeli and Arab terrorism in the Middle East, and their results demonstrated that these terrorists not only enjoyed a living standard above the poverty line, but normally had at least a secondary education. The authors report that 'Any connection between poverty, education and terrorism is indirect, complicated and probably quite weak . . . it is more accurately viewed as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings (either perceived or real) of indignity and frustration that have little to do with economics.' Indeed, their study showed that *unemployed* Palestinians were *less* likely to support violent attacks against the Israeli military and civilians.⁵ One sobering finding, that the majority of Palestinians believed that violence has proved to be more effective than negotiation in achieving their goals,⁶ is consistent with other conflicts.

The Kosovo Liberation Army managed to secure NATO military intervention after engaging in a relatively short-term violent struggle, while Rugova's longer campaign of passive resistance achieved very little.

The authors explain their findings by noting that people normally become politicised through education, which enables them to articulate their beliefs and to surround themselves with others with the same proclivities. In contrast, those who are destitute must spend the majority of their time merely trying to subsist. Moreover, the researchers explain that 'educated, middle or upper class individuals are better suited to carry out acts of international terrorism than are impoverished illiterates because the terrorists must fit into a foreign environment to be successful.'⁷ While the Krueger and Maleckova study is concerned only with the Middle East, information gathered thus far about the al-Qaeda network is consistent with their findings, including the point about successfully adapting to foreign environments. In alien cities, members of al-Qaeda have had no trouble finding employment, renting apartments, attending graduate schools and enrolling for flying lessons, all of which would have been much more difficult had they been uneducated and indigent.

International development organisations, especially the European Commission, the UN and the OECD, along with bilateral donors, understand that counterterrorism will consume a growing percentage of budgets and time in the years to come. To the extent that poverty eradication does discourage terrorism, re-allocating funds from development to counterterrorism within foreign aid budgets would be counterproductive. Thus, donors have correctly recognised the importance of uncovering and articulating the connection between the two in order to ensure the optimal use of scarce resources.

Potential links

While it appears that a higher socio-economic status may be positively associated with participation in and support for acts of terror, the research is mixed as to whether this also extends to volunteers for suicide bombing assignments. Because the families of these 'martyrs' are compensated generously by a number of charitable organisations, it could be argued that the financial reward could be an incentive for a poor family. In the case of the Palestinians, the sponsors even include the Iraqi government; one journalist noted an increase in payments by Iraq to families of suicide bombers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in March 2002 from \$10,000 to \$25,000.⁸

While Nasra Hassan discovered in her study of Palestinian suicide bombers that they were mostly educated, middle-class men, Jessica Stern found from her interviews with those involved in the Kashmir dispute that 'wealthy Pakistanis would rather donate their money than their sons to the cause, [and] families in poor, rural areas are likely to send their sons to "jihad" under the belief that doing so is the only way to fulfill this spiritual duty.'⁹ Typically, terrorist campaigns are funded through charitable organisations, or directly

through 'taxes' on the population at home and in the diaspora, as well as from the sale and barter of arms and, often, drugs. Similar fundraising mechanisms have been used in many conflicts, for example by the Eritreans in their war against Ethiopia in 1998–9, or by the Kosovar Albanians in the 1990s. Stern explains that families of suicide bombers are often elevated to a higher status in their community, receiving financial help to start businesses or build new homes.

More research needs to be conducted on 'new terrorist' movements to determine how relevant wealth and education are as factors. We also need to have a better understanding of the psychological profile of these terrorists, to understand who they are and what motivates them. The thousands of foreign fighters in Afghanistan included the upper-middle-class northern Californian John Walker and law students and web-page designers from the United Kingdom, as well as volunteers from parts of the developing world. Presumably the US government has gathered interesting data from the hundreds of detainees in Guantanamo and Afghanistan, though whether any of that information will be released to the public is unclear. It certainly would help; currently many international organisations are trying to formulate development policy responses to terrorism based on an insufficient empirical database.

Once a more consistent picture emerges, targeted responses can be developed. Nevertheless, any response has to be carefully sold so as not to appear patronising, as Krueger and Maleckova note: 'connecting foreign aid with terrorism risks the possibility of humiliating many in less developed countries, who are implicitly told they only receive aid to prevent them from committing acts of terror.'¹⁰ Humiliation can in itself cause increased levels of commitment and recruitment to 'the cause'. Moreover, others in developing states may exaggerate the risks of terrorism as a way to legitimise their authority, and in turn, possibly receive more development aid, or even military assistance. In Somalia, for example, the Somali Transitional National Government (TNG), opposition figures such as Hussein Aidid, and even the Ethiopian government have each made accusations of terrorist connections, primarily for self-serving motives. The report submitted by the Somali TNG to the UN Security Council noted the following: 'There are two options before the Counterterrorism Committee in dealing with the situation in Somalia: to watch the country slide back into anarchy and chaos or to fully support the struggling Somali state by providing the necessary resources to enable it to play a meaningful role in the fight against terrorism.'¹¹

One response: education

As more evidence is gathered about al-Qaeda and what inspires men to join its ranks, there is one area where development assistance could already be used to target root causes, and that is in support of quality public education for all children in developing countries. UNICEF notes that more than 100

million children do not have access to basic education. In many developing states, education is not publicly funded, and is normally fee-based, which many parents simply cannot afford (though a few countries like Cuba are notable exceptions). In some Muslim countries, poor parents send their children to Qur'anic schools because they are subsidised or free, and the children also receive food, clothing and books, at no cost to the family.

The more hard-line Muslim theological schools are known as Deobandi *madrasas*, named after the original *madrasa* established in 1867 in Deoband, an Indian town near Delhi. The schools were constructed because some Indian Muslims feared that British colonial secular education, which was supported by the Hindus, would destroy Muslim culture, and that only a deep understanding of the Qur'an would protect Indian Muslims from these corrupting influences. The movement eventually reached Pakistan, and *madrasas* were established in areas near the Afghan border. Of the several million Afghan refugees who were 'temporarily' displaced in Pakistan for most of the 1980s and 1990s, children from the poorest refugee families attended these *madrasas*, including those who later became the Taleban.

Jessica Stern noted that whereas in the past the Islamic schools in Pakistan received some funding from the state, today most are privately funded by wealthy individuals, charitable organisations from many Arab and Muslim states, and some governments, including Iran. She explains, 'Without state supervision, these madrasahs are free to preach a narrow and violent version of Islam.'¹² She also noted that they provide their students with few practical skills that would equip them for work in modern society—many children do not learn any maths or science, for example—and students instead aim to join the *jihad*. Foreign students also attend the *madrasas*, though whether these students are on scholarships and from poor families is not known.

In other poor Muslim societies, such as Somalia, where the UNDP estimates that only 14 per cent of children attend primary school, and a mere 17 per cent are literate, Qur'anic schools have also been established. Some consist of little more than a dozen children sitting under a thorn tree reading the Qur'an for a few hours in the morning, while others are more sophisticated, and funded or subsidised by wealthy Somalis and Arabs. These schools compete with internationally funded and fee-based secular schools (except in Somaliland, where public schools are subsidised by the government). The fee-based schools cost parents approximately \$1 a day per child, and this is too costly for the majority of Somalis; thus the temptation to send their children to some form of school may be too great to resist, even if the family does not believe in the extreme form of Islam that may be espoused in the Qur'anic school. As reported in a recent International Crisis Group report on Somalia, these schools 'are vulnerable to penetration by those with more radical Islamist agendas'.¹³

Thus, while the links between poverty and terrorism may not be so clear, what can be determined is that children who attend *madrasas* and other Qur'anic schools not only learn to despise 'corrupting Western influences'

from an early age, but also gain few practical skills. In those parts of the world where families have no other option, support for quality public education for all children (including the provision of books, uniforms and school meals), could counter the radical influences espoused by these schools, and teach children practical skills that can be used in the global marketplace. Since fears of Western corrupting influences on education date back to the nineteenth century, if not before, all such interventions must be conducted with extreme care, and developed together with appropriate authorities in developing countries, otherwise they may be counterproductive. While many members of the Taliban were educated in the *madrassas*, others who were involved in the 11 September attacks were not, and it is important to seek a better understanding of the types of education they did have, in order to develop appropriate interventions for those populations.

State collapse and terrorism

The second partially misguided theory brought to bear when discussing the root causes of terrorism links it with 'failed' states. Although reference to *failed states* has become routine in recent years, this author endorses the terms *collapsed* or *imploded*. The term 'failed' implies that there are standards of success to which all states aspire, which is not the case. No state has a complete monopoly on organised violence—and perhaps the variations can tell us about when and how a state will implode. Likewise, many of today's more 'successful' states have similar characteristics to collapsed states, for example, when residents take the law in their own hands and pay 'taxes' to non-state authorities (as, for example, in parts of Sicily). The term 'failed' also suggests that if an unruly dictator had maintained control over the mechanisms of the state—as in Haiti, which before the 1994 US intervention was ruled by tight networks of terror—it would therefore not have failed. Lastly, it ignores the reality that many of these states, especially in Africa, were probably doomed anyway, since Africa's illogical borders and state institutions were imposed by Europeans, without regard to ethnic groups, religion or physical territorial markers.¹⁴

Interestingly, this is the second time in the last decade that the topic of state collapse has exercised policy-makers. In the early to mid-1990s, state collapse was a subject of serious concern, with Somalia and Afghanistan at the epicentre. Even the CIA commissioned a study in 1994, from a group called the State Failure Task Force, to look at correlates since the 1950s. Our misunderstanding of the concept and inability to respond appropriately contributed to the failure of the US and UN interventions in Somalia in 1993–5, which in turn interfered with an appropriate response to the genocide in Rwanda.

Breeding grounds

The 11 September attacks once again propelled the subject of state 'failure' or collapse on to the international agenda, with Afghanistan and Somalia still the focus, though the link with terrorism is not as strong as it may appear. The factors that could make these places attractive to terrorist organisations include weak or non-existent government structures, and the inability of the international community to oversee and regulate trade or movements of people and goods through landing strips and unguarded coastlines, though such activity may be followed or even taxed by local actors. A few international organisations might monitor particular activities—for example, the International Civil Aviation Organisation manages Somali airspace—but the lack of a permanent international presence throughout these territories severely impedes the gathering of reliable intelligence. International organisations must instead depend on sporadic visits (rarely to insecure areas), the local media and other sources of information, much of which is difficult to verify. Thus terrorists could operate with relative impunity, and without fear of either a government crackdown on operations or international intervention.

These attractions may be countered by the difficulties facing terrorists when operating in an insecure and foreign environment, where security is itself highly fragmented and infrastructure unreliable. Indeed, it is not clear that collapsed states, or parts of states that are no longer controlled by the government, are used as havens, where terrorists live, 'breed' and train. When bin Laden took refuge in Sudan, it was not in the southern parts of the territory that are considered 'lawless', but rather in Khartoum in the north, where the government is firmly in control. Similarly, when he established his base in Afghanistan in 1996, it was no longer a collapsed state, but controlled by the Taleban, which eventually succeeded in ruling most of the territory.

Such places may in fact be more at risk when they are embroiled in wars that are perceived as threatening Islam, as evidenced by the participation of bin Laden and other al-Qaeda members in the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, or more recently in conflicts in Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia and allegedly Kosovo. In collapsed and weak states that are not in the midst of full-scale wars, such as Somalia, power is diffuse; there is no superpower or infidel to fight against, nor obvious local candidates with whom a reliable partnership can be developed. These territories are thus potentially less attractive to terrorists.

Since it has been without an effective central authority since 1991, Somalia has a claim to be considered the most egregious and protracted case of state collapse—beyond even Afghanistan—though many other states have hovered between collapse and extreme fragility for years (e.g. Sierra Leone). It is for this reason that such great interest, most of it seriously exaggerated, has been generated in potential al-Qaeda links with Somalia after 11 September.

At the end of September 2001 the *Daily Telegraph* reported that 'between 3,000 and 5,000 members of the al Qaeda and al-Itihad partnership are

operating [in Somalia], with 50,000 to 60,000 supporters and reservists.¹⁵ On 10 December Paul Wolfowitz, the US Deputy Secretary of Defense, remarked: 'People mention Somalia for obvious reasons. It's a country virtually without a government, a country that has a certain Al Qaeda presence already.' Several days earlier, Walter Kansteiner, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, said: 'The United States is concerned that Somalia's lack of central authority makes it an attractive base for terrorists.'

Bin Laden also boasted of al-Qaeda involvement in the incident in Mogadishu on 3–4 October 1993, in which eighteen US army Rangers were killed in a fierce night battle, though he more than likely overstated his role. The indictment by the US government against bin Laden and his cohorts over the 1998 US embassy bombings noted only that 'persons who had been trained by al Qaeda (and by trainers trained by al Qaeda) participated in an attack on United States military personnel serving in Somalia as part of Operation Restore Hope.'¹⁶ There is also speculation that Somalia was used as a transit place for materials and people who participated in the bombings.

It is not known how many Somalis have been trained by al-Qaeda, or, of those, how many participated in the attacks that night. We may never know these facts, and thus need to use caution when making such inferences, as they can deflect attention and resources from the places where the al-Qaeda threat may be more immediate. A US official recently admitted to the ICG, as cited in its May 2002 report, that 'We're still at a very early stage of gathering intelligence. We still don't know who is operating there. There is no sound target and no evidence yet of al-Qaeda members operating in Somalia in any concerted way.'¹⁷

There may have been some al-Qaeda presence in Somalia in the past decade, through links with Somalia's own relatively small fundamentalist group, the al-Itihaad al-Islam, whose power peaked in the late 1990s after suffering military defeat by Ethiopian troops and Ethiopian-backed Somali forces. This is not to say that al-Itihaad is a spent force, but rather that estimates of its power in Somalia, and links with al-Qaeda, have been vastly exaggerated. As Ken Menkhaus explained,

For the past five years, Al Itihaad's strategy has been to integrate into local communities and clans, and work within legitimate sectors—as teachers, health workers, journalists, merchants, and in judicial structures—toward a long-term goal of preparing Somalia for eventual Islamic rule. As a result, there are no local administrations in Somalia controlled by Al Itihaad, and the handful of small, remote bases that radical Islamists once held are abandoned. Bombing those outposts would be an expensive and pointless exercise in rearranging rocks.¹⁸

Moreover, given the small number of foreigners inside Somalia, any al-Qaeda presence today would be noticeable. And since Somali society is highly fragmented, with sub-sub-clans competing for control of neighbourhoods in some instances, it is unlikely that such a presence would be kept secret for long. For these reasons, since early 2002 the US government has been less

worried about Somalia being used as a base or a haven for escaping al-Qaeda fighters. As a senior member of the US military remarked, 'We know that a member of al-Qaeda would stick out like a sore thumb in any Somali village.'¹⁹ Nevertheless, the US, UK, German, Spanish, Italian and other governments have mounted a serious surveillance operation, using naval vessels and satellites to monitor the Somali coastline and territory, while US and European government officials have visited parts of Somalia.

Economic activity

If cases of state collapse or partial collapse were considered serious breeding grounds for terrorism, then numerous other parts of Africa should be on the list, such as Congo. The only other countries in Africa, besides Sudan and Somalia, that have been mentioned as having alleged links to al-Qaeda are Sierra Leone and Angola—because of the diamond trade, not because they have provided safe havens to terrorists (although this should not be ruled out as a possibility). Further, in these two cases, the allegations are that al-Qaeda acted merely as broker, exchanging arms for diamonds. There is increasing international attention to the issue of brokers, and this could be helpful in closing down terrorist access to certain goods. It is exactly the economic dimension that should be of greater concern to the counterterrorist coalition, much more than the 'breeding ground' issue. As already mentioned, in places where government controls are lax, corrupt, inept or incapable, international crime and terrorism can be abetted through increases in trafficking and the expansion of pipelines used to move humans, drugs, small arms, natural resources, black money and potentially nuclear materials. Raw materials such as diamonds, oil and timber are exploited without regard to domestic sustainability and are used to finance wars and illegal activity.

Because of the lack of regulatory oversight, it is impossible to compile reliable data for smuggling or trade in goods, mostly through trans-shipment activity, and movements of people. It may also be the case that, with the international community closing the economic loopholes in the more regulated economies, weak and collapsed states will become more attractive. In late November 2001 the US government froze the funds of the main Somali remittance bank, al-Barakaat, because of suspected links with al-Qaeda, in an attempt to crack down on what economic activity it is possible to regulate.

In the case of Somalia, deductive reasoning would again lead one to assume that al-Qaeda is operating there at least economically, but so far there is little evidence to support this case, beyond what the US government claims to have concerning al-Barakaat. On the whole, Somalis are more interested in economic activity than dedicated to extremes in religion. They are very aware of the harsh penalties threatened by the counterterrorist coalition for any collaboration with al-Qaeda, which explains the offers by Somalis to assist the US government in searching for any al-Qaeda presence in Somalia. In December 2001, for example, the interim Prime Minister, Hassan Abshir

Farah, said that US military teams would be welcome to come to Somalia to investigate any al-Qaeda presence, though this offer does not mean as much as it might appear to: the government controls only part of the capital, so could not assist US military teams in other parts of the country. Whether or not al-Qaeda are taking advantage of the situation in Somalia or in other weak states to move goods and people, the likelihood is stronger for the lack of oversight and accountability. This should be a cause of concern for the counterterrorist coalition.

A final reason to worry about weak and collapsed states is that the inherent insecurity can be exploited by religious fundamentalists. Because religion can unify people, above and beyond clan, tribe or wealth, it often provides a sense of community and security where this is lacking. In some cases, Islam can reach extreme levels, as for example in the re-application of harsh Sharia law in parts of Somalia in the mid-1990s. Most Somalis would say they prefer not to live by such a strict interpretation of Islam, but they were willing to accept it because it provided security. (Harsh Sharia law is less evident today in Somalia, though it was used in several places from the mid-1990s to 2000.) Similarly, the rise and acceptance of the Taleban in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s was partly due to the increase in warlordism and lawlessness.

State collapse: the response

It is imperative that a serious effort is made to re-establish effective government and the rule of law in places where these are absent or weak, in order to counter the centrifugal forces that cause states to collapse, the by-products of which could lead them to become attractive territories for terrorist activity. Since the evidence linking Somalia to al-Qaeda is inconclusive, the motivation for supporting reconstruction in Somalia (and other fragile or collapsed states) is preventative. A more accountable state would also allow improved access, as well as better communication and economic links, and thus enhance intelligence-gathering.

Holistic reconstruction plans that encompass reform of governance, security sector and economy would certainly go some way to prevent these places from becoming potential breeding grounds for terrorism. While it may not be realistic to assume that Western donors will embark on an enormous programme of state-building in these states throughout the developing world, more serious effort, attention and financial assistance would make an enormous difference. Many donors support a policy of conditionality, where 'good performers' receive more international assistance, and 'poor performers' become even more marginalised and receive significantly less aid in comparison. As recognised by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation,²⁰ and as is evident from the 11 September attacks, this approach can be counterproductive. Targeted reforms for 'poor performers' need to be developed and applied in more creative ways. Reforms should include formal methods of accessing credit (which in turn can be monitored), including the

establishment of financial institutions, and support for greater trade and appropriate investment.

In Somalia, the dynamic emergence of strong patterns of local sovereignty, and the appearance of functioning and legitimate patterns of local administration, constitute a political and social adaptation of Somali society to the prolonged collapse of the Somali government. Somalis have thus forced the international community to consider substate political formations as entities that merit being accorded political legitimacy and some form of international recognition and support. This is another reason why the term 'failed' is inappropriate, since parts of Somalia may be more accountable than many so-called 'intact' states. At the same time, in the areas of Somalia that remain relatively chaotic, especially parts of the south, the duration of state collapse and the negative ramifications of almost complete infrastructural damage will also complicate reconstruction. The longer this situation of lawlessness endures in these parts, the harder it will be to convince those in control of strategic resources to relinquish them, and subsequently, to help rebuild the state.

Strong authoritarian states

It is becoming apparent that poverty and a lack of education do not necessarily propel people to become terrorists, though support for quality public education could be one way of attacking root causes in some parts of the world. It is also evident that while collapsed states may not be the serious breeding ground alleged, they could allow terrorists to conduct economic activity and trade in illicit goods unhindered. Wars involving Muslim populations can also be hijacked and exacerbated by terrorist participation. These themes require further research and more creative policy responses.

The real breeding grounds, however, may be the strong, authoritarian Arab and Muslim states, such as Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia. As Walter Laqueur noted in 1999, 'It is difficult to think of a single Middle Eastern country that has not experienced terrorism in recent times, except perhaps under the most severe dictatorships, such as Iran and Iraq, where the only kind of terrorism exercised is terrorism from above.'²¹ The al-Qaeda terrorists who participated in the 11 September attacks, and those who have been arrested for other acts, come from these states. They oppose the authoritarian rule in their own countries, and view their leaders as corrupted by western influences. Moreover, the United States in particular, but also European governments, are viewed as hypocritical by al-Qaeda—and indeed others—because they espouse democracy and human rights worldwide, yet support elitist and non-democratic governments in these states.

If this is indeed a serious problem, and one of the root causes of anti-Western terrorism, then it is not clear what industrialised states can do. It is not realistic to assume that the US government should overthrow these governments; and anyway, al-Qaeda supporters would not wish a democratic,

secular 'infidel' state to replace the current regimes. Western states could usefully promote education and employment opportunities, particularly for women, who have significant influence within the family, provided this is done with extreme caution, careful consideration of methodology and respect for the local culture, keeping in mind the lesson of the original *madrastas*. Support needs to be channelled as much as possible to indigenous civil society organisations, which have a better understanding of how to operate successfully in difficult and often oppressive environments.

The US government claims that sixty countries are home to or are linked with al-Qaeda members, yet does not publish the list of those countries. It would be interesting to ascertain how many of them are industrialised, impoverished, authoritarian Muslim states, extremely fragile, or collapsed.

Fundamentalist charities

Financial support that promotes terrorism comes from a variety of sources, including the diaspora. For the first time, the counterterrorist coalition has attempted to crack down on some of this financing, the case of al-Barakaat in Somalia being one example. Also, we are only beginning to understand the impact of and role played by fundamentalist charities. A distinction needs to be made here between Islamic charities that provide critical health services and education in neglected rural areas, others that promote a more radical agenda, and some that do both. Indeed, one of the basic tenets of Islam is charity, and charity given in a way that does not humiliate the receiver. This discreet method of delivery, however, complicates matters, because some Islamic charities, along with several governments (such as that of Iran), espouse a more radical agenda through their aid. The United States has added nine Islamic charities to its list of organisations that fund terrorism, though many more operate with either tacit or overt government approval in countries such as Saudi Arabia.

In Somalia, the ICG report noted that the Gulf and Arab states, notably Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 'provided funds to Islamic NGOs for humanitarian and social welfare programs throughout the Somali crisis. Libya has also had sporadic involvement in Somali affairs, mainly because of Gaddafi's personal familiarity with numerous Somali leaders since the 1970s and his apparent desire to recast his country as a regional power broker.'²² These states have also provided the Somali TNG with grants, uniforms for police officers and other aid, as they did for the failed Benadir administration in 1998. While some of the aid has provided vital humanitarian and development assistance, other funds have been channelled into promoting a radical Islamic agenda.

Because Western international assistance to Somalia is not significant in scale, totalling \$60 million in 2001, the influence of these Islamist movements has increased on the quiet. The ICG report noted that the fundamentalist movements inside Somalia 'owe their rapid growth since 1990 less to genuine

popularity than access to substantial external funding'.²³ Islamic charitable assistance is rarely noted in UN appeals for Somalia, and few of these countries actively participate in the Somalia Aid Coordination Body, established to serve as the permanent coordination body for donors, UN agencies, NGOs and other international organisations. As Mark Bradbury noted,

It is clear, however, that significant relief and development assistance is being channelled to Somalia from Muslim countries . . . the success of Al Ittihaad has, in part, been based on investing in a social and economic welfare programme that the West will not fund. Rebuilding a Somali state will require vast resources. It is not at all clear that the West is prepared to provide these.²⁴

Enhancing the dialogue with Islamic and Arab governments would open the way to better information sharing, but accessing financial information for extremist organisations will be difficult. The best option would be for OECD donors to provide sufficient aid so that these other organisations cannot gain a foothold; or, if they already have a presence, Western aid could be used to help build local capacity that in itself can counter radical influences.

Other responses

In developing appropriate responses to the terrorist threat, Western donors should involve diasporas as much as possible. The Somali diaspora is active, and provides much-needed financial support. Religious leaders throughout the Muslim world could also be engaged in community discussions, along with other civic leaders, over the role of Islam in society, and potentially could sway marginal supporters not to endorse radical interpretations that distort the Qur'an through calls to kill Americans, for example. The killing of innocent civilians is contrary to Islamic law, as is suicide, and these messages need to be disseminated by local leaders. The counterterrorist coalition must develop creative ways of working with these leaders.

Reducing humiliation will be a long-term project, but can be achieved through spreading the benefits of globalisation as widely as possible, especially by enhancing international assistance programmes, opening markets, and making greater diplomatic efforts to achieve peace in conflict zones, whether they be in eastern Congo or the Middle East. President Bush can demonstrate goodwill and positive intentions by fulfilling promises made in Mexico in March to increase the US foreign aid budget by 50 per cent from 2004, which would contribute to overcoming perceptions of inequity.

Beyond improving and increasing international assistance, reform must also take place at home. It is often argued that the hijackers became radicalised in European and American cities precisely because they felt marginalised and excluded, and experienced prejudice. Western states need to understand how this transpires, particularly with asylum-seekers.

The lesson of Afghanistan is that the international community, and the United States in particular, ignores unpleasant parts of the world at its peril.

The limited research undertaken thus far to discover the root causes of international terrorism has perhaps provoked more questions and challenges than answers. Sharpening the focus on root causes can lead to politically awkward situations and policy choices. Nevertheless, they need to be addressed if the counterterrorist campaign is to succeed.

When referring to al-Qaeda, one of the dangers often highlighted is the 'sleeper' element, whereby members can be activated in any part of the world on command, while at all other times they successfully blend in with the local environment. The challenge for the international counterterrorist coalition is how to ensure that these sleepers never wake up.

Notes

- 1 As opposed to 'old terrorism', where the motives are more tangible, and can often be resolved through negotiation, even if the struggles are seemingly intractable; see John Gearson's chapter in this volume on 'The Nature of Modern Terrorism'.
- 2 Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, 'The Terror', *Survival*, vol. 43, no. 4, Winter 2001, p. 12.
- 3 Interview given by M. Hubert Vedrine, minister of foreign affairs, to France-Inter's *Question Directe* programme (excerpts), Paris, 6 Feb. 2002.
- 4 Saad Eddin Ibrahim, who interviewed these men in prison, as cited in Simon and Benjamin, 'The Terror', p. 7.
- 5 Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, 'Education, Poverty, Political Violence and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?' Charles University, Working Papers, Research Program in Development Studies, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, May 2002, pp. 1, 16.
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