

## **The Challenge of Terrorism and Organized Crime**

Anastas Angjeli

The attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 ushered in a new era of uncertainty that threatens the world system and presents new challenges to all nations. At the center of these challenges is terrorism, a scourge that is fueled by hate and, in many cases, financed by organized crime. Terrorism and organized crime are destructive phenomena that, apparently, will be with us for some time in the twenty-first century. Despite claims by perpetrators of acts of violence that they are motivated by noble goals, their actions are nothing short of sinister. Their assault on civility, legality, and order has hardly affected their main target, the United States, but has placed emerging nations and fragile democracies, like Albania, in a precarious situation. No sooner did we free ourselves from fifty years of totalitarianism than we were forced to expend resources and energies to defend our newly acquired freedoms from the shadowy threats of religious fanaticism and the crime syndicates, both of which thrive in disorder and poverty. It is for this reason that I believe the fight against terrorism represents a serious new challenge for the civilized world. Only its successful conclusion will guarantee that freedom will survive, democracies will triumph, and human dignity, world peace, and prosperity will be enhanced.

As President George W. Bush has stated on numerous occasions, humanity does not have the luxury of compromising in the war against terror or to equivocate about its causes. Because terrorism, like organized crime, operates beyond the boundaries of legality, if left unattended it will sooner rather

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than later affect global stability and prosperity. The question facing our societies, therefore, is not whether terrorism and organized crime are imminent threats to freedom and stability but rather what are the best approaches to negate their evil intent for the sake of our security and posterity.

At the outset, I believe, the world community must develop a common definition of terrorism as an essential first step toward a common response whenever and wherever it threatens human life and international legality. It is clear to the civilized world that terrorism has changed the security environment and highlighted the need to strengthen cooperation among nations for the long haul. After the tragic events of 11 September, an unprecedented and spontaneous display of solidarity bolstered the determination of diverse nations to close ranks with the United States in what has been called the first war of the twenty-first century. However, this solidarity is undermined when peripheral agendas are fused onto the war on terrorism and affect genuine struggles for human rights (be they in Chechnya or Palestine) and the legitimate grievances of oppressed people.

Matters were much simpler during the Cold War. The world then was not affected by the consequences of globalism. Transnational threats to security were limited and their origins easily traced. Borders were effectively controlled (one could say too effectively), movements of information and people were not easy or frequent, and money transfers (terrorism's life blood) were insignificant.

Matters have changed with the advent of globalization. Once walls came down, borders were opened and the movement of masses in search of their livelihood reached crisis proportions. Keeping track of demagogues and agents of hate that move in a murky political environment became a complicated matter. High security risks have accompanied globalization and the broadening of economic opportunities worldwide. Opportunities were provided to terrorists to exploit, for evil ends, the freedoms afforded by open societies. National borders have become more porous and even irrelevant with the advent of the Internet. A dilemma now faces mankind: whether to retreat from openness for the sake of security or to pursue globalization for the sake of prosperity and face risks to security, prosperity, and freedom. Terrorism can no longer be tolerated as the enterprise of marginal groups. As the Afghanistan and Iraq experiences show, modern terrorists and rogue

states are capable of forming dangerous alliances. The first provide the “expertise,” while the latter offer a place in which to operate and access to dangerous weapons of mass destruction. These weapons in the hands of terrorist groups, or even in the hands of pariah states like North Korea, have multiplied threats to global security and transformed our daily lives. New threats require new strategies and a multidimensional approach to security.

### **Our Tasks**

Governments and nations have no choice but to address the challenge of terrorism collectively and comprehensively. We are aware of the economic, political, and practical difficulties ahead. The modern terrorist phenomenon, unlike its nineteenth-century versions, has adopted different rationales, including the perversion of sacred texts and the distortion of religious beliefs, to pursue its dubious agendas. For this very reason our efforts should be both comprehensive and global. In the first place, the civilized world must reclaim its values and expose the misleading slogans of those who hate progress and envy success. The Robin Hood mask that ordinary murderers have donned must be removed and their ideologies, to the extent that they have any, pinned on their evil deeds. As President Bush has said, “Common values and the determination of people are fundamental for uprooting terrorism everywhere around the globe.”

Post-11 September terrorism is different in form from that which came before, and the threat it poses is greater in scope. In the name of “sacred ideas” and concern for the “oppressed,” it has created an environment in which spiritual beliefs, economic prosperity, and freedom cannot thrive. Their allies define the true nature of the modern masterminds of terrorism when compared to earlier versions in history. Prince Kropotkin and other nineteenth-century terrorists never stooped to the level of allying themselves with crime lords, drug runners, and prostitution managers, as modern terrorists do. No anarchist had as his agenda the return of society to a level of tenth-century feudalism, as the Taliban attempted to do in Afghanistan. It seems that in our days, terrorism, organized crime, and rogue states have entered into an unholy alliance in pursuit of regression to a dark past. The fight against this phenomenon and organized crime, therefore, must by

necessity and with due urgency follow a two-track approach: first, a global marshaling of human and technological intelligence aimed at the prevention and, if need be, preemption of threats, and second, a long-range strategic plan to deal with the causes that lead desperate people to engage in hateful acts. The swamps where terrorists are incubated must be drained, and the issues that the demagogues exploit to recruit terrorists need to be addressed.

In the Balkans, a region that suffered undue hardships in recent years, terrorism and organized crime have joined forces to disrupt the orderly development of democratic life and a free economy. Smuggling, illicit traffic in human beings, drugs, money laundering, and fiscal evasion undermine the foundations of orderly political life. Indeed, a para-economy has developed in the Balkans, particularly in countries where the rule of law has not taken hold. Widespread corruption among the judicial organs, public and police officials, and even political leaders affects most countries in the region, Albania included. Addressing corruption and illegality head on is the best way to ensure that corruption and terrorism do not join forces to impede progress toward a free economy and a free society.

The fight against terrorism and organized crime requires close cooperation and the coordination of activities on a broad scale that includes the removal of dictatorships, like that of Saddam Hussein, which could potentially serve as training grounds and financial resources for terrorists and criminals. We have all witnessed the efforts of the United States and the international community to curtail activities of rogue states that support terrorist acts and to expand the rule of law in countries that have, for too long, lived outside its domain. Toward this end, further efforts to strengthen cooperation and coordination among law enforcement organs in terrorist-prone regions are a necessity that must not be overemphasized.

Looking at matters from a broad perspective and with the Balkans as my primary concern, I believe regional socioeconomic development strategies aimed at poverty reduction should occupy an important place in the fight against organized crime and terrorism. Strategies that enhance the adaptation of governmental institutions to meet the ordinary needs of citizens, coupled with financial mechanisms that protect national resources, will ensure better governance and consolidation of the democratic institutions in the Balkans. Moreover, economic and financial development and the strengthen-

ing and consolidation of public administration are prerequisites in Albania and our Balkan neighbors who suffered fifty years of communist oppression only to find themselves in the grip of criminal enterprises and their terrorist allies.

Albania and other Balkan countries face serious and concrete problems whose solutions cannot be postponed. Smuggling on a wide scale, drug trafficking, fiscal evasion, the flourishing of an underground economy, trafficking in human beings, and the sheltering of foreign criminals must be stopped before they cause states to become dysfunctional and societies to lapse into anarchy. Albania and the neighboring Balkan countries cannot deal with the problems of corruption and terrorism alone. Since they are transnational issues they require multinational approaches, although individual states cannot shrink from their responsibilities or pass the buck under the guise that terrorism is a transnational phenomenon and, therefore, someone else's problem. It is true that ten years of war brought about state dysfunctionality in the Balkan states that permitted the emergence of crime syndicates that now threaten weak governments. The assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic of Yugoslavia in 2003 and the subsequent arrest of more than four thousand suspected members of crime syndicates underscore the dimensions of the problem. Within the limits of its resources, Albania has done its best to confront terrorism within its borders and to cooperate with its neighbors.

As early as 1997 the government sought a coalition of Balkan states to fight terrorism and criminality in all their manifestations on a regionwide basis. We viewed terrorism as a complex multidimensional issue involving political, legal, and economic threats to our stability. Within that framework, a national strategy to fight terrorism was developed. This strategy engages all pertinent state institutions and provides a logical platform for international cooperation. We have cooperated with police and international services in every respect, particularly with those of the United States, including the U.S. Customs Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. But consider the dimensions of the problem we face.

Despite a brief interlude, heroin produced in Afghanistan has exceeded the pre-Taliban levels. According to the DEA, Afghanistan poppies are now

estimated to provide the raw materials for four to six tons of heroin a month that transit through Turkey to the Balkans and into lucrative Western markets. The International Organization for Migration estimates that approximately two hundred thousand women are literally bought and sold annually by the sex cartels of the Balkans and their extensions, which reach all the way to the United States. We are aware and concerned that major crime syndicates involve Albanian nationals of many origins, and we are determined to do something about our involvement, which can be partially explained by what I stated above—the dysfunctionality of Balkan states—but it is only a partial explanation. The problem is made more difficult when corrupt government officials form alliances with the underworld. It is the nexus where organized crime and terrorist phenomena become indistinguishable.

Albania has strongly supported resolutions of the United Nations Security Council for the fight against terrorism, especially resolutions 1368, 1373, and 1377, which define terrorism as a threat to peace and international security. Moreover, the Albanian government has closely cooperated with the Security Council committee on terrorism and has provided this committee with useful information and, in turn, has taken into consideration its advice and help. Albania has paid special attention to adhere strictly to European and UN conventions that focus on the fight against terrorism, organized crime, the identification and elimination of money laundering, and whatever else would be used by terrorists for their evil purposes.

All of this was made possible with an improvement of public order—something that my government has made a top priority. The improvement of police efficiency, the acceleration of judicial reform, and better harmonization of cooperation between the two would further enhance Albania's ability to fight against terrorism and organized crime in all its forms. These efforts, we are confident, will remove Albania from the lists that rank it among the problematic countries in this field. The establishment and the adaptation of the relevant structures, such as the section of the war against organized crime in the ministry of the public order, the creation of an organized crime task force at the general prosecutor's office, and structures that monitor money laundering in the ministry of finance, as well as the approval in November 2001 of the national strategy for the war against illicit drug and human trafficking, constitute a serious commitment by Albania in this fight.

But this is only one part of the struggle. Focusing on the efficiency of these structures and achievement of concrete results in the war against organized crime, illicit drug and human trafficking, smuggling and corruption, fiscal evasion, and the informal economy will remain priorities for some time to come. The battle must be won because our economic well-being and national security depend on its outcome.

