THE TYRANNY OF TERRORISM

As the next chapter in the War on Terrorism unfolds with the war in Iraq, we might question what is this "terrorism" that is being attacked, and why does it evoke such divergent responses.

Terrorists aim to terrify. Through terror, they gain power. Their actions have clearly made us afraid. Our fears may induce us to respond irrationally to our unwanted partners in this imposed dance of death, or we may dispassionately attempt to understand their motives.

The confusion surrounding terrorism may lie in the fact that we can currently discern four types of terrorism, and two levels. We are perhaps only afraid of one type, acting on the uncontrolled level.

The four types of terrorism may be labelled as state terrorism, freedom fighting, attrition terrorism in Israel, and global terrorism. Horrible as each terrorism is, most are perpetrated according to some bounds or "rules". Al-Qaeda global, no holds barred terrorism, with no taboos on killing, is on a different level. It is this type of terrorism, and its potent innovations, that induces fear in us. If we are truthful, most of us care little about the other terrorisms in which our own group is not affected.

Though terrorism occurs in many parts of the world, it is the Arab world that has recently spawned each type of terrorism, culminating in Al-Qaeda. Let us try to untangle the interlocking types of terrorism in that part of the world.

First, state terrorism, as practised in Iraq, is the rule rather than exception in the Arab world. In a recent discussion on the Qatari television station *Al-Jazeera,* Yahya Abu Zakaria, an Algerian Islamist journalist said, "..I am completely convinced that the Arab ruler, in his cruelty, repression, and oppression of the peoples, bears most, if not all, the responsibility for the collapse of the Arab [world], politically, economically, and culturally." He pointed out that these rulers came to power by force, and squandered the wealth of their countries, while their subjects were poor.

David Pryce-Jones (*The Closed Circle; An Interpretation of Arabs* Phoenix Press, London, 2002) believes that Arab societies are locked into pre-enlightenment, undemocratic communities. Essentially, they still adhere to old family, clan, and tribal means of achieving power and wealth. This involves ruthless gang-like competition against rivals, and maintenance of power through corruption, nepotism, force, and reputation. Saddam Hussein's Iraq is a good example of this, but so are Syria and Saudi Arabia.

Freedom fighter, the second type of terrorism has been an aspect of revolt against these regimes, sometimes under the guise of Islam. Such revolts are usually brutally suppressed.

However, the rulers have used the age old device of finding outside enemies to divert internal discontent. They blamed Israel and the United States as neo-colonialist conspirators causing Arab ills.

Arab states have waged wars against Israel, and have supported terrorism against the Israeli population. For instance, Saddam Hussein pays Palestinian suicide terrorists' families $US 10,000 - $ 25,000, according to inflicted damage. I call this attrition terrorism, because the aim of the civilian killings and cycles of revenge is to break Israel's will.

Even so, Palestinian terrorists have continued tribal warlord rivalries among themselves, wherever they stayed (Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine), and against Israel.

Perhaps we know most about terrorist leaders and followers from among Palestinian terrorists. Like many terrorist leaders, Arafat came from a middle class family and was well educated. He proved his credentials early by killing a friend, among other innocent people. In time, he amassed a fortune by "donations", and through the PLO's drug dealing, extortion, bribery, and contract killings (Livingstone & Halevy, *Inside the PLO;* David Pryce-Jones, *The Closed Circle)*.

The foot soldiers, especially current suicide bombers are different. Jerrold Post from George Washington University interviewed thirty-five incarcerated would-be Palestinian suicide bombers. They were males aged 17-22 who came from relatively poor, uneducated, and oppressive backgrounds. They often had experience of personal or family loss or humiliation. Their lives lacked meaning. They tended to search for authorities who promised salvation from their misery and despair. They tended to accept the black and white world visions of the leaders, including the promise of heaven. They could be labelled as *naïve idealists*.

Coming now to Al-Qaeda, the leadership and followers bear the hallmarks of their terrorist predecessors (Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda,* Scribe, 2002). Coming from wealthy educated families, the future terrorist leaders were idealistically influenced by charismatic figures in universities. They became leaders of their own groups through ruthlessness. Osama bin Laden had his mentor and founder of al-Qaeda, Dr Abdullah Azzam, killed.

What personal ostracisms, inadequacies and meaninglessness, these people may wish to overcome can vary. Perhaps Osama was resentful of his position as the 17th of 52 children, the son of the despised fourth wife called 'the slave woman' in the family, and himself 'son of the slave woman'.

Like other would-be rebels, Osama was prevented from fomenting opposition in his native Saudi Arabia. He had to make his mark in Afghanistan. That he was still permeated by his social background, is shown by the fact that with the Taliban he imposed a state terrorism in that country that could rival any Arab state.

Osama was able to take terrorism to a new level, through his unusual capacity to exploit a seductive mix for believers, and promise of punishment for unbelievers. As a cult figure, Osama guided a utopian political ideology of a proud and powerful Arab empire; and a religious ideology of Islam with the promise of heaven. Unbelievers were promised, through unabashed spectacular terrorism, the choice of symbols in 9/11, and media exploitation, death and destruction. His globalization skills added to the terror he meant to instil.

The strategy of instilling fear of unbounded terrorism is a cynical device to evoke excessive, unthinking *fight and flight* responses in victims. Excessive responses mean striking at, or being afraid of, *symbols* reminiscent of previous traumas, even if they are unlikely to reproduce the traumas. Saddam Hussein is reminiscent, and symbolic of Al-Qaeda, but whether he is dangerous to the West, is a moot point. However, if Al Qaeda can draw the victims to strike back too wide, those innocently attacked can become new Al Qaeda allies. On the other hand, if victims restrict their actions through excessive fear, they become easier to intimidate and blackmail.

So in the War on Terrorism, should we invade Iraq? Is Saddam Hussein a terrorist? Undoubtedly, a state terrorist. Does he support terrorist organizations? Undoubtedly. Palestinian terrorists. But if we are clear on different types of terrorism, we have to admit that he has not been an Al Qaeda type terrorist.

An attack on terrorism through attacking Iraq can only have the goals of removing a state terrorism, removing some support for Palestinian terrorists, and giving notice to other Arab tyrannies to move toward democracy, and not spawn and export terrorism.

Such a prong of the War on Terrorism requires clear goals and planning. For instance, having replaced a state terrorist, we should not leave the area to other tribal warlords, or become just another such warlord.

If we want to nudge other Arab terror states toward democracy, stop making them the breeding ground for terrorists, and to encourage peace between Israelis, Palestinians, and Arab states, we require a clear statement, a long-term plan and wholehearted international participation.

Dealing with Al-Qaeda terrorism requires a different basic approach. We must deal with them as we would with a dangerous international cult, or a criminal organization like the Mafia, who have developed fanciful ideas of world domination. The Al Qaeda terrorists must be labelled as criminals, and their propaganda and techniques must be exposed. Their attempts to polarise must be resisted, and all should recognize that Muslims are their first victims, as happened in Afghanistan. Perpetrators of criminal activities, and their leaders, must be hunted down and imprisoned.

By identifying different types of terrorists and their levels of activity, we may deal with each in less emotive and more constructive ways.

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