



Relearning lessons in the war on terror

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From the recent Israel-Hezbollah war in southern Lebanon to the jihadists in Iraq's Sunni Triangle to the repeated efforts by Islamists across the globe to trump Sept. 11, 2001, what old lessons about terrorism are we in the West finding ourselves having to relearn?

First, death is the mantra of terrorists. In urban landscapes, they hide among apartment buildings, use human shields and welcome all fatalities--friendly or hostile, combatant or civilian. Death of any kind, they think, makes the West recoil but allows them to pose as oppressed victims.

Their nihilistic hatred intimidates, rather than repels, third parties--whether "moderate" Arabs, Europeans who back off from peacekeeping in Lebanon, or the Western public at

large. Our enemies call Jews "pigs" and "apes" and employ racist caricatures of America's African-American secretary of state. Meanwhile, we worry about incurring charges of "Islamophobia," when we should be stressing our liberal values and unabashedly contrasting Western civilization with the 7th Century barbarism of the jihadists.

Second, windfall petrol-dollar profits (now around \$500 billion annually) financially fuel radical Islam. Iranian cash allowed Hezbollah to acquire the sophisticated weaponry needed to achieve parity in ambushes with the Israel Defense Forces. Unless the U.S. can find a way to force oil prices back down below \$40 a barrel, Islamists may eventually be better equipped with weapons they buy than we are with munitions we make.

Third, as Israel's experience in Lebanon demonstrated, air power alone can never defeat terrorists. Precision bombing is a tempting option for Westerners since it ensures few if any of our own casualties. But jihadists, through the use of human shields and biased photographers, are able to portray guided weapons as being as indiscriminate as carpet-bombing.

Fourth, the use of old shoot-and-scoot missiles--Katyushas, Qassams and worse to come--is altering the strategic calculus, as they now number in the many thousands. The fear of Hezbollah's near limitless mobile launchers enabled terrorists to put whole Israeli cities in bomb shelters and almost shut down the country's economy.

Fifth, intelligence remains lousy. The lapses are not just an American problem but stymie the Israeli Mossad as well. The latter had little idea of the anti-tank weapons and impenetrable bunkers of Hezbollah a few miles from the border.

Under the jihadists' code of vigilante justice, local informants suspected of supplying tips to Westerners are almost instantly and publicly executed. We, on the other hand, flay ourselves over targeted wiretaps.

Sixth, there is little evidence of either the efficacy or morality of the vaunted "multilateral" diplomacy. The French have steadily downsized their proposed contribution to the UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon. Cash-hungry Russia sold its best weapons to terrorists. And

oil-hungry China supplies Iran with missiles.

And seventh, the reputation of the international media in the Middle East for both accuracy and fairness has been lost. In the recent war in Lebanon, news agencies were accused by bloggers of publishing staged photos, and one agency, Reuters, was embarrassed when it found out-- thanks again to the work of bloggers--that one of its freelancers had doctored war-zone photos.

Journalists rarely interviewed or filmed Hezbollah soldiers. In the Middle East, reporters are scared stiff of Islamic fundamentalists, but not the Israeli or American military.

Despite the enormous advantages of Western militaries, there is no guarantee we can keep ahead of terrorists--especially since they are becoming more adept while we seem tired and unsure about whom, why and how we should fight.

So far, the U.S. has been able to dodge the latest terrorist bullets. So far, Afghanistan and Iraq are clinging to their newfound democracies. So far, Israel has been able to survive Hamas and Hezbollah, and these groups' state sponsors in Iran and Syria.

But unless we in the West adapt more quickly than do canny Islamic terrorists in this constantly evolving war, cease our internecine fighting and stop forgetting what we've learned about our enemies--there

will be disasters to come far worse than Sept. 11.

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