



British Minister Fails the War of Ideas

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In a speech on British policy on Terrorism, the international development secretary of the UK failed the basic understanding of the ongoing War on Terror. PM Hilary Benn, a candidate for Labor Party deputy leadership said "*President George Bush's concept of a "war on terror" has given strength to terrorists by making them feel part of something bigger.*"

In a New York meeting organized by the Center on International Cooperation think-tank, Mr. Benn advocated the pre-9/11 idea that Terrorists are reacting to foreign policies and that they function not on the basis of ideologies but on the grounds of economic injustices. In view of the fact that Mr. Benn is a member of a Government involved in the War on Terror, both inside Britain and overseas, it is very trou-

bling to see that in the heart of Western democracies, a deep ignorance of historical and ideological facts still exist, even among leaders of global defense of democracy.

Following are my comments on Minister Benn's remarks:

"By letting them feel part of something bigger, we give them strength..." Hilary Benn

1. Mr. Benn said "*the phrase gives a shared identity to small groups with widely differing aims.*" He added: "*And because this isn't us against one organized enemy with a clear identity and a coherent set of objectives.*"

Mr. Benn should know better. When Jihadi cells grow and operate in London, Manchester, Leeds, Bir-

mingham, blow up undergrounds, conspire to destroy airliners over the Atlantic; when British authorities are now monitoring more than 1,200 potential future Terrorists across the isles; that is not a local police issue. When the Salafi Jihadists operate in Morocco, Algeria, India, Russia, Indonesia, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Holland, France, Canada and the United States, with one ideology, a focused identity, a global strategy and a set of coordinated moves; and when on top of that, their leaders, commanders and emirs clearly state their world objectives, identify their common enemy; when all that is displayed and restated on and on in the media and on internet, it is the most troubling that a member of the British Government, in charge of "international development" fails on guessing who the war is against and who his country and democracies around the world are up against. If that is not a Global War, what else could be? M. Benn incapacity to identify the global threat is disturbing, particularly because the enemy isn't secret nor its ideology is confidential. But let's note that US legislators lately have recommended similar mind games.

2. Mr. Benn goes on to say: "*What these groups want is to force their individual and narrow values on others, without dialogue, without debate, through violence. And by letting them feel part of something bigger, we give them strength.*"

These "groups" are not a collection of individuals engaged in personal quest for glory or banditry. The Jihadists who massacred British citi-

zens on July 7, 2005 in London and those who are developing Terror cells throughout England and the rest of the World are members of an international army formed by Salafi ideologues who began their campaign in the 1920s, while the Khomeinist Jihadists joined the fray in the 1980s. They are not just seeking to "impose" values by personal acts, including violence; they are waging a war, a full fledged, carefully planned series of campaigns over the decades to crumble their foes and establish totalitarian regimes. They do not wait for their enemies to describe the conflict for them but they define it by themselves. Thinking that by removing definitions and imposing some other wording is going to deter the Jihadists from acting as such, or as "feeling" they are not global is a serious intellectual failure. Stating that by snubbing them we will make them feel bad is indicative of psychological insecurity among many in the West who not only do not understand their enemies, but explain it wrongly to their constituencies.

3. Mr. Benn attempts to replace the current definition of the War by stating that it is "*the vast majority of the people in the world*" against "*a small number of loose, shifting and disparate groups who have relatively little in common.*"

While this equation should be the objective of international society, that is to isolate the Jihadists worldwide and within the Arab Muslim world, it is nevertheless not yet reality. The Jihadists are converging onto one global objective, have many things in common and

even after the vanishing of their leaders continue in the same direction. While their foes are of different backgrounds, left wing and right wing, liberal and conservatives, from various ethnicities and ironically not unified, not coordinating and lacking a universal vision of the struggle against Jihadism. M. Benn should have recognized reality first, "what is" before offering what all of us in the international community wish for, the "what should."

4. In his most strange statement, Minister Benn *"urges world leaders to find common ground with potential enemies, rather than relying on "hard" military power. "The fight for the kind of world that most people want can, in the end, only be won in a different battle - a battle of values and ideas."*

As the author of the book *The War of Ideas*, I cannot agree more with the proposition that winning the conflict with Jihadism needs success in ideological and intellectual battles. It is certainly true that hard military power alone cannot solve this crisis. Hence, my criticism of those theories describing this war as a police operation only. So Mr. Benn and many who espouse his views must make a choice: either this war on Terror is essentially a War of ideas or it is a massive police effort against some small factions. One cannot go both ways. If this is a "battle of ideas," the public needs to know between which set of ideas? The same logic used by M Benn et al to reject the concept of a war against "Terrorism" also rejects the idea that this conflict is simply against "bad guys." One cannot serve half the truth. Yes, the Jihadists

are bad guys because of their misdeeds, but they have a worldview and doctrines they refer to in their indoctrination and recruitment. M Benn cannot ignore this ideology. If he wishes to get rid of the concept of a "War on Terror," we have no problem with it, as long as he proposes something more intelligent and analytical. He criticizes M Bush for adopting the unclear idea of "Terror" but replaces it by an even more simplistic concept of "narrow values." And to completely fail the test, the British minister doesn't even identify these "narrow" matters.

5. Ironically, the Jihadist ideologues would find M Benn's statements perfect. For the Terror leaders main objective is to see their foes learning less and less about their (Jihadists) ideology, strategies and plans. The enemies of liberal democracies and of the UK wish to see British (but also American) politicians moving away from the concept of War on Terror, and not seeing the Jihadists as Global and coordinated. That is exactly what the Terrorists want: If the British and their allies reduces their perception of the conflict to "police operations" or pretend their enemies are much smaller than reality, they would be fighting a war with obsolete weapons and almost no strategic vision. What better gift can Bin Laden and Ahmedinijad hope for?

6. Finally, M Benn says: *"in the UK, we do not use the phrase 'war on terror' because we can't win by military means alone."* Coming from a high level official in London and a potential future British leader, such a state-

ment is an eye opener: That he has been thinking all along that the War is only about guns. No wonder why the "Coalition" wasn't making progress over the past years. Such a conclusion if anything indicates that at the core of the British Government (and of many other Western democracies including the United States) the battle of Ideas was lost years ago, before it actually begins.

Unlike some of his colleagues in the cabinet, and regardless of the domestic debate in Great Britain, at least M Tony Blair said one day, that the real war of ideas has to be won at home. I do hope, that in contrast with M Benn he meant that most British and other world citizens must know the enemy they are facing, whatever the decision they wish to follow afterward.

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