



Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century

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I. The Definition Issue: What is Terrorism?

Describing the nature of a particular topic is commonly the path towards defining it. Attempting to outline what constitutes terrorism amounts to landing in the middle of a semantic minefield where emotions run very high and the criteria necessary to describe the term are constantly evolving. Terrorism is a polemical word that has long provoked interpretation discrepancies in the international community. Although definitions are short formulations used with the intent of conveying clarity, we may be facing a case of intended ambiguity, of a lack of clarity in order to stifle the need to pronounce moral judgment about terrorism. The results to attain a definition that elicits universal acceptance have been frustrating so far because the predicament of de-

fining terrorism lies in its subjectivity. There are clear contrasts in perception for those in authority, onlookers, public opinion, victims or perpetrators;¹ for those who condemn or condone terrorism. It all “seems to depend on one’s point of view,” says terrorism expert Brian Jenkins; “if one party can successfully attach the label ‘terrorist’ to its opponent, then it has inherently persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint.”² His formulation summarizes the rationale behind the controversy surrounding terrorism, which is epitomized in the relativistic saw, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” Although there are different reasons hindering international consensus, subjectivity remains a major obstacle in defining the term. The international community has pragmatically chosen to tackle the issue by skipping to use the word itself and fo-

cluding instead on the adoption of a series of protocols and treaties that deal directly with some of terrorism's external features. Although this piecemeal approach may be semantically insufficient, it has become a successful effort in securing that a vast majority of states sign on these binding international agreements for the prosecution or extradition of the perpetrators of some designated acts such as aircraft hijacking, hostage-taking and a variety of violent attacks against individuals and property.³ While the international community has made some headway classifying some of the violence considered terrorism to be covered by international law, the euphemistic approach so necessary to reach international consensus makes only certain the persistence of the semantic disarray.

Subjective and heinous, terrorism leaves no one indifferent. Invoking the word "terrorism" stirs strong emotions due to its violent nature and the misery its bloody actions usually entail. Violence or the threat of violence may be the only feature generally accepted to describe the terrorist ethos.⁴ Unfortunately, today virtually any especially abhorrent act of violence is often described as terrorism,⁵ showing the pervasive misapplication of the word in everyday life since not all violence is terrorism. The word has become too elastic, a catchall term to describe violence directed against society. However, the terrorist is fundamentally a rational actor and a "violent intellectual" ready and committed to using force in pursuit

of his particular political goals;⁶ he thinks out his objective and then carefully plans how best to achieve it.⁷ In the taxonomy of violence, terrorism stands out as a policy tool of coercive intimidation whose ultimate aim is to change "the system," through violent acts.⁸ An important objective for those terrorists who carry out the coercion strategy is to influence the public not so much through articulate appeal as through intimidation and fear.⁹ Therefore, violence applied to achieve a political goal is in essence the fundamental characteristic that distinguishes terrorism from crime and other forms of violence.¹⁰

Since the definition issue remains controversial, terrorism experts such as Walter Laqueur¹¹ and Bruce Hoffman¹² find it useful to list certain distinctions as a path to definition. In addition to its ineluctable political dimension and deliberate violence, there are some cardinal criteria for describing the ontology of contemporary terrorism.

- It is about power: Terrorists want power; terrorism is designed to create power where there is none or to consolidate it where there is very little.¹³
- It is systematic: The terrorist enterprise is a planned, calculated, and indeed systematic act.¹⁴ Terrorism is a method, rather than a set of adversaries or the causes they pursue.¹⁵ It is choreographed with an audience in mind – a concept epitomized in the celebrated state-

ment by terrorism expert Brian Jenkins, "Terrorism is theater."¹⁶

- It is designed to have the ripple effect of fear: Terrorism seeks to go beyond the immediate target victims; it seeks to have far-reaching psychological repercussions.¹⁷ The purpose of a terrorist attack is to instill fear on a wider scale¹⁸ in order to coerce others into giving in to their demands. The essence of terrorist operations is its indiscriminate attacks against civilians¹⁹ with the intent of creating havoc and instilling fear and insecurity in society.

- It is non-state: Terrorism is more usefully regarded as a most serious breach of peace in which non-state entities participate.²⁰ Today it is usually a networked, leaderless adversary, either a subnational group or non-state entity, ideologically motivated.²¹ In spite that one of the most accepted criteria about the terrorist narrative is its non-state essence, terrorism is also developing into a new form of asymmetric warfare carried out by states²² in one more demonstration of its chameleonic nature.

- It is rational: The terrorist strives to act optimally in order to achieve his goal in a clear demonstration of an entirely rational choice, often reluctantly embraced after considerable reflection and debate,²³ weighing costs and benefits before undertaking the murderous journey.

This short list of criteria is a helpful account in the quest of understanding the ontology of contemporary terrorism. Our current manifestation of terrorism has very little in com-

mon with the character of its previous versions and a definition of the past would likely not meet the requirements of today. The word "terrorism" was first popularized during the French Revolution to describe the violence practiced by the state during the Reign of Terror (1793-1794) in revolutionary France and in those days, the term had a decidedly positive connotation.²⁴ Almost one century later, during the days of Karl Marx, the term was proudly anti-state and acquired many of the revolutionary connotations we recognize today.²⁵ And one century after that, the same word has such intrinsic pejorative connotations that not even its practitioners want the terrorist label to describe their actions.²⁶ This definitional metamorphosis taking place during the span of centuries is only one part of the story. The fact is that pursuing universal acceptance regarding certain issues often ends up becoming a utopian ideal. The semantics of terrorism seems to be one of those lost causes.

II. Fostering Terrorism: The Root Causes

Just as with the semantics of terrorism, neither is there consensus among academic experts about what generates and fosters terrorism. Although scholars such as M. Crenshaw, A. Merari, or W. Reich have advanced various hypotheses and arguments about the origins of terrorism in general, an integrated framework that considers the possible causes of terrorism in a systematic manner is still lacking.²⁷ The

underlying, even naïve, assumption is that if society identifies and removes the root causes, then terrorism will wither away²⁸ and this possibility is depicted as an apparently plausible effort towards addressing the terrorist issue.²⁹

Although the causality issue remains as controversial as its other aspects, terrorism does have causes; *ex nihilo nihil fit* – nothing comes out of nothing.³⁰ Much has been written and speculated about the circumstances that make the road to terrorist violence seem to be the only way out of despair;³¹ however, more than anything, terrorism tends to be the product of a long process of radicalization that prepares a group of individuals for such extreme action.³² Notions of causality imply a sense of predictive value that belies the complexity of terrorism as well as the factors behind the choosing of terrorism as a strategy of violent protest.³³ Actually, terrorism is a problem of what people (or groups, or states) do, rather than who they are or what they are trying to achieve.³⁴ The actor-oriented approach may be more useful than the root-cause approach for the analysis of these dynamic processes since the latter gives the impression that terrorism is driven by fate and its practitioners are passively swayed by social, economic, and psychological forces into the terrorist venture.³⁵ This kind of analysis becomes a misrepresentation of reality since terrorists are undoubtedly rational and intentional actors who choose to develop violent strategies in order to achieve their political objectives.³⁶

The persistent belief that poverty is the main, if not the only, cause of terrorism in the contemporary world is explained by applying certain *political* assumptions such as this one: In pure Marxist-Leninist terms, the misery of poor countries is the fault of imperialism and developed countries exploit them unmercifully; therefore, Westerners have been told not only that the current wealth distribution is unjust, but that it is all their fault and the effective cure for the eradication of terrorism is the redistribution of that wealth.³⁷ Holding poverty and inequality as root causes of terrorism is the wrong approach since the actual data does not fit that narrative.³⁸ In fact, most research shows that a higher living standard is positively associated with support for, or participation in, terrorism.³⁹ Yet as long as the root causes of terrorism are analyzed through an interest-based lens, i.e. dividing the world into haves and have-nots and linking poverty to terrorism, the Marxist explanation will remain a compelling argument, regardless of its lack of accuracy. Discussions that attempt to root terrorism just in poverty or civil strife miss one fundamental attribute of terrorism: It is primarily a strategy and tactic open to any group from any background and for any politically related reason.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, society is still told to believe that the root causes of terrorism are poverty, unemployment, backwardness, and inequality⁴¹ and adding to that picture, other arguable factors are adduced for the

spread of terrorism, e.g. the “clash of civilizations,” the existence of the State of Israel, or anti-Americanism.⁴² However, factors far more tangible in the terrorist context are, for example, the correlation between terrorism and nationalist, ethnic, religious, and tribal conflict;⁴³ ideology, the vengeance motive, and the stark feelings that real or perceived wrongs can inspire. It is equally important to consider the difficult-to-define and frequently-neglected psychological factors such as aggression and fanaticism, which involve motives far more elusive and hard to control, entailing investigations considered repugnant to many as they tend to reduce the importance of the ideological factor in terrorism and lump together terrorists with other types of violent aggressors.⁴⁴ In fact, fanaticism is an essential part of terrorism; Hitler believed that the greatness of each movement is rooted in a religious fanaticism totally convinced of its own rightness, relentless in the pursuit of its goal, intolerant against anything else; therefore the enemy had to be smashed and destroyed – and with the resurgence of fundamentalism came a recurrence of fanaticism.⁴⁵ While in the terrorism of earlier eras indiscriminate killings were the exception rather than the rule, indiscrimination has become common practice in our days; this dehumanization is in large part the result of religious fanaticism, especially in the case of Islamism, but it is also true in the case of radical nationalist terrorism.⁴⁶ Our contemporary world presents terrorism in astonishing complexity and diver-

sity, with equally perplexing perspectives through which contemporary terrorism is addressed⁴⁷ and with religious and nationalist fanaticism as its predominant feature.⁴⁸

The notion of “root causes” is taken more from the realm of politics than from terrorism research and social theory.⁴⁹ Politicizing the research of the causes of terrorism or sanitizing the conclusions through the filter of political correctness has not been helpful. There is a connection between terrorism and the economic and social situation; there is a connection with the political state of affairs, and at the present time, there is a connection with Islam; yet such conclusions do not take us very far.⁵⁰ We need to know more; if we do not ask the right questions, we will not get the necessary answers. Terrorism is not a homogeneous threat; it is a complex process and seeing it that way can help us to prioritize our questions. They must put strong emphasis in the link between perspective and evidence, the role this relationship plays in order to understand terrorism, and that methodological rigor and evidence are the most important qualities of research.⁵¹ Only evidence can settle disputes; to understand terrorism one ought to investigate more than just its outward manifestations and, in order to make that happen, the research endeavor requires leaving behind preconceived notions, studying the available evidence, and taking into account the old and new features of terrorism.⁵²

III. State-Sponsored Terrorism: Violence as a Foreign Policy Tool

Just as the character of terrorism has evolved over time, state sponsorship of terrorism has also undergone a protracted transformation since the days of Joseph Stalin to the 1980s when states, in a move of cold rationality, chose to sponsor terrorism and turned it into a deliberate instrument of foreign policy as a vivid demonstration of ruthless *realpolitik*.⁵³ Although non-state entities are the main actors of the terrorist enterprise, states provide the lifeline these entities need to survive and thrive; it is a symbiotic and deadly relationship with a long and bloody history, accounting for several thousand casualties worldwide.⁵⁴

Among the strategic, domestic, and ideological motivations states have for such an unsavory kind of partnership, the most important is often strategic interest: State sponsorship of terrorism is a foreign policy tool that can be used to influence neighboring countries, intervene in the affairs of a hostile adversary regime, or achieve other aims of state.⁵⁵ In reality, one sort of motivation does not necessarily exclude the rest; sometimes an all-of-the-above pick in order to advance their own agendas leads nations to back terrorist groups.⁵⁶ The lack of political levers and strong allies, feeble economies, little international prestige, and weak conventional military forces push some states to use terrorism in conjunction with other means as a way of augmenting, rather than replacing, their instru-

ments of national power and improving their status in their respective zones of influence.⁵⁷ A case in point is Syria's use of terrorism as an integral tool of its foreign policy structure.

This joint venture is usually advantageous for both partners and presents several incentives: On the one hand, the sponsoring state can enjoy anonymity and avoid international reprisal, it offers a more cost-effective approach than conventional warfare, and makes power projection plausible, it also plays a role in bolstering leaders' domestic positions.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the sponsored terrorists can capitalize on even larger rewards under the protection of a state sponsor. In most cases, the support provided by the state makes the terrorists far more capable and hinders efforts to counter them.⁵⁹ The type and degree of support states give to these groups varies, but it places a well of resources typical of a established nation-state's entire diplomatic, military, and intelligence apparatus at the disposal of terrorists, such as training, money, logistics, arms, organizational assistance, diplomatic backing, ideological direction, and sanctuary – with the latter as the most important sort of assistance.⁶⁰

The other side of the coin has to do with the disincentives to engage in this abominable practice. On the terrorists' side, the high risk of losing their lives is a serious disincentive that money surely assuages. Yet the main cost for the sponsored group is the loss of identity by hav-

ing to relinquish its original political motivations in exchange for hard cash – e.g. the case of the Abu Nidal Organization.⁶¹ In the case of states, the disincentives to sponsoring terrorism have mainly to do with the high price of being a pariah – an aspect still shaping policies.⁶² Not surprisingly, states turn to diplomacy, economic pressure, or even conventional war before deliberately choosing the terrorist venture; after all, terrorism is murder.⁶³ In 1979, the U.S. State Department established a list of countries providing either direct or indirect support to terrorist groups. In 2010, the only states listed are Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria, though its practitioners do not circumscribe just to that list. To be formally designated a state sponsor automatically entails sanctions whose effectiveness is impossible to measure accurately; an informal look at the currently designed sponsors provides only very modest support for the proposition that sanctions have helped to reduce terrorism.⁶⁴ The best case – maybe the only case – about the power of sanctions was seen in Libya’s policy shift.⁶⁵ The application of a mix of military, political, and economic measures led to Libya’s pariah-state label, economic hardships and growing domestic unrest, with sanctions as the driving force; this in turn allegedly forced the hand of Libya’s leadership to abandon terrorism.⁶⁶ The international consensus reached to present a common front against sponsoring Libya should count as a really exceptional case. Furthermore, there is never a one-solution-for-all approach to

dealing with sponsors since each state has its own peculiarities and vulnerabilities to be taken into account.

The worst case about the power of sanctions is Iran’s continued support to terrorism.⁶⁷ The capture of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979 and the imprisonment of American diplomats and private citizens for 444 days with the explicit acquiescence of the Iranian government is the quintessential example of an act of state-sponsored terrorism and it was the pivotal event in the emergence of this type of terrorism as a weapon of the state as well as an instrument of foreign policy.⁶⁸ Libya, Syria, and Iraq and some governments elsewhere were quick to follow this egregious example. In spite of international sanctions, Iran has remained one of the world’s most active states sponsoring terrorism; it has supported dozens of violent groups over the years, but out of those terrorist groups, none is more important to Tehran than the Lebanese Hezbollah, which quickly became a disciplined, skilled and dedicated movement to become one of the world’s premier terrorist organizations.⁶⁹ Decades-long sanctions, though painful, did not affect the political orientation of the regime, particularly Iranian support to terrorism.⁷⁰ Perhaps the lack of consistency in applying the sanctions played a role. Iran has simultaneously faced both sanctions from the United States and engagement by Europe.⁷¹ Sanctions are costly and this reality cuts both ways, but they can be useful. Their effectiveness

depend on variables such as the dependence of the target state on foreign trade, the responsiveness of its political system, the breadth of multilateral support, and the importance to the targeted regime of the behavior the sanctions are intended to change.⁷²

Most instruments of coercion are ineffective and at worst counterproductive.⁷³ Despite different levels of pressure using diplomacy, military action, political and economic coercive measures, sponsors have not been willing to abandon such an important tool for achieving strategic ambitions that otherwise they would not be able to accomplish due to their own weakness.⁷⁴ One capital reason why states choose terrorism to advance their interests is because it is *not* treated as an act of war and such a distinction is vital for sponsors.⁷⁵ Commissioning or sponsoring terrorist acts allow for a degree of deniability; it is a type of surrogate warfare to confront more powerful enemies without risking retribution.⁷⁶ States simply respond to a calculation of risks and benefits in advancing their agenda. Factoring economic sanctions in to see how a regime's interests are better served may keep it away from engaging in terrorism while a more ideologically motivated state may feel that sanctions demonstrate that its rivals are determined to sabotage its economy and thus increase its support for terrorists.⁷⁷ States can be coerced into halting their support, but the process is arduous, lengthy,⁷⁸ and it does not guarantee success. State sponsorship of terror-

ism offers a lever of foreign policy influence for many leaders with far more potential than other means available.⁷⁹ Since they have few alternatives to achieve their ambitions,⁸⁰ they consider that the benefits outweigh the costs. That is why it is so difficult to eradicate and it will remain a challenge for civilization during this new century.

IV. Insurgency or Terrorism?

Insurgency and terrorism are two different phenomena that share many traits. As it is the case with terrorism, "insurgency is part of a broad category of conflict known as irregular warfare."⁸¹ And just as with terrorism, political power is the central issue in insurgencies; the aim of insurgency is to get the people to accept its governance or authority as legitimate.⁸² Insurgencies are essentially a contest for the allegiance of local populations.⁸³ According to the CIA's *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, "the common denominator of most insurgent groups is their desire to control a particular area. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations, whose objectives do not include the creation of an alternative government capable of controlling a given area or country."⁸⁴ With this determinative geographical component in mind, it becomes clear that not all terrorist groups are insurgencies, but almost every insurgent group uses terrorism.⁸⁵ Since by definition insurgencies hold an alternative vision about polity and seek to replace it with one fitting their political, economic, ideological,

or religious vision, they use a variety of political, informational, military, and economic instruments to realize that vision, in addition to the irregular military tactics that characterize guerrilla operations, combining all these tools with the intent to generate mass political mobilization to overthrow the existing authority, e.g. a national government, imperialist government, or foreign-occupying force.⁸⁶ In contrast, terrorism may be fueled by sheer revulsion toward the *status quo*, without an alternative in mind.⁸⁷

The terrorist and guerrilla have been among the most common approaches to warfare throughout history; but to succeed against more powerful enemies, weaker actors have had to adapt.⁸⁸ Irregular warfare is the response to an overwhelming power in which state and non-state entities avoid overt military engagement and instead apply other resources to weaken and destabilize the powerful adversary. It is a challenge for mighty powers that often end up resembling helpless giants on the defensive against small but ruthless enemies.⁸⁹ That is why terrorism offers many advantages for insurgencies and the reason behind why few groups can resist its allure completely.⁹⁰ Isolated terrorist groups come and go, often abruptly, but the average insurgency lasts more than a decade.⁹¹ Traditional terrorist groups are small and have no deep roots among the population in contrast with insurgencies that are usually popular and more complex movements that often control territory.⁹²

Many terrorist groups are state-sponsored precisely because they are insurgencies and this state support helps insurgents conduct guerrilla operations, which ultimately enables them to conduct terrorist attacks.⁹³ Israel's experience with Hezbollah suggests the many difficulties in confronting a skilled terrorist group that is also a popular insurgent movement.⁹⁴

The distinction between insurgency and terrorism has vital implications because the techniques that could be used to halt or destroy a terrorist group often fail or are incomplete against an insurgency that regularly uses terrorism as a tactic.⁹⁵ Though broad historical trends underlie the factors motivating insurgents and most insurgencies follow a similar course of development, no two insurgencies are alike; every one is different in circumstances, character, and importance to a nation's interests.⁹⁶ The same can be said about terrorism; it has changed over time and so have the terrorists, their motives and the causes of terrorism.⁹⁷ However, insurgencies appear under different conditions than terrorism – an important consideration trying to understand how to anticipate and counter such violence.⁹⁸ Insurgency and terrorism require different policy approaches; applying the wrong remedies can often exacerbate the problems. Understanding the nature of the enemy must permeate policymaking from top to bottom and from capital to field.⁹⁹ In regards to the terrorist undertaking, American planning and analysis often tends to react to

an emotive and generic approach to terrorism, and/or generalize from patterns and incidents that simply do not justify such generalizations.¹⁰⁰ The word “terrorism” has repeatedly served to imply attacks by small groups or independent organizations, rather than attacks by well-organized, non-state actors or asymmetric warfare by states.¹⁰¹ From a functional perspective, ignoring the risk of asymmetric warfare does not spell objective planning, assessment, and analysis, neither does using definitions of “terrorism” that include virtually any act of violence except formal war, as some American agencies do.¹⁰² While fighting terrorism might mean just getting rid of some unsavory group, fighting an insurgency requires other tactics that include e.g. swaying the population against the insurgent group and training other military forces on how to conduct counterinsurgency operations.¹⁰³ Understanding insurgency sets the stage for developing the political, material, and psychological tools to win the contest of popular support.¹⁰⁴ The military forces that successfully defeat insurgencies are usually those able to overcome their institutional inclination to wage conventional war against insurgents and instead apply counterinsurgency knowledge.¹⁰⁵

The structure of a group says more about its primary purpose; it could be said that, as a rule of thumb, groups organized into irregular military units are more likely to pursue guerrilla war; however, those with cell structures are proba-

bly intending to use terrorism.¹⁰⁶ Yet Hezbollah has two armed wings, one wages guerrilla war and the other carries out terrorist attacks.¹⁰⁷ Attacks on military forces are considered insurgent operations; however, the attacks on civilian populations are more common nowadays and these incidents have served to blur the thin line dividing insurgency and terrorism today.¹⁰⁸ The CIA’s *Guide* pinpoints that terrorists do not work in the open as armed units, for the most part hold no territory, avoid engaging enemy military forces in overt combat, numerically and logistically are constrained from mobilizing popular support in a concerted manner, and have no direct control or governance over a populace at any level.¹⁰⁹ These are just general guidelines, there are no absolute categories regarding insurgency and terrorism; their tactics overlap and evolve over time – more intensively now due to globalization. For example, in the case of insurgency, while its traditional definition emphasizes armed opposition to national governing systems and authorities, globalization has altered this concept since today there is a growing number of insurgencies that are multinational in identity, reach, and aims.¹¹⁰ In the case of terrorism, globalization has enabled terrorism to grow from regional phenomenon into a global threat through the expansion of air travel, the wider availability of televised news coverage, and broad common political and ideological interests.¹¹¹ The overlap between insurgency and terrorism has important implications for understand-

ing state motivations and for effective counterterrorism¹¹² and counterinsurgency. Overwhelming conventional military superiority has pushed enemies to fight unconventionally, mixing modern technology with ancient techniques of insurgency and terrorism.¹¹³ However, by focusing on efforts to secure the safety and support of the local populace, and through a concerted effort to truly function as learning bodies, victory can be achieved¹¹⁴—until the next challenge pops up.

V. Oil and Terrorism: That Deadly Combination

Because of its significant role as the fuel – literally and figuratively – for modern industrial economies and for military forces, oil has long been a top-priority political issue; countries have constantly sought to gain control of petroleum resources and to manage the use of those resources for their own political, military, and economic benefit.¹¹⁵ With the development of the petrochemical industry, oil changed our lifestyle. The scope of products made from oil and by machinery and systems powered and transported by oil is simply breathtaking. Gasoline, airplane fuel, diesel or heating oil are the obvious products that come to mind; however there is a list of less obvious applications that nonetheless play a prominent role in everyday life such as tires, all rubber products, fertilizers, CDs and DVDs, shoes, eye glasses, computers and accessories, asphalt roads, pharmaceuticals, anesthetics, cosmetics, detergents, and countless more. With-

out oil to provide the world's current fuel, material needs, and economies, we would be forced to return to a level of civilization and infrastructure of more than a century ago.¹¹⁶ Oil has become so pervasive for our modern way of life that its importance will remain crucial in the coming decades for our continued progress. The first quarter of the twenty-first century will see our most intensive dependence on oil as a fuel and materials source.¹¹⁷

The real problem is that, in spite of all those vaunted Western measures and plans about alternative sources of energy to cut dependence on foreign oil, the West – the United States in particular – will become even more reliant on Middle East oil by 2025 due to rising demand and depleting reserves elsewhere.¹¹⁸ Since the world's oil supplies are mostly concentrated in this region¹¹⁹ and the oil-rich, authoritarian countries of the Middle East have become the birthplace of today's global jihadist movement, oil dependence from this region is perceived as a serious vulnerability in terms of national security and energy security – two issues more intertwined in the 21st century than ever before.¹²⁰ Ensuring unfettered access to Middle East oil may have been a policy that has contributed to economic growth, but it has also been a decisive factor in other areas rendering less desirable outcomes¹²¹ in a region where perceptions matter as much as realities. Although America imports its oil mostly from non-Middle East sources, decades of oil extraction in the Middle East have resulted in a

widespread image of the United States as a global parasite, feeding off Middle Eastern petroleum reservoirs and propping up malevolent and greedy autocratic states.¹²² This perception has undoubtedly contributed to the challenges of global terrorism.¹²³ In general, Western intervention in the cause of oil is perceived as a factor supporting corrupt, autocratic rulers in the Middle East.¹²⁴ This Western energy dependence definitively shapes policies towards other countries. These policies have been designed in large part to assure the abundant and uninterrupted flow of oil to the West; for example, the presence of American troops in the world's largest producer country, Saudi Arabia, which has long enraged some Muslims and that Osama bin Laden has masterfully exploited to promote his cause,¹²⁵ or European policies toward Iran or Libya since these countries supply a large percent of Europe's imported oil.¹²⁶

The role of oil in the twenty-first century will be shaped by markets, technology and government policy.¹²⁷ During the Cold War, U.S. foreign policies towards the Gulf were shaped with the bipolar struggle against the Soviet Union in mind and the containment of communism provided an overarching strategic framework that clearly influenced many policy decisions between 1945 and 1991.¹²⁸ During this period, America contracted many marriages of oil convenience with autocratic states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Egypt, to keep the Soviets at bay.¹²⁹ It could be argued that much of the

anti-American sentiment in the Middle East is in part caused by the perceived hypocrisy between American values and its defense of national economic interests to ensure the unrelenting flow of this mineral strategic commodity,¹³⁰ while turning a blind eye to disturbing realities in the Middle East directly connected to oil extraction such as political corruption, lack of political and social development, critical levels of economic dependence on a single national resource,¹³¹ and other structural problems. Despite its abundant oil wealth, the quality of life in the Arab World is considerably lower than in other developing countries - a condition which Osama bin Laden and other Islamist terrorists have noted and exploited in their continual exhortations for the Muslim world to take up violence against the West.¹³² Though there is no proven causal linkage between poverty and terrorism, it is the perception of this nexus what terrorist leaders skillfully exploit. Poverty combined with youth unemployment does create a social and psychological climate in which Islamism thrive generating the radicals necessary to incite internal conflicts.¹³³

Saudi Arabia, home of an autocratic kingdom and a strategic American ally because of oil was also the birthplace of most of the 19 identified hijackers that carried out the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This country is particularly vulnerable to terrorism and al-Qaeda is well aware that a successful attack on one of the kingdom's major oil facilities would

send shockwaves to the world.¹³⁴ Islamist terrorist violence in Africa is also a matter of great distress and al-Qaeda has already expressed its particular interest in destabilizing the region and attacking its oil infrastructure.¹³⁵ Physical damage to energy infrastructure is a threat to energy security and to political and economic stability. Attacks on pipelines are tactically easy and the desire among terrorists to attack them have been well publicized by Osama bin Laden in different statements calling on his associates to take their holy war directly to the oil industry and to disrupt supplies to the United States from the Persian Gulf.¹³⁶ The specter of burning oil fields by terrorist attacks brings to mind the time in 1990 when Saddam Hussein ordered the destruction of Kuwait's oilfields during Iraq's retreat. If Saddam had invaded Saudi Arabia instead and applied his scorched-earth policy there, Western economies would have been crippled for years.¹³⁷ A carefully-planned terrorist attack could land us in that scenario.

Oil alone cannot explain the horrors of 9/11 or the phenomenon of Islamist terrorism in general, but we cannot completely disregard the connection between the flow of Western money towards the Middle East and the growth of well-funded Islamist terrorist groups.¹³⁸ Long-term energy security and national security goals will prove elusive unless our energy security interests are pursued alongside coordinated efforts contributing to the increase of state legitimacy and good gov-

ernance in oil-producing countries worldwide.¹³⁹ Foreign investment, particularly in the hydrocarbon sector, can play a crucial role in modernizing and upgrading economic infrastructure.¹⁴⁰ The fact is that these countries could not exploit their oil without Western technology. Therefore, the extraction of oil should no longer result in the same patterns of theft, greed, corruption, and authoritarianism so familiar to the Middle East.¹⁴¹ Admittedly the West has some responsibility in this area but the exploitation of our collective guilt over colonialism, imperialism, and other -isms in the politically correct environment of our days is a big factor exerting negative influence on policy today. In addition to the time-honored tradition in the Muslim world to put most of the blame of its failures on foreigners rather than on their own shortcomings and lack of self-criticism;¹⁴² most Western governments have advisors and experts who offer perception-based and not fact-based analysis since they come from the Middle East or from universities where their positions are paid for by oil-producing regimes and produce monothematic advice: Muslim extremism is due to wrong Western foreign policymaking or to the way Muslim immigrants are treated in the West.¹⁴³ This kind of approach has led to many failed policies and strategies contributing to the lack of unity to confront the terrorist enemy. The greatest threat to our security remains problems of mindset and perception since we fail to appreciate how these phenomena can impact on terrorist thinking and op-

erations as well as on our own views and premises, constraining and distorting our policymaking.¹⁴⁴ There is an enormous need to cultivate a new generation of academics who can understand this and to involve dissidents from the Arab world who would inform us not about the perception, but about the reality of the Middle East – ¹⁴⁵ and Western policymakers who can bravely look at this issue through new eyes.

At the turn of the century, non-democratic and unstable Middle Eastern countries provided thirty percent of the global supply of oil with Saudi Arabia alone providing ten percent of total supply.¹⁴⁶ Although oil may eventually diminish in importance, it will continue to play a significant role in the global economy for the foreseeable future and will remain a key subject of international politics well into the twenty-first century.¹⁴⁷ Almost ten years after 9/11, too many Western policymakers are still not capable of connecting the dots between oil revenues and the financing of Islamist terrorism.

VI. Islamist Terrorism: The Curse of the Free World

The decade prior to 9/11, a number of scholars and experts perceived that fundamental changes were taking place in the character of terrorism since the use of violence for political purposes had allegedly failed: “Postmodern terrorism” was to be conducted for different reasons altogether.¹⁴⁸ This time the reason was

religion. For groups like al-Qaeda, religion is the overriding motive and, indeed, the religious imperative for terrorism is the most important defining characteristic of terrorist activity today.¹⁴⁹ Yet if we can look beyond the fiery and religiously-fervent rhetoric of terrorist leaders, religion may be used as a powerful motivating element for its members, but the ultimate purpose to use violence is none other than the seizing and remolding of the controls of a state to establish the caliphate,¹⁵⁰ an alternative polity that Muslims recall as a “golden age of Islam.”¹⁵¹ Thus, in reality, it is business as usual; the essence of jihadism is politically-motivated violence wrapped in an appealing mix of religion and fanaticism, but political after all.

The postmodern version of the old terrorist scourge, which some authors use to explain the underlying rationale of the global jihad, is seen as a reaction to the perceived oppression of Muslims worldwide and the spiritual bankruptcy of the West.¹⁵² Reemergence in the early 1980s of terrorism motivated by a religious imperative set in motion profound changes, still unfolding, in the nature, motivations, and capabilities of terrorists.¹⁵³ Not until 1980 did the first “modern” religious terrorist groups appear.¹⁵⁴ Much of it could be seen because of the revolution in Iran that so dramatically portrayed the zeal and forcefulness of the new Islamic leaders.¹⁵⁵ With the resurgence of fundamentalism came a recurrence of fanaticism.¹⁵⁶ And what the world is enduring today

are mostly manifestations of fundamentalism; what the public sees is not a Muslim majority but a jihadist minority.¹⁵⁷

The Wahhabi religious vision is the fundamentalist version of Islam and consists in a strict, puritanical faith that emphasizes literal interpretation of the Koran and requires to fight the unbelievers in a holy war or "jihad" and to reestablish a true Islamic state.¹⁵⁸ Contemporary jihadists read the Koran and extract from it the verses referring to violence and then tell Muslims that it is their duty to behave accordingly; however the problem is whether it was ever meant to be used as a blueprint for action.¹⁵⁹ Jihad, that literally means struggle in the path of Allah, basically states that life is hard and one must struggle against evil in oneself in order to be virtuous and moral, trying hard to do good and help to reform society; from then on, it is open to interpretation that can go all the way to holy war to defend Islam.¹⁶⁰ Jihad is a concept with multiple meanings that has been used and abused throughout Islamic history.¹⁶¹

Using the jihadist interpretation, violence is first and foremost a sacramental act or divine duty for the religious terrorist.¹⁶² The will of Allah and the doctrine of the Koran make their actions legitimate, however unrestrained and violent they may be.¹⁶³ With this justification at hand, their violence becomes devoid of the moral constraints other kinds of terrorists may have.¹⁶⁴ Naturally, this also serves as the justification to

embrace a more open-ended category of "enemies" – anyone who does not belong to their group, including other fellow Muslims – and also to commit suicide or "self-martyrdom," though forbidden by Islamic law.¹⁶⁵ According to their interpretation, the enemy is the West, the United States in particular, willfully impeding the reinstatement of the caliphate.¹⁶⁶ Jihadists and their followers argue that Western societies are naturally hostile to Islam¹⁶⁷ and exploit the misconception. On the other side, many Westerners hear about Islam and the Muslim world only through explosive, negative media reports, failing to distinguish between Islam as a religion and Muslims and the extremist jihadists who have hijacked Islamic discourse to justify their terrorism.¹⁶⁸ It is another case of the clash between perception and reality that needs to be urgently addressed.

In 1996, bin Laden declared war on the United States and its allies; his goal was to drive American forces out of the Arabian Peninsula, overthrow the Saudi government, and liberate Islam's holy cities of Mecca and Medina – threats he conveyed with carefully-staged media appearances.¹⁶⁹ Global politics were indeed for bin Laden a clash of civilizations between the Muslim world and the West, between Islam and a militant Judeo-Christian conspiracy.¹⁷⁰ According to his vision, the crimes of the West, the exploitation, and the massacres committed by colonial rule, had to be avenged; the West, with its demoralizing cultural

influences as much as its economic predominance, is still the main obstacle for the global victory of Islam.¹⁷¹ Once the holy war was announced, the fame of bin Laden and his organization spread through the Muslim world and al-Qaeda had no difficulties enlisting new recruits.¹⁷² Uncontrolled demographic growth and the incapacity of Arab governments to create jobs for young people have contributed to the terrorist potential in the Arab world.¹⁷³ However, this potential due to unemployment does not depict the whole picture of jihadism. Though the support among the poor masses in Islamic countries is strong due to its appealing message for social justice, this kind of terrorism is about privileged boys: The operatives of international terrorism in Europe and America hail not from the poor, downtrodden, and unemployed, but usually belong to the affluent middle class.¹⁷⁴ Even leaving aside multimillionaire Osama bin Laden, the 9/11 terrorists were all without exception scions of Middle Eastern privilege; in fact, al-Qaeda has no great use for illiterate recruits because they cannot carry out World Trade Center-like attacks, unable to make themselves inconspicuous in the West and lacking the education and training terrorist operatives need.¹⁷⁵ In other words, such persons will have to have the sort of education that cannot be found among the poor in Pakistan or in Palestinian refugee camps, only among well-off town folk.¹⁷⁶ Jihadists do not fit the traditional stereotype of secular terrorist organizations, neither does their *modi*

operandi, as a result, it becomes more difficult to find the appropriate counterterrorism measures.¹⁷⁷

Terrorism is an attempt to destabilize democratic societies and show their governments are impotent.¹⁷⁸ Bin Laden, Hamas and other spokesmen for the terrorists have declared on many occasions that America and the West in general are paper tigers whose young people above all want to live, whereas the young jihadists long to sacrifice their lives.¹⁷⁹ It is true we celebrate life, but this generalization misrepresents the obvious: A small minority is trying to impose their deadly conception and to arrogate the representation of a whole community or religion. Islam is a religion like others and jihadism is an ideological movement fighting and killing to impose its purist and radicalized vision of Islam and the world. In order to isolate and marginalize the jihadists, the Muslim community needs our help.¹⁸⁰ We are immersed in a conflict that is an ideological struggle as much as a security threat. Globalization may have improved the technical capacities of terrorists and facilitated the expansion of their reach, but terrorism still remains the weakest form of irregular warfare, representing the extreme views of a scarce minority of the global population.¹⁸¹ In order to deal with the vexing challenge of global terrorism, the international community must delegitimize the appeal of the terrorist message that is a product of twisting religion or political theory, inspiring recruits to destruction rather than personal

enlightenment.¹⁸² It is a tall order in this new century, but not a hopeless venture.

VII. Existential Challenge or Plain Exaggeration?

There is no question that jihadism is an old type of conflict in a new guise. It is also undeniable that al-Qaeda has declared war on the United States and Western civilization in general, first in 1996 with bin Laden's widely-dismissed first *fatwa* and then in 1998 with his second *fatwa* in which he expounds the basic tenets of the jihadist ideology, the basis of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Crusaders and the Jews.¹⁸³ This was specifically a declaration of war on the United States and its allies for occupying the holiest of the territories and plundering its riches; it became every Muslim's personal duty to kill Americans and their allies, both civilians and military, until they depart from all the lands of Islam, incapable to threaten any Muslim.¹⁸⁴ There are so many fringed groups threatening every moving target that American counterterrorism efforts were focused on other sorts of threats and it seems to have ignored the possibility of using an aircraft as a suicide weapon.¹⁸⁵ It was a wake-up call of spectacular proportions. Never before had so many people been killed in a terrorist attack. Besides the terrible carnage, 9/11 had an indisputably powerful psychological impact on the American psyche and shattered the country's sense of invulnerability due to its superpower standing and relative

geographical isolation.¹⁸⁶ The direct answer to this threat was the "Global War on Terrorism" (GWOT). The United States had been trying to stop al-Qaeda's logistics networks; U.S. and allied intelligence services disrupted numerous plots around the world before the 9/11 attacks, but al-Qaeda's haven in Afghanistan enabled the terrorist group to train with little interference.¹⁸⁷ Al-Qaeda had dozens of training camps with thousands of volunteers in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁸ The Taliban regime paid its unflinching commitment to al-Qaeda with the ultimate price - removal from power in 2001, just three months after 9/11.¹⁸⁹ The Afghan operation was quick and forced the Taliban to become a guerrilla force once more.¹⁹⁰ With a new government in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda lost its open haven but survived the departure of the Taliban regime. It remains an organization with a dense set of links and its presence in dozens of countries has allowed them to endure.¹⁹¹ The principle of jihad is the ideological bond that unites this amorphous movement transcending structure, diverse membership, and geographical separation.¹⁹² After the Afghan campaign, the Bush administration made Iraq its next target.

Even before the Second Gulf War in March 2003, Iraq had already emerged as an important rallying cry for al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement; it was al-Qaeda the one suggesting its wish to make Iraq the central battlefield of jihad¹⁹³ and asked jihadists to descend on Iraq to confront the U.S.-led coalition,

which they did in droves after the fall of Baghdad.¹⁹⁴ Iraq was prominent in al-Qaeda's plans to invigorate the jihadist cause and perpetuate the image of Islam on the defensive, having to take up arms against the West.¹⁹⁵ On the second and third anniversary of 9/11, al-Qaeda's deputy leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri conveyed the group's strategy in a message expressing that Americans could not handle both wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, landing in a difficult situation since withdrawal meant defeat and staying meant bleeding to death.¹⁹⁶ The American policy to bridge this gap was to choose containment for Afghanistan and to seek stability in Iraq. After a successful campaign to depose Saddam Hussein, the post-invasion was marked by sectarian violence. In addition, the continuation of the violence, the inability of U.S.-led Coalition forces and Iraqi security forces to maintain order in the country and the Abu Ghraib incident along other unfavorable developments surely contributed to the U.S.'s already poor standing among Muslims.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, the inept use of America's strategic influence only made things worse. In 2007, there was an important strategic shift regarding Iraq, better known as the "Petraeus Doctrine." The successful implementation of the "surge" turned the tide and the situation in Iraq has improved significantly ever since. So much so that our attention has turned once more to Afghanistan since our containment policy in combination with a disastrous NATO-led operation

have allowed the Taliban to make a strong comeback.

In the post-Iraq war period and the continuation of the war against global terrorism, understanding the politics of the Muslim world as well as the sources of radicalism and extremism is extremely important.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the West has its own demons to fight first, today more than ever. Jihadists seek to wear down the will and resolve of the adversary and force a withdrawal.¹⁹⁹ They know the struggle is not easy but that it can be won because they perceive and seek to exploit the weakness of the West, particularly the mortal fear of the spiritual superiority of Islam and the unlimited, unrelenting willingness of its believers to fight and to die for Islam's principles.²⁰⁰ Western societies have erred in the opposite fashion, going for disarmament and appeasement and playing down the achievements of Western civilization; as such they have often lost their liberty as a consequence of not being able to provide security for their own peoples.²⁰¹ Western contemporary postmodern ideologies such as multiculturalism, utopian pacifism, and moral equivalence have heavily influenced the psyche of the jihadist movement. Our multiculturalists contend that the West has neither the moral capital nor the intellectual deftness to condemn foreign practices such as suicide bombing, religious intolerance, female circumcision, and honor killings, and so must accept those practices merely as different.²⁰² Because of multiculturalism, many in the West either do

not think jihadists pose any more threat than does their own industrial capitalist state – ²⁰³ painfully evident in the attitudes of public opinion and in many of our policy-making decisions. Europe, where there is a significant influx of Muslims, is facing daunting integration problems. The willingness to become integrated did not exist among the Muslim immigration of the post-World War II period; they wanted to keep their way of life, which in the age of multiculturalism was considered perfectly natural.²⁰⁴ Unfortunately, the attraction of radical Islamism in the Muslim diaspora in Europe and other parts of the world continues to be substantial.²⁰⁵

The second ideology, utopian pacifism, is innate to Western civilization, given its propensity both to wage horrific wars and in response to put their hopes in world government in organizations such as the United Nations or the International Court of Justice (ICJ).²⁰⁶ In the West, there are people convinced that, with proper study and counsel, war can be outlawed.²⁰⁷ This premise reveals our failure to understand, or to accept, that conflict is part of the human condition. Others delude themselves into thinking that the declared enemy really wishes us no harm and is just misunderstood, that some good Chamberlain-style talk could help us out. Although much of what bin Laden has said seemed feisty rhetoric for the masses, not having taken him at his word has been at our own peril.²⁰⁸ Should we maybe be listening more carefully to what Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad is saying? In the West, utopian pacifists have hammered the guilt factor into our consciences to such extent that too many people are convinced that radical Islam is also our fault.

The third postmodern ideology is moral equivalence that seeks to do away with any notion of calibration and magnitude, placing impossible burdens of perfection upon Western societies; for example, Abu Ghraib, as disgusting as it was, but where no Iraqi detainees perished, is the equivalent of either a Nazi Stalag or Soviet Gulag, where *millions* were starved to death or executed.²⁰⁹ This morally wrong, isolated episode during the Iraq War has quickly boosted the jihadist narrative and put into question the moral standing of all the troops and of our cause. Context simply becomes irrelevant; an educated and affluent Western society must not err, while the “other” is apparently always expected to.²¹⁰ The aggregate result of multiculturalism, utopian pacifism, and moral equivalence can be resumed in the term “political correctness;” leaving the Western public philosophically and ethically ill-equipped to condemn Islamist extremism.²¹¹

The Soviet Union may have collapsed, but the Marxist undercurrents of thought still haunt us. We are looking at the jihadist challenge as an interest-based issue: “If we solve the poverty problem, there will be no more terrorism.” Though the jihadists exploit the interest-based vision to advance their cause,

they actually see their enterprise as a value-laden struggle, and believe in the superiority of their ideas; they are ready to sacrifice even their lives dreaming of finally defeating the West and establishing their global caliphate. Contempt for America played a greater role in the large-scale jihadist attacks than any other motive; however much they may hate us, terrorists seldom attack enemies whom they fear.²¹² Westerners have to believe their cause is worthy, too. The West is not perfect but it has a proud heritage that is worth defending: Reason, freedom, individualism, science, democracy, human rights, pluralism, secularism, and more. It does not mean to impose it on the rest; civilizations undergo exchanges and cross-fertilizations; they overlap and have differences and similarities,²¹³ but the allure of Western civilization is all too powerful and the radicals know it. The Islamists violently oppose modernism, but large sections of the Islamic world have been irrevocably affected by Western ideas²¹⁴ – even more now with the forces of globalization at the helm. It has endlessly been repeated that the majority of Muslims want to live in peace with their neighbors, a statement that is as correct as it is irrelevant because the believers in jihad are a minority, in most countries a small minority, but they can count on a substantial periphery of sympathizers, more than sufficient to sustain long campaigns of terrorism.²¹⁵ The irony of it all is that jihadism has killed more Muslims than infidels. All Muslims who do not share the jihadists' convictions

are no better, in principle, than the infidels, and the battle against them is still a religious duty.²¹⁶ It is a struggle between barbarism and civilization. And as a good first step, the West has to realize of the urgent need to reach out to the Muslim community to join us in the fight against jihadism. We are in this together.

VIII. How to Respond to This Asymmetric Threat

A good dose of realism would certainly do some good. There are no easy, quick fixes; there is a great deal of wishful thinking and a belief in miracle solutions to the terrorist phenomenon.²¹⁷ We should also keep in mind terrorism expert Walter Laqueur's pertinent observation that there is not one but many terrorisms. It is a daunting task because what these many terrorisms increasingly share is indiscriminate violence against civilian populations. Society is today far more vulnerable due to urbanization and technological progress; not only have the arms become far more lethal, the targets have become so much softer.²¹⁸

International relations expert Robert Keohane suggests that to win the battle against transnational terrorism, it must become widely regarded as illegitimate, as are slavery and piracy today. They have not been completely eradicated in the world, but they have been marginalized. The deepening delegitimation of transnational terrorism is a necessary force in world politics.²¹⁹ The

problem of the definition of terrorism and the subjectivity issue come to mind as big stumbling blocks; however the international community must continue working on these issues to put pressure on states that legitimize political violence. We should never disregard the power of diplomacy and “peer pressure” among nations. State-sponsored terrorism continues to be a challenging issue with passive support of terrorism often as important as deliberate assistance.²²⁰ Sponsors, enablers and cooperators really constitute one single spectrum with mixtures of conflict and cooperation all along it.²²¹ Ending passive support requires reconceptualizing what state sponsorship of terrorism is and reevaluate how it is fought.²²²

Although there are no perfect solutions, careful policymakers should avoid falling prey to common mistakes that could only worsen the challenge presented by state sponsorship of terrorism.²²³ Coercing powers often have a poor understanding of the full range of state support and concentrate only on some aspects, thus rendering counterterrorism policies less effective.²²⁴ Therefore, setting priorities, having realistic expectations, understanding the nature of the adversary and the reasons why a state would support terrorism, are just some of several general guidelines that could help curb state sponsorship of terrorism.²²⁵ For states, the use of terrorism as substitute warfare precisely because old-fashioned, conventional warfare has become much

more risky and expensive will only grow in the near future; using proxies is too tempting as a formula to inflict harm on an enemy, based on the hope that the sponsorship will be difficult to prove conclusively.²²⁶ Success may be elusive, but since the international community cannot turn a blind eye to the problem, it can at least adopt measures to make coercion more effective.²²⁷ For example, whatever we are doing regarding Iran, the main sponsor of terrorism in the world, is obviously not working. As a result, the Persian nuclear bomb is getting ever closer to becoming a frightful reality. The geopolitical consequences of such a development will reverberate in the security and balance of power throughout the Middle East region and far beyond.

Another aspect is the specter of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorists or the fear of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism. To improve counterterrorism policymaking, we should pay attention to the full range of terrorist threats. Sometimes it is necessary to learn to live with complexity and uncertainty and the reality that CBRN programs and policies will have to keep on changing to deal with threats as they do, or do not, develop.²²⁸ The threat of a CBRN attack may be a scary thought for policymaking, but delivery remains a significant technological hurdle for terrorists²²⁹ and this variable should be more carefully weighed since it is very likely that, in the foreseeable future, terrorist deeds against the

international community will continue to be perpetrated in the old-fashioned way. If the new terrorism dedicates its resources toward information warfare or cyberterrorism, it will be exponentially more destructive than any power it wielded in the past – greater even than it would be with biological and chemical weapons: Why indiscriminately kill people when a computer attack can produce far more dramatic and lasting results?²³⁰ Those same technological resources and greater international cooperation have helped us with the interdiction of terrorist finances, showing one of the biggest 9/11 improvements of any of the counterterrorist instruments with more than 121 million dollars in terrorist-related financial assets frozen by governments worldwide as of the end of 2008.²³¹ Governments need to understand that cyberterrorism is actually a global threat and more concerted efforts are needed in this area. The United States has finally established a command that will defend military networks against computer attacks and develop offensive cyberweapons, but the structure will also be ready to help safeguard civilian systems.²³² These are steps in the right direction.

It is often heard that a cause of terrorism is the State of Israel; for the Muslim world at large, Israel is a symbol and a catalyst of their rage rather than the cause, in reality Israel is just a small Satan compared with the various big Satans on the Islamists' political horizons.²³³ Israel is a well-established Western de-

mocracy surrounded by tyrannies, failed states, and state sponsors of terrorism. Although it is highly desirable to find soon a way out to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as the two-state solution, it takes two to tango and Israel will continue to have a very hard time finding the right tango partner in the struggle for peace and security. Hamas and Hezbollah, two terrorists groups sponsored by Iran, do not have the slightest inclination to contribute to the success of such Western projects. On the contrary, their task is to impose their Islamist vision on the region and they openly seek the destruction of the State of Israel using one of their preferred resources all along – Islamist terrorism. A realistic analysis of the current Israeli-Palestinian situation will have to conclude that an imminent solution is not at hand. After so much time and money spent, policymakers need to reconceptualize the whole issue.

Regarding jihadism, today very small radical groups are not aiming at conducting propaganda and regular politics to seize power; they aim at destruction in the hope that out of the ruins of what they have destroyed, a better world will emerge or at least one more in line with their ideology.²³⁴ In the ideological struggle, a distressing feature of contemporary Islam is the rapid growth of fundamentalism in the Middle East since those who belong to this creed are the most intolerant members of any religion and their narrow-mindedness renders them incapable of any agreement or com-

promise with those who think differently.²³⁵ In Islamic countries, the supervision of education is in the hands of the Islamists; in addition, secular entertainment hardly exists at all, to be a member of a group that does something active is a powerful motivation and most terrorist groups have little difficulty in recruiting angry young men and women.²³⁶ Besides, in these countries, the religious schools, called madrassas, are often vehicles for organizing terrorism.²³⁷ Islamist activities will go on since they are convinced that the only way to achieve their mission on earth is armed struggle, i.e. terrorism and, in some circumstances, guerrilla warfare.²³⁸ Insurgents should not continue holding an advantage in using information and cognition to influence popular attitudes. In the struggle for legitimacy, both performance and perceptions matter. For example, to recognize that nonviolent Islam is the key to isolating jihadism; in Afghanistan and Iraq, that jihadists have no concept, no plan, and no ability to govern, much less offer Muslims a promising (i.e., non-fantasy) future.²³⁹ But Western societies also need to be informed; without magnifying or belittling the issue, without equating Islam either with only peace or with only war; there is certainly a connection between the religion and the ideology, but it must all be properly explained.²⁴⁰

The importance of winning the Afghanistan War cannot be overstated. Not only is the future of NATO at stake, there is a big chance that radi-

cal fundamentalism becomes the norm and not the exception to interpret Islam. Moderation and tolerance will go out of the window and the Muslim community will feel hard pressed to accept more radical positions. American General Stanley A. McChrystal, the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan and a real counterinsurgency expert, has shifted toward successfully proven strategies such as seeking to protect the population, to reduce civilian casualties, to increase the size and capacity of Afghan police and military forces, and his planned 'civilian surge' of governance and development assistance; these are moves in the right direction, provided the effort can be resourced and sustained.²⁴¹ Our defeat would not only boost the enemy, it will have a domino effect on neighboring Pakistan because the conflict in Afghanistan cannot be separated from developments in Pakistan. In a not so far-fetched scenario, Pakistan could become the first Islamist nuclear power. To prevent that from happening will require that militant Islamists do not take control of that country. Afghanistan and Pakistan are symbiotically linked and constitute a single front in the broader war against Islamist terrorism. Although NATO's efforts in Afghanistan, if retooled, could culminate in victory, establishing the metrics of what constitutes victory has become an elusive task in itself. For example, the Alliance could do everything right in Afghanistan and still lose the broader regional campaign against terrorism if Pakistan fails to contain the radicals in its midst;

could that be considered victory? Thus, apart from being a crucial move against the cancerous spread of radical fundamentalism in the Islamic world, the fight in Pakistan, and finding means to help Pakistanis help themselves, is actually the most important battle in the world.²⁴²

To that disturbing picture, we must add the reaction, often the ineptitude, of governments around the world reacting to the spread of Islamist terrorism.²⁴³ As part of successful counterinsurgency measures, it is all the more crucial to include local authorities, groups, and citizens in new information networks that can help create information societies in which truth, freedom of ideas, and the requirement of government to listen are the best antidote for insurgency.²⁴⁴ Our military forces are powerful but we need more *legitimate* force. Among Muslim populations already resentful of Western power, U.S. military forces are presumptively illegitimate, as reflected in polls showing that a majority of Iraqi Arabs believe that violence against U.S. troops is justifiable. Counterinsurgency strategies should have as the chief mission to improve and support effective and legitimate indigenous forces.²⁴⁵ Many policymakers find it difficult to accept that asymmetric warfare is only illegal or illegitimate in the eyes of those who do not need to use such tactics, or believe this is the most effective form of attack, and the fact that the future threat posed by covert or proxy attacks by state actors may be at least as important,

and far more lethal, than the threat posed by foreign and domestic terrorist-extremist groups and individuals.²⁴⁶

The relationship between politics and terrorism in the oil-rich countries of the Middle East has produced a powerful incentive for America and the Western world to look elsewhere for new partnerships to meet growing oil needs and for serious moves towards energy independence.²⁴⁷ It is of the utmost importance to cut the oil umbilical cord tying us to the Middle East as one more step to hamper the spread of Islamist terrorism – to put it simply, no money, no terrorism. Our dealings with countries that export or finance terrorism have all to do with our intense dependence on foreign oil since oil is the lifeblood of Western economies. This need has pushed the West to deliberately turn a blind eye to the way petrodollars are used to fund terrorism and other totalitarian activities. Yet in the countries from which we buy this vital commodity, there is a widespread perception of Western exploiters stealing Middle Eastern oil – a pathetic image that terrorism exploits very effectively. Western governments need to take real steps, not just posturing, so that we can achieve energy independence and stop fearing the “oil weapon,” hanging like the sword of Damocles over our prosperity.

IX. Conclusion

Terrorism is the enemy with a thousand faces, multifaceted, and prone

to surprise us with different guises. The countering of its diverse manifestations has to continue unabatedly, always vigilant, while researching the factors behind it, the dynamics of its enterprise, the stimuli that triggers it, and the idiosyncrasy of its participants.

The West needs to join forces with the Islamic community in the fight against jihadism. It is a threat to both civilizations. Many steps are required to reach that state of affairs in this new century. Nonetheless, the first step in the right direction

would be to understand the nature and seriousness of the Islamist threat in order to take the normative approaches towards making life more difficult for the terrorists. This endeavor must also factor in one important premise: Although we cannot eradicate terrorism, civilized societies can work together to *actually* turn terrorism into a totally unacceptable tool to attain political objectives in the twenty-first century. That would diminish its allure as a political weapon and, hopefully, its spread in society.

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Notes

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⁴ Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*. (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 6.

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⁶ *Ibid*, p. 38.

⁷ Whittaker, p. 83.

⁸ Hoffman, p. 37.

⁹ Whittaker, p. 22.

¹⁰ Hoffman, p. 2.

¹¹ Walter Laqueur, "The Terrorism to Come." *Policy Review*, Vol. 126 (2004), p. 34.

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¹³ *Ibid*, p. 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Paul R. Pillar, *Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy*. (Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p. 18.

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¹⁷ Hoffman, p. 32.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 40.

¹⁹ Laqueur, "Come", p. 58.

²⁰ Whittaker, p. 4.

²¹ Hoffman, p. 38, 40.

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- 32 Bjørgo, p. 3.
- 33 Horgan, "Psychology", p. 84.
- 34 Pillar, p. 18.
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- 41 Laqueur, "Come", p. 50.
- 42 Laqueur, "No End", p. 19-21.
- 43 Laqueur, "Come", p. 51.
- 44 Laqueur, "No End", p. 23.
- 45 *Ibid*, p. 25, 27.
- 46 *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 47 Whittaker, p. 20.
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- 55 *Ibid*, p. 4.
- 56 *Ibid*, p. 32.
- 57 *Ibid*, p. 21-22.
- 58 Byman, p. 5, 21; Hoffman, p. 258.
- 59 Byman, p. 53.
- 60 Byman, p. 54; Hoffman, p. 259.
- 61 Hoffman, p. 259.
- 62 Pillar, p. xiii.
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