

To End Terrorism, End State Terrorism

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One year ago, two dates punctuated a continuing cycle of violence and counter-violence: the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, with about 3,000 civilians killed, and the October 7 start of the attack on Afghanistan, with about 6,000 civilians killed so far. How can we break out of this vicious cycle?

Some days after September 11, a psychologist gave advice on CNN to parents with children asking difficult questions. One young boy had asked "What have we done to make them hate us so much that they do such things?" A mature question, unlike the answer: "You could tell your child that there are good people in the world, and evil - -." That boy had arrived at the stage of reciprocity on psychologist Jean Piaget's scale of child development, seeing the actions of others at least partly as influenced by our own actions (and vice versa). By contrast, the psychologist's answer remained at the earlier stage of autism, seeing evil actions by others as uninfluenced by anything we do.

Motivation helps explain, but not justify. Hitler's success can be explained by the humiliating 1919 Versailles treaty, which called Germany alone responsible for World War I and imposed huge reparations for 50 years. Of course, nothing can justify what Hitler did. Understanding is not forgiving. But without understanding, we are condemned to repeat history.

The US media never mention the state terrorism exercised by the USA on other countries. Since 1945, the United States has intervened abroad 67 times, causing twelve million deaths, about half by overt action (Pentagon) and covert action (CIA). These are practically unknown to

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most Americans, and rarely mentioned, with the notable exceptions of Chalmers Johnson's book *Blowback* and Bill Blum's *Rogue State: a Guide to the World's Only Superpower*. In addition, 100,000 people die daily in the world from hunger and preventable diseases in the midst of enormous luxury and waste.

The targets of the September 11 terrorist attack were symbolic: the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center, representing a system of world trade that amasses unspeakable wealth in a few hands while impoverishing billions in the Third World.

Bin Laden's statement broadcast by Al Jazeera shortly after September 11, said, "Our nation has been tasting this humiliation and this degradation for more than 80 years," referring to the 1916 Sykes-Picot treason, bringing Arabia under the rule of infidels, breaking the British promise of independence for the Arab nations in return for their participation in defeating the Ottoman Empire; and the 1917 Balfour Declaration supporting the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Terrorism (carried out by men and women without uniform) and state terrorism (carried out by men and women in uniform, a difference of little importance to the victims) have the following characteristics in common: they use violence for political ends; they harm people not directly involved in struggle; they are designed to spread panic/terror to bring about capitulation; they have an element of surprise in the choice of who, where, when; they make perpetrators unavailable for retaliation or incapacitation.

Wahhabism, a fundamentalist branch of Islam, state religion of Saudi Arabia, and Puritanism, the civic religion of the USA, share some common characteristics: Dualism (dividing the world into us vs. them, without neutrals); Manicheism (we are good, they are evil); and (Armageddon) the inevitability of a final decisive battle to "crush" them, like vermin. The harder varieties of the three abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, also share the concepts of being a Chosen People under God, with a Promised Land; a glorious past and/or future; having suffered a trauma. They are found in the rhetoric of both Bush and bin Laden.

Al Qaeda and Wahhabites see the USA as greedy, interested in oil (world trade) and bases (Pentagon). Indeed, the USA seized an old Soviet base near Kandahar. On 30 May 2002 came the signing of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline by the two presidents and the former UNOCAL consultant, now Afghanistan prime minister, Hamid Karzai. The US totally confirmed its image.

If the USA had limited itself to a military campaign, leaving policing to the UN Security Council and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, without US bases and leaving rights to oil pipelines to the Afghan people, they might even have won their war. Now it is lost.

The Islamic fundamentalists' long-term goal seems to be respect for religious sensitivities. The US seeks free trade and military protection. Trade with basic need priority, including religious sensitivities, could achieve both.

Imagine Bush had said: "Fellow Americans; the attack yesterday on two buildings, killing thousands, was atrocious, totally unacceptable. They have to be captured and brought to justice by an appropriate international court, with a clear UN mandate.

"But my address tonight goes beyond this. There are serious flaws in our foreign policy, however well intended. We create enemies through our insensitivity to the basic needs of the peoples around the world, including their religious sensitivities. I am therefore taking these steps:

- withdraw our military bases from Saudi Arabia,
- recognize Palestine as a state, details can follow later,
- enter into dialogue with Iraq to identify solvable conflicts,
- accept President Khatami's invitation for the same with Iran,
- pull out militarily and economically from Afghanistan,
- stop our military interventions and reconcile with the victims."

That evening, 1.3 billion Muslims would have embraced America; and the few terrorists left would have no water in which to swim. It would have taken a speech-writer half an hour, and ten minutes to deliver it; as opposed to, say \$60 billion for the Afghanistan operation. Psychologically, this is not easy, but the benefits are immeasurable.

