

The Alternative

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Dear Reader,

This issue of the Newsletter is on Terror, Terrorists and Terrorism. It is, unfortunately, not a new topic. Terror is a well-known reaction common at any time in history. Human beings, subject to floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and numerous other natural disasters, know what it is like to be terrified. As a political instrument, terror is also far from being a novelty. Individuals and organizations long ago learned that terrorizing can be a powerful tool for controlling and subduing a population.

Is the political use of terror more widespread today than in the past? One would get that impression from the news media and politicians. Perhaps there has been a big jump in the use of terror but much depends on what to include within the scope of terrorism. Terror as an emotion is simple and direct; terrorism as a political category is complex and debatable. Probably no one thinks of himself as a terrorist. As is often said, one group's terrorist is another group's freedom fighter.

The four essays in this issue try to draw some lines in the messy discussion of terror, terrorists and terrorism. Luke Mitchell offers a perspective on the attacks of 2001 which so shocked people in the United States. Gabriel Moran breaks down the wall that separates terrorism and war. Nicholas Kristof and Thomas Friedman assert the need for a clear denunciation of terrorists and terrorism despite the moral ambiguity surrounding the meaning of terrorism.

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TERROR AND WAR

By Gabriel Moran

The phrase *War on terrorism* has become ubiquitous. But what must be said is that there isn't any war on terrorism. The phrase is nonsensical, which is not to say that it isn't a useful tool for some parties. The thesis of this essay is that there cannot be a war on terrorism because war is terrorism. War is the most obvious, most widespread and most deliberate use of terror. The reason why this simple fact is not acknowledged is because of the peculiar way in which *Terrorism* has been defined.

Caleb Carr's book, The Lessons of Terror, was criticized for blurring the distinction between war and terrorism. It allowed Carr to cite numerous examples from military history as examples of terrorism. I think blurring the difference made sense and made for a more interesting book. However, I think Carr gets it badly wrong by claiming that *Terrorism is war*. That led him to advocate that (their) terrorism should be met with (our) war. The real lesson of terror is not that terrorism is (a form of) war but that war is (a form of) terrorism. And the way to respond to (their) terrorism is to examine (our) terrorism and find a non-symmetrical response that might reduce the terrorism on both sides..

Terror has a very clear meaning in the English language. People have little difficulty in understanding the feeling of terror or identifying something as a cause of terror. Terror is an emotional reaction to a situation in which one fears for one's safety or for one's life. The threat may be shadowy or even illusory but mental anguish is central to how severe is the fear of physical harm.

A *Terrorist*, then, would be someone who uses terror as a means to an end. Someone using terror is a terrorist at that moment, although the act does not necessarily constitute one's identity. There are few people whose identity is to be a terrorist. Many people at times in their life have been involved in terrifying a group or an individual. This is especially true if one recognizes that many kinds of organizations use tactics of terror.

The cause of the confusion and blindness regarding terror and terrorist comes from the use of the word *Terrorism*. Like most words ending in -ism, it is an abstraction that any powerful group can define as they like. In this case, the powerful group can be a nation-state which has simply decided that a nation-state cannot engage in terrorism. Only individuals and sub-national groups are designated as terrorist organizations.

The most influential definition of terrorism was issued by the U.S. State Department in 1998. The beginning reads: "The term terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." This statement limits terrorism to non-state actors. The exclusion of the state from terrorism delimits the methods employed by terrorists to those available to non-state actors. Tanks and war planes are not used by terrorists; When tanks and war planes are used, then that is not terrorism.

The second clause of the State Department's definition is: "The term terrorist group means any group practicing, or any group that has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism." By distinguishing between a group that practices terrorism and a group that has significant subgroups that practice terrorism, the State Department makes room for the idea of state-sponsored terrorism without granting that states are actually perpetrators of terrorism.

The manner in which the State Department defines terrorism determines the data incorporated into its Terrorism databank. The CIA and RAND conceive terrorism to be the illegitimate use of force by non-state actors and rogue nations, such as Syria and Iran. But whatever is done by the United States or Israel is outside the State Department's definition of terror. In this context, war is not terrorism. The firebombing of 67 Japanese cities in 1945 or the bombing of Belgrade to convince the Serbian government to change its ways cannot be called terrorism, despite the extraordinary terror caused to millions of people.

The definition of terror should exclude the actor. If there were focus on the nature of the act, it would be harder to persevere in the common practice of referring to terrorism practiced by the state as "maintaining order," "ensuring security" or "upholding democracy." This meaning of terrorism resists seeing terrorism as induced by a disposition that compels the actor toward violence.

If one thinks of international terror as the unleashing of violence to reach a political end, there can be little doubt that most of the world sees the United States as the chief terrorist organization. The United States, with more military might than most of the rest of the world combined, uses its firepower to achieve what it decides are good ends. The U.S. military insists that it does not "target" civilians and no doubt military planners try to avoid the civilian population. But if one looks at the act and the results of military operations, especially aerial bombing, the effect is terrifying for anyone in the vicinity. All wars spread terror but a war from the sky multiplies the terror tenfold.

The torture of prisoners is a part of the terror of war. Not all soldiers practice torture but training to kill the enemy is hardly good preparation for taking care of the imprisoned enemy. The Geneva Conventions are a noble attempt to resist the full logic of war. They are a continuance of Christian theology's rules for going to war and rules for conducting a war. But the twentieth century should have made obvious the illogicality of declaring that some aspects of war are illegal.

The United States has killed thousands of Iraqis. Scandalously, the U.S. government openly admits it has no interest in counting the number of Iraqis that have been killed. In the United States this slaughter seems to have been accepted with a shrug: So what do you expect in a war? And yet the pictures of a few dozen Iraqis being tortured and humiliated set off a worldwide furor. The pictures are able to focus attention on the inhumanity of the whole operation.

Shouldn't the next step be to have a fourth Geneva Convention that war is illegal? If torture and assassination are illegal, how can war be legal? So long as international authority is not sufficiently developed, there would remain conflicts. But a nation that unleashed a war on another nation should be considered a terrorist state. The international community would have the power to authorize a degree of force to resist violence but not to wage war.

The United States, in disregard of international opinion, has launched a tirade of violence, with no end in sight. In 2001, the United States met terror with terror. The metaphor of war was introduced immediately. It resonated with all sorts of other metaphorical wars - on poverty, drugs, illiteracy, pollution. The metaphor is nearly always hideously inaccurate (although a cold war captured some of the real conflict that involved proxy armies). The problems require education and political skill. Declaring a war on terrorism was absurd. Where is the battlefield on which this war was to be fought? It turns out to be everywhere. A terrorism doctrine about practices of terror, is in any country that one chooses to name.

We now know that the executive branch of the U.S. government decided from the start on one country against which to wage an actual war. A war on terrorism was the gateway to a war on Iraq. It was not a war with Iraq which would suggest two nation-states being at war. It was a war launched on a country that supposedly embodied terrorism. The war on terrorism as a nonsensical phrase did not prevent it from being a linguistic preparation for a war on Iraq. One can hope that the unexpected difficulties of this venture will call a halt to preparations for knocking over other countries that are defined as hotbeds of terrorism. But the evidence is not clear that any lesson has been learned or that a war on terrorism might not continue without end.

A RUN ON TERROR

By Luke Mitchell

Terror, like ecstasy, tends to magnify perceptions. Just as affection becomes adoration in the physical act of love, so too does vigilance sometimes become morbid obsession in the face of spectacular violence. To be effective, this normal function of survival must also be temporary. It is now more than two years since our own national incident of spectacular violence, however, and although the United States remains obsessed, it is not unfair, or even insensitive, to begin considering the events of September 11 from a more detached perspective.

In 2001, terrorists killed 2,978 people in the United States, including the five killed by anthrax. In that same year, according to the Centers for Disease Control, heart disease killed 700,142 Americans and cancer 553,768; various accidents claimed 101,537 lives; suicide 30,622 and homicide, not including the attacks, another 17,330. As Mr. Bush pointed out in January, no one has been killed by terrorists on American soil since then. Neither, according to the FBI, was anyone killed here by terrorists in 2000. In 1999, the number was one. In 1998, it was three. In 1997, zero.

Even using 2001 as a baseline, the actuarial tables would suggest that our concern about terror mortality ought to be on the order of our concern about fatal workplace accidents (5,431 deaths) or drowning (3,247). To recognize this is not to dishonor the loss to the families of those people killed by terrorists, but neither should their anguish eclipse that of the families of children who died in their infancy that year (27,801). Every death has its horrors.

Anti-terrorism nevertheless has become the animating principle of nearly every aspect of American public policy. We have launched two major military campaigns in its name. It informs how we fund scientific research, whose steel or textiles we buy, who may leave or enter the country, and how we sort our mail. It has shaped the structure of the justice department and the fates of 180,000 government employees now in the service of the Department of Homeland Security. Nearly every presidential speech touches on terrorism, and according to the White House, we can look forward to spending at least \$50 billion per year until the end of time.

Is all this necessary? One of the remarkable things about September 11 is that there was no follow-up - no shopping malls were firebombed, no bridges destroyed, no power plants assaulted. This is, no doubt, partly the result of our post-2001 obsession with preventing such disasters. We must at least consider

the possibility, however, that this also represents a lack of wherewithal on the part of would-be terrorists. Although there may be no shortage of those angry enough to commit an act of violence against the United States, few among them possess the training, the financing, or the sheer ambition necessary to execute an operation as elaborate as September 11. The nineteen who have already done so are dead, and in the nearly three years that they have enjoyed their martyrdom and their virgins, few have stepped forward to join them. In the United States, none have.

The Department of Homeland Security does not bother to track the number of Americans killed by terrorists. The FBI tracks terror fatalities within the United States and the State Department tracks the same abroad, but each uses a different definition of terrorism and neither has domestic numbers beyond 2001. Similarly there is no comprehensive watch list of likely terror operatives. What we have instead is a sophisticated public-relations system, the color-coded Homeland Security Advisory System, that works to terrify Americans without the grisly work of actual terrorism.

Many desired activities, from shopping to watching television, have been cited as examples of what we must do, or else the terrorists will have won. This is debatable. What is not debatable is that if the American people are terrified the terrorists have won. And, in this regard, they will have been working with the full cooperation of the current administration.

TRUST AND SHAME

By Thomas Friedman

When you have large numbers of people ready to commit suicide, and ready to do it by making themselves into human bombs, using the most normal instruments of daily life - an airplane, a car, a garage door opener, a cellphone, fertilizer, a tennis shoe - you create a weapon that is undeterrable, undetectable and inexhaustible. This poses a much more serious threat than the Soviet Red Army because these bombs attack the most essential element of an open society: trust.

Trust is built into every aspect, every building and every interaction in our increasingly hyperconnected world. We trust when we board a plane that the person next to us isn't going to blow up his shoes. Without trust, there's no open society because there aren't enough police to guard every opening in an open society.

That is why suicidal militants have the potential to erode our lifestyle. Because the only way to deter a suicidal enemy ready to use the instruments of daily life to kill us is by gradually taking away trust. We start by stripping airline passengers, then we go to fingerprinting all visitors, and we will end up by removing cherished civil liberties.

So what to do? There are only three things we can do: 1) Improve our intelligence to deter and capture terrorists before they act. 2) Learn to live with more risk, while maintaining our open society. 3) Most important, find ways to get the societies where these extremists come from to deter them first. Only they really know their own, and only they can restrain their extremists.

Dov Seidman, whose company teaches ethics to global corporations, says: *The cold war ended the way it did because at some bedrock level we and the Soviets agreed on what is shameful.* And shame, more than any laws or police, is how a village, a society or a culture expresses disapproval and applies restraints.

But today, alas, there is no bedrock agreement on what is shameful, what is outside the boundary of a civilized world. Unlike the Soviet Union, the Islamist terrorists are neither a state subject to conventional deterrence or international rules, nor individuals deterred by the fear of death. And their home societies, in many cases, have not stigmatized their acts as *shameful.* In too many cases, their spiritual leaders have provided them with religious cover, and their local charities have provided them with money.

We cannot change other societies and cultures on our own. But we also can't just do nothing in the face of this threat. What we can do is partner with the forces of moderation within these societies to help them fight the war of ideas. Because ultimately this is a struggle within the Arab-Muslim world, and we have to help our allies there, just as we did in World Wars I and II.

MORAL CLARITY

By Nicholas Kristof

Is it fair to present the war on terrorism as a parable of good (us) versus evil (them)? Grenville Byford reflected the skeptics's view in an essay in *Foreign Affairs*. He argued that moral clarity is more apparent than real and that *the sooner the rhetoric is retired the better.* Highly nuanced intellectuals tend to poke three kinds of holes in moral clarity:

1) Terrorism is in the eyes of the beholder. President Reagan declared the African National Congress a terrorist group not long before its leader, Nelson Mandela, won the Nobel Peace Prize. Meanwhile he described Jonas Savimbi, who everyone else thought of as a terrorist, as Angola's Abraham Lincoln. Oops. Speaking of national heroes, what about our radical forebears in the American Revolution who burned the homes of British loyalists. Were they terrorists?

2) Trying to wipe out terrorists is sometime unhelpful. Even if we could agree on what constitutes terrorism, it's often not obvious what we should do about it. Pakistan has done more than Iraq to support terrorism (in Kashmir), but instead of invading Pakistan, Mr. Bush has sent aid - for bolstering President Pervez Musharraf who is the best hope for ending the violence. Circumstances vary, so sometimes we kill those engaged in terrorism, and sometime we invite them for state visits.

3) In crude military terms, terrorism often works. New methods of killing people initially provoke outrage but eventually are often accepted. Henry V used long bows at Agincourt, outraging the French. British redcoats marching in neat columns were appalled by sneaky Yankees hiding behind trees. After Guernica, aerial bombing was condemned as barbaric, and in World War II the West condemned Germany's V-1 and V-2 missiles as terror weapons.

I fear that Al Qaeda-style terrorism could become another terrible advance in military history. Other radical groups are no doubt impressed that for only about \$400,000 Al Qaeda inflicted hundreds of billions of dollars of damage on the United States. Vietcong military theorists predicted something like Al Qaeda-style urban guerilla warfare, and there's a risk that it is what the future looks like.

All these problems reflect what the British scholar Adam Roberts refers to as genuine doubts about the term terrorism. The Reuters news service normally refuses to describe people as terrorists - outraging those all over the globe who are sure that's what their enemies are.

The objections leave moral clarity somewhat tattered. But ultimately terrorism's potential for becoming the methodology of every desperate organization makes it doubly important that we do all we can to delegitimize it. Ideally, any private group should know that if it kills civilians, it will become a pariah and discredit its own cause. The next Savimbi, Begin or Arafat should know that violence against civilians will not propel him into a presidential mansion but into infamy.

