

TERRORISM IS THE WORLD'S PROBLEM

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Ever since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Americans ask: “Is America safer today?”¹ However, the question that needs to be asked is, “Are we safer today?” in which the word “we” encompasses not only the American people, but also people outside of the United States. Terrorism is not an American problem—it is the world’s problem. Terrorism is too complex to define it as simply an American problem or that of any one country. Resolving terrorism will inevitably require responding to the politics of other countries. America is a global power with global interests. The American people, however, must understand that the problem of terrorism cannot be addressed only from the perspective of American politics.

I. AMERICA NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND THE POLITICS OF OTHER NATIONS

In his recent speech Secretary of State James Baker, based on his experiences in diplomacy and negotiations, pointed out that agreements are formed by understanding the other side’s politics. This is a significant point because for governments to collaborate, the U.S government will have to understand and coordinate not only with American politics, but also Afghani politics, European politics, Middle Eastern politics, and so forth. There is no mathematical formula for unifying these different politics because success largely depends

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1. The ideas in this essay were first presented at the 2005 conference titled, “Strategies for the War on Terrorism: Taking Stock” at Duke University School of Law.

on intangible factors. Finding the solution to terrorism requires more than policing in ways like monitoring visas or monitoring the movement of certain individuals; it requires something much simpler—communication. For example, the 9/11 terrorists were Middle Easterners trained in Afghanistan and networked in industrialized communities that stood back and said, “I’m not part of this battle—the government and the criminals are all the same.” This complete misunderstanding by other communities and some governments has led me to believe that the world is still not responsive enough to effectively work against terrorists. Terrorism is a different kind of war, a different kind of scourge that communities are constantly ignoring, believing that terrorism is not their problem. Governments will not succeed in deflecting terrorism unless this perception changes.

America needs to start dealing with other communities’ interests. Consider this example of “generational transformation” in the Middle East and Egypt: fifty-six percent of Egypt’s population is twenty-five years or younger, and twenty-five percent of Arabs are Egyptians, meaning that about fifteen percent of the Arab world is twenty-five or younger. This younger generation wants to see prospects of opportunity in the future. The Egyptian government estimates that an opportunity will occur only when 700,000 new jobs can be created every year. But with Egypt’s GDP (gross domestic product) being only \$110 billion (the equivalent of Wal-Mart’s revenue), creating these jobs poses a major challenge. To meet this challenge, Egypt must project itself as part of a larger marketplace in order to attract the requisite domestic and foreign investment. To do so, it must undergo a transformation and energize the local marketplace by empowering the private sector. This is coupled by consolidation of its economic voice and by joining regional and sub-regional economic zones in North Africa and East Africa with the European Union, over and above the Arab world. Becoming a more attractive and more effective global-market player is imperative if Egypt is to provide hope rather than futility for its population and to preserve Egypt’s national security.

II. AMERICA AS A GLOBAL POWER

As the only global power, America has the responsibility to lead globally. America’s power should be described as a global power, not a super power. Global power means having global opportunities and global responsibilities, while super power is a function of strength vis-à-vis someone else. If America is the most important, strongest

global power in the world, then anti-Americanism, including the rise of anti-Americanism around the world, will have a negative effect on the ability of the Egyptian and other governments to help the American government fight terrorism. Terrorism, as it stands today, is strongly perceived as terrorism against America, the so-called American war against terrorism, rather than terrorism against the world. Consequently, the political parameters that govern the ability of governments and communities to take proactive measures are adversely affected. To reverse this perception, the American government must, among other things, respond to the problems of other communities, whether the problem is the Pakistani-Indian conflict in Kashmir, the Middle East peace process, or Iraq's liberalization and reform. These issues, in addition to many others, will significantly affect the success or failure of the war against terrorism because their resolution reduces the level of anxiety in these communities, which terrorists take advantage of. Therefore, America needs to realize that it is in its own interest and in the interests of all nations globally for America to take proactive measures to help resolve issues, even though America's interest may not be immediate. Given its global responsibilities and interests, America cannot respond only when it is attacked.

Assuming that the U.S. government accepts my global context theory—a belief that we are all interdependent—as being a possible response to the terrorism problem, then in answering the original question posed in this article, I would conclude that America is generally safer today than it was pre-9/11, for a number of reasons. First, there is more focus on the issue of terrorism in America. Second, America has been leading the international cooperation on the issue of terrorism. Third, America's assertive posture to use force and move the military to address security problems in different parts of the world has made it difficult for terrorists to structure their activities around the world. However, with these proactive measures, there are still future actions that must be taken to ensure safety for all nations and not just America. For example, America needs to be more aggressive in pursuing peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict by continuing to work towards ensuring that Iraq becomes a unified country for all Iraqis, not a splintered country in three pieces: Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites. Moreover, America needs to form a domestic American foreign policy constituency. For several reasons, foreign policy is not a political issue for an average American. Iraq was not a foreign-policy issue for America. Terrorism was not a foreign-policy issue. Both are actually American domestic issues because they only became topical

when America lost lives in combat and when its territory was attacked

Without this foreign constituency, America will be at a disadvantage in the war against terrorism for a number of reasons. First, America will not truly understand what being global really means and thus will not take advantage of the opportunities that exist or share in the responsibility that comes with being the only global power. Second, America will find it extremely difficult to deal with sub-regional or regional political issues. Moreover, the lack of an American foreign constituency will have serious ramifications not only on America, but even a greater penalty on other Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt. I truly urge Americans to understand the global context of the war against terrorism and to understand that U.S. borders do not start or end with the waterways.

III. TERRORISM EXISTED EVEN BEFORE 9/11

The world existed before 9/11, and so did terrorism. Further, the perception that the only terrorists in the world are the individuals that attacked America is incorrect—the same terrorists who attacked America also attacked Egypt. In fact, the Egyptian government warned the western world years before 9/11 about Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman—the terrorist responsible for the first World Trade Center explosion. Sheikh Omar applied for a visa at the American embassy in Cairo, and Egyptian embassy officials like myself notified the American embassy that Sheikh Omar is a known terrorist and therefore should not be given a visa under any circumstances. Perhaps out of politeness, the American government initially denied Sheikh Omar the visa in Cairo. However, Sheikh Omar was eventually granted a visa by the U.S. Embassy in Sudan. At the time, this action conveyed a simple policy message from the American government to the rest of the world: as long as he did not threaten America, he was not a terrorist. Sheikh Omar was thus seen as somewhere between an oddball to a dissident to somebody who had a gripe with the Egyptian government.

In addition to Sheikh Omar, Ayman al-Zawahiri is another example of other governments focusing their efforts solely on perceived threats to their countries. In the case of Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian government requested that Zawahiri be extradited from Switzerland, Denmark, and the United Kingdom, for a conviction outstanding in Egypt. In all cases, those particular governments denied extradition. This occurred before 9/11. The reason for denying

extradition was because Egypt had a death penalty. I understand the European governments' reasoning, but what I do not understand or accept is allowing Ayman al-Zawahiri to be set free without arresting him. By not arresting him, these European governments conveyed a message that the debate was not about the death penalty, but instead about whether these governments considered him to be a criminal element or a dissident—clearly they did not. After 9/11, suddenly Sheikh Omar, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and others became terrorists.

America made many mistakes before 9/11, but it was not alone. Other governments, including Egypt, also made a key mistake: we all preferred to ignore the problem of terrorism until we were attacked. However, after 9/11, there have been significant changes. America took issue of terrorism and the policing element of terrorism extremely seriously. Furthermore, the exchange of information between Egypt and the U.S. government on issues of terrorism, especially in terms of the Middle East is very intense and very cooperative. For example, the American government helped coordinate international conferences on issues such as money transfers. Although the U.S. government has been proactive in policing, my serious concern is the non-policing element of terrorism. These are the seeds that will plant the terrorists of the future. They may attack you, they may attack us, they may attack a third party, but we need to deal with the issues that create the frustration for the future if we want to bring it back to a fringe element.

IV. TWO-TIERED APPROACH TO TERRORISM

When Egypt was faced with a terrorism problem the first response of the Egyptian government was denial. This response occurred and reoccurred. Ultimately, however, there was a point where denial was not going to help. After analyzing the terrorism problem, the Egyptian Government decided to apply a two-tiered approach. The first tier, the main operatives, like Ayman al-Zawahiri, would have to be policed. Currently, this is the approach applied by the American government—that is, to track the main operatives such as Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri and prevent them from entering the United States. However, in dealing with the terrorism issue, almost equal weight has to be placed not only on ideologies, but also on the “foot soldiers.” This leads to the second-tier approach.

The Egyptian government found that there were the foot soldiers outside the main operatives, who were larger in numbers. Further, these foot soldiers were our own nationals, Egyptians. Thus, the

Egyptian government concluded that there must be a problem that led Egyptian nationals to invest in such a risky proposition like terrorism. After a thorough analysis, the government found that most of these foot soldiers were recruited in Egypt's poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Therefore, the main reason for not responding to terrorism was not an external issue, but an internal one: the government failed to fulfill its social-economic responsibility vis-à-vis this strata of its people.

After the Egyptian government determined that a socioeconomic problem existed, it responded by providing those neighborhoods with a tremendous amount of financial assistance. This financial assistance resulted in creating a domino effect that produced more jobs and, most importantly, more choices. While 100% success is not achievable anywhere in the world, the net result was a decrease in the availability of foot soldiers for terrorists.

V. TERRORIST MOTIVATIONS

Terrorism is not simply a Middle Eastern problem or a function of a democratic deficiency. Germany's Baader Meinhof, Italy's Red Brigades, and America's Timothy McVeigh are all terrorists who originated in democratic countries. Each of these terrorists like Ayman al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden chose issues of real concern, being discussed in legitimate circles, to justify their illegitimate acts. For example, Ayman al-Zawahiri's publicly stated motives such as opposing American bases in Saudi Arabia or concern about Israeli/Palestinian issues had legitimacy in Egypt and other Middle Eastern societies. However, these are not the real motives for Zawahiri's attack on Egypt or America. Instead, terrorists like Zawahiri use legitimate issues in our societies, including problems such as poverty, to generate nationwide support.

A possible real reason for terrorist activity against America is that Bin Laden, Al-Jihad—the Egyptian Islamic jihad group—and other extremist groups want to change Middle Eastern societies in a manner that is consistent with terrorists' own beliefs: change the systems in the Middle East by provoking a conflict between the Middle East and America. These terrorists realize that actions result from conflicts and not through the political process.

Why? The answer is simple. The political process in any Middle Eastern society would not support the changes that these terrorists seek. Furthermore, it is easier for terrorists to exploit weaknesses in human nature than the political process. This is why it is important

for the response of the civilized world to be both sophisticated and very precise: each government has to respond to its own domestic problems. This does not mean solving Middle Eastern problems in response to Osama Bin Laden, but instead, being proactive and not waiting until terrorist attacks. There will always be terrorists, and the idea that we will get rid of all terrorism is naïve because it is not going to happen. However, we can achieve significant results if we stop assuming that terrorism is only a function of certain cultures or particular problems and that it can be dealt with in absence of global cooperation.

VI. INTERNATIONAL UNITY AND COOPERATION

Terrorists today have become more global because of freedom of movement; free flow of information, money, and communications; and the ability to exploit loopholes in the spectrum of laws between countries. Currently, civilized societies including America, Europe, and Egypt have not been able to find a compatible balance between what is consistent legally and politically in each of our societies. Each country wants to preserve its own national identity and civil liberties, but unfortunately this has had a direct effect of creating exploitable weak points and loopholes for terrorists. For example, the Egyptian government found that financing of a terrorist network in Egypt was a result of outside resources. It was difficult for Egypt to investigate the movement of the money because it does not have the needed resources for such investigations. However, when the Egyptian government found million-dollar transfers of money to post office boxes of inactive NGOs, the Egyptian government asked European governments for assistance with tracing the money. The response of European governments was to deny Egypt's request because of their privacy laws. As stated previously, I respect other countries' laws; however, what I do not condone is the European governments' refusal to investigate despite the substantial evidence offered by Egypt.

Governments internationally cannot continue to allow terrorists to take advantage of these loopholes. Money laundering, transfers of money, and other substantial issues need to be resolved on the international level. This may mean an international conference in the context of the United Nations or other mechanisms in which countries are brought together to deal with the issue of terrorism as a global problem, not as a problem affecting one side or another. Furthermore, the international community needs to work together quickly and consistently on cases where we agree, because even in those

cases, there still are a lot of weak points. Additionally, we need to make this war the world's war against terrorism, not just America's war. America deserves credit for educating the international community about terrorism more than any other country. However, the war against terrorism is not America's war, and we need to have a more far-reaching perspective of what the international community does by way of resolving these issues. It is not enough to deal with the symptoms while ignoring the root causes of the problem, nor can we focus only on the causes that fit our respective domestic politics, nor can we choose drastic measures as a response, without thinking through the long-term consequences. One must solve the problem and simultaneously manage to come up with the solution, and we need to make this a global issue. Finally, we need to find an international prevention system that is flexible enough to respect each and every one of our civil systems, but that is also able to respond to serious, credible questions about activities that are not consistent with a normal state of affairs.

In addition to closing international loopholes, America needs to start garnering international consensus from the United Nations before taking actions. Granted, in certain respects, America has been proficient in working with the United Nations. When America went to the United Nations to obtain sanctions against the Taliban, these sanctions were adopted within hours. This was an important step because America accepted that it needed international consensus before acting. Thus, if a country is clearly condoning terrorist activities, it can't simply be America's judgment, but America has the moral authority and the political power to create disincentives through international activities that will ultimately increase the pressure on terrorists throughout the world. However, in other respects, it is clear that while America does not believe that the Security Council is merely a formality, it has taken the attitude that "if I cannot get it through the Security Council, I will do it myself." This is a contrast to medium-sized countries like Egypt that have only two options available: they do not use force unless they are attacked or unless the use of force is clearly mandated by the Security Council. It is important for the international community to exert every effort to reach common ground and collaboration. Only terrorism gains from the inability of our systems to work together.

VII. EGYPT'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR TERRORISM

Critics of Egypt's government have contended that Egypt is responsible for the terrorist acts because Egypt does not follow Western democracy. To answer this question, simply look at past terrorist activities—and a pattern of terrorism will emanate from the Western world. For example, look at Germany when the Baader Meinhoff terrorists were active, Italy when the Red Brigades happened, Japan when there was a sarin gas attack in its subway system, and America and Timothy McVeigh.

Thus, I do not support such a conclusion if it is only founded on the democracy and non-democracy distinction. Before the critics focus on Egyptian evolution of democracy, they should review American democracy, which was not born in one burst of perfection. For example, Dr. Condoleezza Rice often says that African-Americans were once, during the time of slavery, three-fifths of a human being in America. America can be proud of its democracy because the citizens of the country continually strive to make it better.

Egypt, like America, also has democratic institutions. Egypt has had a constitution for seventy years, and women have voted in Egypt since the fifties. The problem, however, is that Egyptian citizens in years past did not feel empowered by the political process because it had an extended period with a one-party system before introducing a multiparty system. Currently Egyptian democracy is increasingly providing an average Egyptian with the resources to hold politicians accountable and the ability to challenge authority in a responsible manner. Egyptians will have to learn an important characteristic of democracy: namely, that the majority opinion is the one that rules. As a result, the minority will have to accept the majority rule, and the majority will have to accept equal rights for minorities even if they lose elections. This political transformation in Egypt occurred not because of terrorism, but because Egypt has a very young population calling for change, because we have had a successful economic liberalization process empowering the private sector, and because of the free flow of information that accompanies the era of globalization. We need to expand the reform, but I do not 'agree that terrorism is a result of an absence of democracy.

VIII. CURRENT FUTURE OF IRAQ

No analysis of terrorism could be complete without discussing Iraq. With Iraq, the American government has a great opportunity to create a stable society. However, the American government still has

a significant amount of work to accomplish. I consider Iraq to have taken a successful step forward after the first national election. However, the experiment can only be considered to have been concluded successfully on its completion and then, after Iraq addresses its first crisis. Currently, the American government is trying to develop a constitution for Iraqis. I am concerned about the absence of the Sunnis in the election. If Iraq is governed based on ethnicity then the country will crumble again. The fact that America has put together a government structure is positive. However, anything that simply balances ethnicity is a recipe for disaster. This is going to reflect what is happening in Iraq. The reality is that a significant minority did not participate in the election—the Sunnis. Additionally, if the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites each have their own state, this will create other problems: Shiites would raise major headaches in the Gulf, a Kurdish state would raise Turkey's concerns, a Shiite state would raise major concerns in the Arabian Gulf region.

Another significant problem with Iraq and the Middle East is that religious factions are gaining support at the expense of secular factions. This is best illustrated by recent elections in the Palestinian territories and in Iraq. If we analyze every single one of the most recent elections in the Middle East, there is an increasing prominence of religion. I am a practicing Moslem, but religion for me is something between me and God—religion is not supposed to be a part of politics. Thus, I become concerned when politicians advocate their political agenda based on God with statements such as, "This is what God meant," especially when this occurs in societies that have an extremely large percentage of illiteracy, lack of education, and common social problems because people are hesitant to challenge the views attributed to the holy books. Finally, I wonder how in the future this may factor into the political game, and whether that is the model that people take out of their recent experiences rather than the democratic process.

EPILOGUE

In conclusion, the United States must first examine why the country is becoming a target of terrorism and determine what proactive measures can be taken to decrease the possibility of future attacks. This begins with ensuring that there is no support of terrorist activities in different communities around the world. America will never convince Osama Bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri. But America can definitely make a fundamental shift in the sentiment vis-à-vis

America that would help create a strong center; a center that will protect America, the Western society, and Egypt, for that matter, against terrorists. We must build and develop this bridge because no country can ignore the extreme influence of America on social, economic, and political structures around the world. Meanwhile, America has to realize that the war against terrorism does not in itself solve micro- or sub-regional problems.