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## The War on Terrorism

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The "war on terrorism" declared by the US government on 11 September was actually re-declared. The first such declaration was 20 years earlier, when the Reagan administration came into office, announcing that a war on terrorism would be the core of US foreign policy, particularly state-supported international terrorism, the most virulent form of "the evil scourge of terrorism" (Reagan), a plague spread by "depraved opponents of civilization itself" in "a return to barbarism in the modern age" (Secretary of State George Shultz). Reagan happened to be referring to the Middle East, at a moment (1985) when terrorism in that region was selected by editors as the top story of the year. But Shultz warned that the most "alarming" manifestation was frighteningly close to home: "a cancer, right here in our land mass," a state that was openly renewing the goals of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, he informed Congress.

We must "cut out" the Nicaraguan cancer, Shultz warned. And in the light of the immensity of the evil and the threat, we should not be bound by moralistic constraints: "Negotiations are a euphemism for capitulation if the shadow of power is not cast across the bargaining table," he declared, condemning those who advocate "utopian, legalistic means like outside mediation, the United Nations, and the World Court, while ignoring the power element of the equation." The US was exercising "the power element of the equation" with mercenary forces based in Honduras, where John Negroponte was in charge, while blocking efforts by the World Court and Latin American nations to pursue "utopian, legalistic means."

The military component of the new war on terrorism is led by Donald Rumsfeld, Reagan's special representative for the Middle East; the diplomatic efforts at the UN by Negroponte. Other leading figures of the first war also reappear in a prominent role. The world has changed little since, and the continuity of leadership also suggests that the first war on terrorism should have instructive lessons.

Before exploring them, some preliminary questions should be considered: (1) What is terrorism? (2) What is the proper response to it? The answer to the second question should at the very least satisfy the most elementary of moral truisms: If some act is wrong for others, it is wrong for us; if it is right for us, it is right for others.

The first question is held to pose great difficulties, but there are simple answers that seem adequate, for example, the definition given in US Army manuals published when Reagan and Shultz were issuing their bitter condemnations: terrorism is "the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature...through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear."

There are many illustrations. 11 September is a particularly shocking example. Another clear case is the official US-UK reaction, announced by Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, chief of the British Defense Staff, and prominently reported. He informed Afghans that US-UK attacks will

continue "until the people of the country themselves recognize that this is going to go on until they get the leadership changed," in conformity with the official definition of international terrorism.

The actions that he and his associates in Washington were directing go well beyond the norm. They were undertaken with the expectation that they would place huge numbers of civilians at serious risk of starvation; millions, according to unchallenged estimates. But Boyce's words are familiar: he was closely paraphrasing Israeli statesman Abba Eban, shortly after the first war on terrorism was declared. Eban was replying to Prime Minister Menachem Begin's account of atrocities in Lebanon committed under the Labor government in the style "of regimes which neither Mr. Begin nor I would dare to mention by name," acknowledging the accuracy of the account, but adding the standard justification: "there was a rational prospect, ultimately fulfilled, that affected populations would exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities." At the time, with decisive US support, Israel was carrying out military operations in Lebanon in an effort to elicit some pretext for the planned 1982 invasion, carried out, as openly acknowledged, to deter the threat of an unwanted diplomatic settlement along the lines supported by virtually the entire world (apart from the US and its Israeli client). When provocation failed, Israel invaded anyway with US military and diplomatic support, killing some 18,000 people. It maintained its occupation of much of the country for almost 20 years in violation of Security Council orders, with regular terror. One example is a candidate for the prize of worst terrorist atrocity in the region in the peak year of concern, 1985: the "Iron Fist" operations conducted by Shimon Peres's government, targeting what the high command called "terrorist villagers" opposing the occupation.

Another candidate for the prize was a car-bombing in Beirut at a Mosque, timed when people were leaving to inflict maximum casualties: 80 killed, over 250 wounded, mostly women and girls, along with other atrocities described vividly in the national US press. The target was a Muslim cleric, who escaped. The bombing was organized by the CIA with British and Saudi support. The only other plausible candidate for 1985 in the region was Israel's bombing of Tunis, also with no serious pretext, killing 75 Palestinians and Tunisians; the shocking results were graphically reported by the respected journalist Amnon Kapeliouk (in Israel). The US cooperated by failing to warn its Tunisian ally that the bombers were on the way. Shultz informed Israel that Washington "had considerable sympathy" for the action, but drew back from open approval when the Security Council unanimously denounced the bombing as an "act of armed aggression" (US abstaining). A few days later Prime Minister Peres arrived in Washington, where he joined President Reagan in denouncing the "evil scourge of terrorism."

None of these examples enter the canon of international terrorism, however, because of a crucial condition: terrorism is terrorism targeting us, excluding what we do to them. That is standard practice, probably a historical universal. Accordingly, there was no comment when Reagan and Peres issued their denunciations of Middle East terrorism right after having won the prize at the peak moment of concern over the plague, or when the US and UK frankly described their operations in Afghanistan.

The same convention applies to the operations to "cut out the Nicaraguan cancer," an uncontroversial case, given the judgment by the World Court condemning the US for the "unlawful use of force" and the supporting Security Council Resolution calling on all states to observe international law (vetoed by the US, Britain abstaining); uncontroversial, that is, among those with some respect for international law and human rights. The Court ordered the US to terminate the crime and pay substantial reparations. Washington responded by escalating the

war and issuing the first official orders to attack "soft targets" -- undefended civilian targets -- and to avoid combat with the army. By convention, all of this is excluded from the annals of terrorism, along with the even more barbaric international terrorism then underway in the neighboring countries.

The observation generalizes. Take Cuba, probably the leading target of international terrorism, reaching remarkable levels in Kennedy's Operation Mongoose, continuing to the late 1990s. Cold War pretexts were offered, but are known to be false. The terrorist operations and secret decision to overthrow the government preceded any Soviet connection. In secret, the Cuban threat was described as "the spread of the Castro idea of taking matters into one's own hands," which might stimulate the "poor and underprivileged" in other countries, who "are now demanding opportunities for a decent living" (Arthur Schlesinger, reporting the conclusions of JFK's Latin American mission to the incoming president). The Cold War connection was that "the Soviet Union hovers in the wings, flourishing large development loans and presenting itself as the model for achieving modernization in a single generation." The case is by no means unusual. Cuba remains officially a "terrorist state," suspected of supporting international terrorism. But it is not the target of terrorism, thanks to the governing convention.

Though the powerful protect themselves from such unwanted facts, they are of course familiar to the victims; Ireland knows the story well. Harsh condemnation of the terrorist atrocities of 11 September was virtually universal, but was regularly accompanied by bitter memories. Panamanian journalist Ricardo Stevens, for example, recalled the death of perhaps thousands of poor people (Western crimes, therefore unexamined) when George Bush I bombed the barrio Chorillo in December 1989 in Operation Just Cause, undertaken to kidnap a disobedient thug who was sentenced to life imprisonment in Florida for crimes mostly committed while he was on the CIA payroll. Eduardo Galeano observed that Washington's posture of opposing terrorism is hardly convincing to those who remember well the state terrorism that raged "in Indonesia, in Cambodia, in Iran, in South Africa,...and in the Latin American countries that lived through the dirty war of the Condor Plan," a small sample. The research journal of the Jesuit university in Managua recognized that the September atrocities might be described as "Armageddon," but added that Nicaragua has "lived its own Armageddon in excruciating slow motion" under US assault "and is now submerged in its dismal aftermath." The record continues to the present: it suffices to compare the list of leading recipients of US arms with human rights reports.

Similar conventions apply to extradition. The US refused even to consider extradition of the suspected perpetrators of the September 11 crimes, just as it pointedly refused to obtain unambiguous Security Council authorization for its retaliation, as it could easily have done, if not for attractive reasons. The stance reflects a traditional principle of world order: the powerful must establish that they defer to no authority.

Being small and weak, Nicaragua tried to follow the rules, but of course failed. Similarly, when Costa Rica requested extradition of a US rancher who turned his lands over to the CIA as a base for the terrorist attack against Nicaragua, the request was routinely ignored. One highly relevant current case involves Emmanuel Constant, the leader of the Haitian paramilitary forces that were responsible for thousands of brutal killings in the early 1990s under the military junta, which Washington officially opposed but tacitly supported. Constant was sentenced in absentia by a Haitian court. Haiti has called on the US to extradite him, again on September 30, 2001. The request was again ignored, probably because of concerns about what he might reveal about ties to the US government during the period of the terror.

President Bush and many others have raised the question "why do they hate us?" Many sophisticated answers have been proposed, but some simple ones come to mind. It helps to remember that the question is not new. It was raised in 1958 by President Eisenhower. Our problem in the Arab world, he informed his staff, "is that we have a campaign of hatred against us, not by the governments but by the people," who side with Nasser -- a "Communist" (despite firm CIA denials), by virtue of his independent nationalist stance. One reason for Washington's plight was offered by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles: The "Communists" are able "to get control of mass movements,...something we have no capacity to duplicate.... The poor people are the ones they appeal to and they have always wanted to plunder the rich." A more formal answer was given by the National Security Council, which concluded that "the majority of Arabs" see the US as "opposed to the realization of the goals of Arab nationalism" and believe that it is seeking to protect its interest in Near East oil by supporting the *status quo* and opposing political or economic progress..." The perception is difficult to counter, the NSC recognized, since it is accurate: "our economic and cultural interests in the area have led not unnaturally to close U.S. relations with elements in the Arab world whose primary interest lies in the maintenance of relations with the West and the status quo in their countries..."

It remains difficult to counter such perceptions. After 11 September, the *Wall Street Journal* surveyed opinions of "moneyed Muslims": bankers, professionals, businessmen with close US ties. They expressed dismay about US support for "oppressive regimes" and its opposition to independent development and political democracy; and about specific policies, particularly US support for Israel's harsh and brutal military occupation and the sanctions against Iraq that are devastating the population while strengthening its murderous dictator -- whom the US and Britain supported right through his worst atrocities, as they recall, even if the West prefers to forget. The sentiments are broadly shared, and the great mass of the population is not pleased to see the wealth of the region flow to the West and its local clients.

Suppose we depart from convention and adopt the moral truism mentioned at the outset. We can then honestly inquire into the proper response to international crimes. We can, for example, ask whether Haiti has the right to use force to compel Constant's extradition, in accord with Washington's model in Afghanistan (after it had refused to consider extradition). The same question arises about the uncontroversial case of Nicaragua, and many others. Throughout, Admiral Boyce's prescription, which was implemented, is unthinkable, yielding a conclusion too obvious to state.

Other responses to international terrorist crimes have been proposed. One was put forth by the Vatican and spelled out by military historian Michael Howard: "a police operation conducted under the auspices of the United Nations...against a criminal conspiracy whose members should be hunted down and brought before an international court, where they would receive a fair trial and, if found guilty, be awarded an appropriate sentence." Though never contemplated, the proposal seems reasonable. If so, it should apply to even worse terrorist crimes, such as the ones that left tens of thousands dead in Nicaragua and the country devastated perhaps beyond recovery, and much extreme cases close by, and elsewhere. That could never be contemplated.

Honesty would leave us with a dilemma: the easy escape is conventional hypocrisy (as the word is defined in the Gospels). The other option is harder to pursue, but imperative if the world is to be spared still worse disasters.