

# the MENA Report

ANALYSIS & INSIGHTS  
FROM THE **ARAB WORLD**

الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا



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# ABOUT THE MENA REPORT

*The MENA Report*, published monthly by The Cordoba Foundation, provides unique insights and analysis of events and developments in the Middle East and North Africa. Seeking to provide impartial, accurate and authoritative content and analysis, we do this through The Cordoba Foundation's unique access to rare and highly important primary sources in the Middle East and beyond.



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# WELCOME



Welcome to the October edition of *The MENA Report* where we attempt to better-understand terrorism; the American War on Terror and the plethora of definitions that abound as well as the people most affected by terrorism and the key perpetrators and instigators of terrorist acts throughout history. We also attempt to understand who decides if an act of violence is considered a terrorist or an act of self-defence. The decisions that govern the lives of millions of people are made by governments. A sizable proportion of these decisions are made by autocratic regimes that are known to have resorted to terror tactics against their citizens and against other nations.

We also argue in this issue of *The MENA Report* that terror attacks and reciprocal violence is mostly a reaction to state-sponsored violence and terror. In some instances terror policies were quite flagrant and had wide media exposure such as recent cases relating to Egypt, Syria and also Iraq over a long period. Some of these acts of terror were so obvious to have been orchestrated by the regimes that they

received continuous ridicule and comments on Youtube and other social media sights. A clear example of this is when an Egyptian state sponsored TV reporter denied the Ministry of Interior's communiqué that a hand-grenade was thrown at Bulaq al-Dakror Police Station only to be thrown at the same station half an hour later.

As observers and analysts, it is essential that we think critically and attempt to fathom the stories behind the headlines especially when most of the information is manufactured by the state. Similarly, we need to discern the rapid flow of information to make-up our own minds about important issues that berated millions of lives in the past and will definitely continue in the future. National pride, judicial and political sovereignty should not be a barrier to intrusive policies carried out by carefully instituted international bodies to save the future of generations of people especially in undeveloped nations from the tyrannies of autocratic regimes. Whilst at face value, the War on Terror maybe a noble effort to defend freedom, what good is freedom if



An improved awareness of the nature, history and grievances involved in conflict constitutes part of the progress towards diminishing the threat of violence.

it arrives at the cost of thousands of innocent lives? What good is freedom if there is no justice or at least proper investigation for the root causes of violence and terrorism? What good is freedom if it allows regimes a free reign of terror against millions whilst punishing only the small players?

The international community is in need of a robust and properly thought-out policy and guidelines to provide strategic risk-informed assessment to counter-terrorism activities irrespective of the geopolitical or economic concerns. Also, the policy should fully comply with International Law and the principles of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

An improved awareness of the nature, history and grievances involved in conflict constitutes part of the progress towards diminishing the threat of violence and terrorism. Every state has the right to defend itself against acts of terror and aggression; however it is counterproductive to weave national geopolitical concerns

with global phenomenon such as the evil of terrorism, and try to gloss over its international dimension. Only by taking on board all the aforementioned concerns can the War on Terror have a better chance of success as wider, popular, global compliance will be more forthcoming and hence depleting the pool of potential recruits for terrorist acts.

**Dr Fareed Sabri**

HEAD OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA PROGRAMME  
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# THE WAR ON **TERROR**: THE HUMAN COST AND POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS

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The term “War on Terror” has become synonymous with American foreign policy over the past 20 years. It has been defined and appropriated by the US as part of its leverage at the disposal of its politicians to be applied to the diplomatic other. It became a powerful tool of persuasion, intimidation and even sometimes as a payoff for autocratic and democratic regimes alike. There is no doubt that terrorism is a big challenge facing our societies today, but is terrorism a new phenomenon, or is it a ubiquitous fact that has beset human societies since antiquity? Nonetheless, there is no doubt that terrorist acts (if only defined as acts by non-government actors) have increased in their frequency and violent nature in societies traumatised by seismic structural changes after the Second World War. The definition and the whole range of laws and measures taken to combat what has been selectively defined has fundamentally changed regional and global alliances and is energising the dynamics that are reshaping the unstable map of the Middle East -- a region which will continue in its ideological fermentation (as it has always been) the epicentre of religions, religious ideas and cults.

To the critical reader, the arguments aforementioned may be construed as an attempt by *The MENA Report* of trying to shift the blame of terrorism by sweeping it under the carpet. To the contrary, we have endeavoured in this edition to reach a balanced and realistic understanding of the term “terrorism”. We explore the effects and manifestation of terrorism in society as well as offer ideas of how we may effectively deal with this menace. As alluded to earlier, violent acts against civilians have been a human phenomenon ever since humans began populating the planet. If terror is to be defined as an act against civilians irrespective of the actor then we could easily highlight that to displace or even murder whole societies was the norm from antiquity to the Middle Ages and beyond.

The Roman Empire’s attitude to war is totally different to our normal understanding of war, such as grabbing more territory for economic reasons, manpower (slaves) or spreading the victor’s ideology and way of life. Clearly, the rationale of the Roman’s state of mind is totally different from ours as citizens of the modern-day state governments.

Instilling terror and fear in the hearts of other nations to dissuade them from disobeying Roman laws, mutiny or rebellion was a calculated and efficiently executed Roman strategy. Revenge was enacted with murderous effect against cities and nations once they had lost on the battlefield to the Roman Empire.

Romans were a minority within their Empire; their army was too small to subdue the vast array of nations and territories under their command. Hence, shock and awe strategies were the best weapon to keep other nations in check. This psychological warfare was highly effective as the size of their army was not the deciding factor. Furthermore, the Roman Republic did not have the sufficient financial capability to equip and arm vast armies ready for campaigns whenever needed. For the first few centuries of the life of the state the ordinary citizen was required to fork out the cost of arming himself in the hope of getting rewarded from the booty of war. Awe and instilling fear in the hearts of other nations is what kept the Empire glued together for centuries despite

Rome's small army and nation compared to the vast expanse of the wider Empire.

Genocide was often an expected consequence of a rebellion against Rome. A lesson had to be understood by other nations that the price for daring to challenge the Roman authority was paid with the very existence of the nation as a whole. The complete destruction of the city of Carthage (in present-day Tunisia) in 146 BC was an example and a turning point in history. Rome effectively opened a new page in its history of dominating the Middle East and Europe. During the Third Punic War their army entered Carthage, destroyed the buildings, and wiped out many of the Carthaginian people.

Terror was instrumental in the Roman system and the psychology of previous and earlier civilisations. The Assyrians, for example, preceded the Romans with even worse terror tactics that enabled them to dominate the Middle East for centuries.<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly these tactics were





## Religion became a single solid unit appropriated by the extremists and scriptural commandments were reduced to nothing more than mechanical rituals.

passed from one era to another since they guaranteed effective dominance by psychological terror.<sup>2</sup> Terror in the ancient world was not just a state and empire building instrument utilised by warrior nations for accumulating worldly riches. Ideologically-justified terror campaigns were also known from before and after the foundation of the Abrahamic religions.

In the first century after the birth of Jesus Christ, a Jewish Sicarii sect used terrorist tactics such as assassinations and kidnapping. They targeted people who they accused of collaborating with the Roman administration during their occupation of Jerusalem. Their main aim was to spread fear and discord among the Romans and their associates. The pursuit of religious purity and the belief in the literal commands of the scriptures annulled any possibility of compromise or relative positions towards the religious beliefs and values. Even those Jews who were religious but held different political opinions and relative understanding of the religious texts were targeted, since it was the purity of

the ideology which was the important thing. Getting rid of the Roman occupation was for the zealots and their military offshoot i.e. the Sicarii the first step towards applying the law of God rather than the pagan laws of the Romans.

Religious scripture, with its morals, ethics, and values of justice and compassion, became one solid block to be saved from the wicked other. Its values and directives were relegated in the hope that when the war is won, only then will the instructions and directives of the Holy Scriptures be acted upon or utilised. Religion became a single solid unit appropriated by the extremists and scriptural commandments were reduced to nothing more than mechanical rituals or a kind of identity tag to distinguish the believers from others, even those of the same religious persuasion. This is why we find paradoxes and dichotomous behavior in such individuals or groups. For example, it is not strange to expect from the religious extremist or terrorist an extreme piety and a tendency to steal at the same time. Similarly one can expect extreme kindness with family,



## Sinners according to the *Khawarij* is considered *kufir* (disbelief) which merited capital punishment unless one repented.

friends, and even strangers, coupled with the propensity to commit murder even against coreligionists if he believes that they offended or didn't believe in some aspects of his conception of religion.

In the seventh century AD forty years after the death of Prophet Muhammad, a new religious group emerged challenging the authority of Ali bin Abi Talib (559-661 AD), which the Muslims consider as the fourth "Rightly Guided" Caliph.<sup>3</sup> They were known as the *Khawarij* who rejected the leadership of Ali accusing him of betraying the religious commands. Then they went further to excommunicate their head of state, and later on managed to assassinate him while he was leading a congregation in prayer. For another two hundred years the *Khawarij* continued their campaign of terror against the state and ordinary citizens which severely weakened the state. Their uncompromising belief in the sanctity of the religious doctrine as a one package led them to totally ignore the basic ethical and moral commandments and values for the pursuit of

higher values as they believed. Sinning according to the *Khawarij* is considered *kufir* (disbelief) which merited capital punishment unless one repented. Following this argument, the religious and political leadership were by default sinners if they committed sins (obviously they will since it is a human nature to do so). Unless they declare their repentance with all those who follow them (i.e. the ordinary citizen) they become a legitimate punitive target. The absurdity of such dogma carried surreal implications where extreme piety was coupled with murderous acts against ordinary civilians.<sup>4</sup>

One of the reasons for their extremely violent acts against ordinary civilians is their inherent belief that their religious dogma and ascetic regimental and disciplined way of life will never be dominant. They will always remain a minority, hence murder and intimidation, especially against those from among their own community, will serve to inhibit others from lending support to their opponents. Extremist Islamist groups adhere to an abstract rhetoric devoid of any practical political or even social past application



or experience to merit any sort of legitimacy or solid referent. This highly sanitised idealism forces the extremist organisation into a position of contentious organisational divisions, infighting and instability. Consequently, the pursuit of new recruits and aggressive and religious purity opens the door for infiltrations thereby compromising their security and their strategic policies.<sup>5</sup> This has been observed in places like Algeria, Iraq, Yemen and currently in Syria.

In the early 1990s, the Algerian terrorist group known as the GIA (*al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah al-Musallaha*, from French *Groupe Islamique Armé* or Armed Islamic Group) published a weekly pamphlet entitled *Nashrat al-Ansar* (the partisan bulletin).<sup>6</sup> The group embarked on a terror campaign against both the government and Islamist supporters alike. They accused the vast array of Islamist organisations such as FIS (the Islamic Salvation Front), the Algerian HAMAS (Muslim Brotherhood) and others of religious fluidity, treason and heresy. The organisation itself was splintered and heavily infiltrated by the Algerian security police who carried out

many atrocities against civilians in the belief that such acts will, throw the ordinary citizen into the arms of the state and dissuade them from supporting Islamist extremists and moderates alike.<sup>7</sup> Abu Qatada, the Palestinian-Jordanian cleric had a regular column entitled "From the core of the doctrine" *من صميم المنهج*. He and other writers legitimised murdering government officials, police and army personnel. They even boasted of crimes against innocent families of the army and police.<sup>8</sup>

Similar stories were replicated and continued to be in Iraq. The terror campaign of al-Qaeda affiliated *Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic State of Iraq) progressed from targeting the forces of occupation to the collaborators, finally ending-up targeting resistance groups supposedly on their side against the multinational forces and the Iranian backed militias. Again, their political and religious dogma is so narrow and abstract dictating that their rhetoric is violently opposed to other Islamist organisations including those who showed them some support in the past like the



Despite all the tactics and psychology of the small groups and terrorist organisations their collateral, material and psychological damage remain limited compared to that of state-sponsored terrorism.

Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS).

In 2005 at the height of the election campaign in Iraq, al-Qaeda carried out terror threats and attacks against polling stations and Sunni politicians. The political ramifications were dire for the Sunni community which al-Qaeda claimed to protect from Iranian influence and the occupation. The only beneficiaries were the Iranian backed militias and politicians. Unsurprisingly, many Iraqi politicians use these events to propose theories of Iranian and other regional infiltration to prove that al-Qaeda and similar groups can only function with state logistical and financial support.<sup>9</sup>

Despite all the tactics and psychology of the small groups and terrorist organisations their collateral, material and psychological damage remain limited compared to that of state-sponsored terrorism. In Iraq, state-sponsored militias managed to murder 944 innocent civilians in a matter of a few days after the Samara Mosque bombings in 2006. Furthermore their terror campaign against places of worship and ordinary civilians forced the consequent displacement

of millions of Iraqis inside and outside the country.<sup>10</sup>

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1. [http://faculty.uml.edu/ethan\\_Spanier/Teaching/documents/CP6.0AssyrianTorture.pdf](http://faculty.uml.edu/ethan_Spanier/Teaching/documents/CP6.0AssyrianTorture.pdf) There is uncanny similarity between the strategies of the Assyrian and Roman Empires. Even the Assyrian soldiers' armor and weapons were likely to be copied by the Romans as is obvious from relief work and murals depicting Assyrian weaponry and military campaigns.
  3. He is the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad. He ruled over the Islamic Caliphate from 656 to 661.
  4. History books are full of murderous acts by the *khawarij* against worshipers and ordinary citizens simply for showing indifference and not rebelling against what they consider to be deviant of the real religious path. At the same time, they were known for extreme piety, asceticism and personal moral integrity.
  5. On numerous occasions in Algeria in the 1990s and in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, the security services managed to infiltrate these terrorist groups and even carry out terrorist acts to instigate a popular backlash against the groups, thus stripping them of safe havens, new recruits and supplies.
  6. [http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue\\_archive/Wasat%20magazine/XML%20Alwasat/AlWasat\\_1995/11November-1995%20Ok/11-Politics/1995-11-13/13p15-01.xml.html](http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Wasat%20magazine/XML%20Alwasat/AlWasat_1995/11November-1995%20Ok/11-Politics/1995-11-13/13p15-01.xml.html)
  7. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/mar/21/richardnortontaylor>.
  8. In one occasion the GIA boasted of a campaign against women and children purported to be family members of police officers. Abhorred by the act the

researcher at The Cordoba Foundation sent a question to Abu Qatada via one of his followers enquiring about the legitimacy for such crimes. His answer was equally shocking; he said those women and children shouldn't be destroyed because they are now the property of the *Mujahideen!*

9. In 2003, our researcher met a Kurdish clergy close to the Kurdish Islamist commander Mullah Krekar, the original leader of the Islamist armed group Ansar al-Islam. The group was set-up and commenced operations in Kurdistan while Krekar had refugee status in Norway. Concurrently he was issued with two Iranian passports. He claimed that the Iranian government allowed 700 members of Ansar al-Islam to enter Iraq from the Kurdish border near the town of Halabja presumably to fight the Americans. In 2006, the Sunni Endowment Minister, Dr Ahmed Abdul Ghafour al-Samara'i claimed during his visit to the UK that members of al-Qaeda in the Samara district confessed to him in a meeting that they received Iranian financial support solely to disrupt the election campaign in the Sunni provinces.

10. In an interview with Iraqi Vice-President, Tariq al-Hashimi, he claimed to have pleaded with Prime-Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'fari many times to declare a State of Emergency to stop the killings. Al-Ja'fari refused claiming that was only fair for people to vent and dissipate their anger against the desecration of the Shi'i shrine in the city of Samara. The Mahdi militias who carried out these crimes were in coalition of al-Ja'fari's *Da'wa Party*.

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# THE FAILURE TO PROPERLY DEFINE **TERRORISM** CONTRIBUTES TO ITS CONTINUOUS SPREAD

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“Tell me from where to start and I will tell you whom to blame.”

In the June edition of *The MENA Report* we explained how the term terrorism is inadequately and varyingly defined by different American government agencies. The definition is so general that it could be interpreted any way the politician wishes, enabling them to exploit the malleability and vacuity of the definition.<sup>1</sup> Human beings usually tend to define threats in the context of their personal security ignoring wider implications and circumstances which led to the existence of a given phenomenon.

Furthermore, academic studies are usually tainted by nationalist agendas, ideological bias and abstraction of the history and causes of given phenomenon or event. Most terrorist experts consider terrorism as a modern phenomenon starting with the Israeli airline El-Al hijacking in 1968.<sup>2</sup> It is associated mainly with the actions of groups, organisations and individuals, it is not strange therefore to

find a variety of definitions for terrorism even within the confines of one state or security agency as is evident in the United States of America. The key to all definitions of terrorism is the attack on civilians. The US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) describes terrorism in terms of creating fear and publicity to convince the civilians that their government is unable to protect them or stop the attacks against them.<sup>3</sup>

The Federal Investigation Bureau (FBI) website provides more detailed definitions for both international and domestic terrorism;

“International terrorism” means activities with the following three characteristics:

- *Involve[ing] violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;*
- *Appear[ing] to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of*

- *a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and Occur[ing] primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S., or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.<sup>164</sup>*

From the above, domestic terror acts are defined within the boundaries of three characteristics. *First* is to involve dangerous acts to human life that violate federal law. The *second* is to appear to intimidate or coerce the civilian population, influence government policy by coercion or affect the conduct of government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping. *Third*, it is to occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.

Other American agencies including the US army, have

different definitions and guidelines for terrorist acts. Whilst still the European Union ratified the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, signed at Strasbourg on 27 January 1977. It is important to stress that this convention does not offer a comprehensive definition of terrorism since its objectives are of a procedural nature. The convention draws up a list of terrorist acts defined either autonomously or by reference to international conventions. One of the main purposes of this convention apart from safeguarding the democratic values of the member states is to limit the scope of characterising acts as a political offence or an offence inspired by political motivations such the safety of Civil Aviation, attacks against diplomats, the taking of hostages and unlawful detention and offences using a bomb or firearm.

At the United Nations level, the divisions between member states prevented a united approach towards a horizontal definition of terrorism; however this did not prevent the adoption of a number of conventions and resolutions



The lack of consensus among the international community and the thin and ineffective definitions will undoubtedly render any international agreement on combating terrorism impotent.

dealing with specific aspects of terrorist acts. In fact the Security Council adopted 19 resolutions since 2001 and 4 by the General Assembly since 2006.<sup>5</sup> The disagreement between the European member states on the definition of terrorism was reflected in the European Parliamentary Recommendation on the role of the member states in combating terrorism prior to the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. The recommendations were vague; their only added value was to call for a framework decision to promulgate a new definition.

On the official European Union website the main argument offered is “to protect the Union’s citizens from individuals and groups using terrorism to advance their political aims posing a serious threat to the democratic values of the member states.”<sup>6</sup> We find this strategy inherently lacking and counterproductive since it ignores the root causes of terrorism and it only wrestles with the consequences. The lack of consensus among the international community and the thin and ineffective definitions will undoubtedly

render any international agreement on combating terrorism impotent and counterproductive.

Despite the agreement by the General Assembly through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) of 2006, the primary responsibility rests on the individual member states to implement, coordinate, and support and necessary policies.<sup>7</sup> As discussed earlier, most of the democratic and internationally effective member states have different and ineffective definitions of terrorism or at least their definitions are focused on local consequences and local political ramifications.

In the preamble of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy it gives a comprehensive condemnation of terrorist acts irrespective of the perpetrators. It goes as follows:

“Guided by the purposes and principles of the





Charter of the United Nations, and reaffirming its role under the Charter, including on questions related to international peace and security, reiterating its strong condemnations of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations committed with whomever, wherever, and for whatever purposes, as it constitutes threats to international peace and security”<sup>8</sup>

On page 2 of the same document it elaborates more on the nature of the terrorist acts however without stressing further on the main perpetrators of terrorist acts and human rights abuses. The document covers this omnipresent aspect of terrorist offences (i.e. state-sponsored terrorism) though in general. The article elucidates;

“Reaffirming that acts, methods and practices of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations are activities aimed at the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy, threatening territorial integrity, security of States and destabilising

legitimately constituted governments”.

Though the paragraph above is crystal clear about the protection of rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy, these references are buried in a plethora of recommendations and definitions of organised and individually sponsored terrorist acts. This is in addition to the lack and ineffective due reference to State sponsored terrorist acts against its citizens and against other States.

With the age of fast and intrusive communications, travel, and global economy, it is vitally important that the United Nations and the member States take into consideration new approach to State-sponsored terrorism to ensure people’s rights to freedom of speech and democracy. At the end of the day it is the democratically-established and affluent Western countries that are most affected by the ramifications of State-sponsored repression and terrorist offences against the ordinary citizens in the Middle East. Instability and poor economic performance prompted hundreds of thousands

of people to seek refuge in the West. Moreover, poor economies translated to loss of markets for the sophisticated and high quality Western manufacturers, thus enabling less developed economies and new emerging powers to fill the vacuum and assert their politics on the region.

An intrusive internationally sponsored and regulated policy towards a comprehensive definition and policies to countering terrorism is very much overdue. Guidelines, arbitration committees, fast tracks for international courts of justice and democratically based overruling Human Rights and Counter Terrorism Council are vital for International peace and security. Conservative estimates of the human cost in Egypt over the past few months runs to five thousand dead and triple this number of injuries. The international response to the State-sponsored violence against peaceful demonstrators and the nascent democratic process can, at best, be considered feeble amid allegations of direct involvement to support the military coup by regional and international governments.

Many consider the American international campaign against terrorism as a complete failure. Terrorist attacks since 2001 increased, especially after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Any war against terror needs collaboration among governments and interaction between their respective intelligence and security agencies. Ever since the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorist organisations have been displaced and appropriated by the same agencies entrusted to fight them, or used by countries that have grievances with the United States and her allies.

According to a prominent Iraqi politician the Saudi government sponsored al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq mainly to keep Iraq unstable and redirect the attention of extremists and terrorist elements from Saudi Arabia.<sup>9</sup> The Saudis trained al-Qaeda members and have harboured their leadership near the Iraqi border since 2005. Paradoxically, Saudi's arch enemies, the Iranians had contacts and agreements with al-Qaeda since 2002. The same source claims that officials from both governments confessed to their links with al-Qaeda



## State strategies in the Middle East and beyond... used terror tactics within its own security apparatus, encouraged and utilised terrorist groups to bring in new draconian laws.

in addition to testimonies of ex-members of moderate Islamic groups who turned to al-Qaeda activism during the American occupation.

Similarly the Syrian regime harboured, trained and financed al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations consequently devastating the very fabric and the social cohesion of the Iraqi society between 2003 -2009. After 2010, the Syrian Government embarked on a terror campaign sparing no weapon or means to violate the human rights of its people with puzzling impunity. In such unrestricted and unpunished violence against ordinary people it is unreasonable to the level of criminality to expect ordinary citizens to be passive or never resort to violence. The silence of the international community and the lack of proper definitions and guidelines and means to protect ordinary people from state-sponsored terrorist acts can be described as criminal negligence at the very least.

Time and time again it has been proven that state strategies

in the Middle East and beyond (some Western democratic nations followed the same routine) used terror tactics within its own security apparatus, encouraged and utilised terrorist groups to bring in new draconian laws for the purpose of ethnic and religious cleansing. Also to destabilise or silencing the opposition.

Religious fanaticism, and in particular Sunni-based fundamentalist and violent groups have always been a symptom and a reaction to macro-structural changes or a reaction to a state-sponsored terrorism.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Sunni religious groups are more inclined to distinguish themselves from each other based on ideological schism. This is why one finds sharp differences between different Sunni organisations which develop tensions and infighting.<sup>11</sup> Not to mention that the lack of a central religious and political authority also contributes to the sharp divide in addition to regional governmental infiltrations and influence to weaken any attempt to organise beyond the boundaries and jurisdictions of the regimes.



## The rapid intellectual reform within the Muslim Brotherhood and other Salafi-based outfits petrified autocratic regimes in the Middle East since the early 1990s.

Unlike Sunni-based religious activism or fanaticism, Shi'i organisations are most likely to be ethnically and nationally based with strong ties to the religious authority of the Supreme Guide in Iran. Hence their activism is in fact less ideological in the sense of propagating religious, ethical and moral values. Further, they are less concerned with political or moral revision and reform since this falls within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Guide and the religious authority (*Maraji*). They consider that the apex of reform and political correctness has already been achieved by the Iranian revolution. However, this does not negate the attempt by different Shi'i religious, intellectual and academic organisations to reform the political system, in an attempt to accommodate religious doctrine within aspects of international norms of democracy, human rights, free speech, economic and scientific development.

This is why the political and religious reform is quite open and progressing at a greater pace within the Sunni domain since it is not bound by a single religious or political authority. In fact the rapid intellectual reform within the

Muslim Brotherhood and other Salafi-based outfits petrified autocratic regimes in the Middle East since the early 1990s. To discredit these organisations and hinder their progress towards political and religious reform Middle Eastern governments used the same tactic time and time again. These tactics usually start with vast array of human rights abuses against a given trend to solicit violent responses against the state. The state would respond with even more harsh tactics accompanied by a variety of laws to curtail the rights of the rest of the population. The second stage always involves the infiltration of these organisations to encourage them to commit to more extreme tactics, hence splintering and transforming them to become fringe organisations.<sup>12</sup>

Islamic activism and a military response based on religious values is, as proposed earlier, a natural reaction to macro-structural changes and violent tactics used by autocratic regimes. In the present vacuity of ideological alternatives such as Arab nationalism, communism and organised secular-based political entities, it is only natural that political Islam will be the only alternative. Communist and socialist-

based organisations, intellectuals and movements are heavily implicated in the support of autocracies in the Arab and Muslim world; hence they are incapable of challenging the present corrupt regimes and dictatorships. A clear example is that of the Ba'ath Party members in Iraq resorting to political Islam to frame their struggle as thwarting the occupation and returning to power in the cloak of Islamic rhetoric. Syria is another example. In interviews with leading figures of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in exile, they claim that many of the groups who are currently fighting in Syria who claim to follow the ideology and political direction of the Muslim Brotherhood have never been affiliated to the Brotherhood or trained in the Brotherhood's *fikr* (thought) and *minhaj* (methodology). It was a simple case of a move by young freedom fighters that chose to fight the regime under a banner that offers an opposing rhetoric and religiously-framed grievances.

Conversely, Communist, non-Communist, Socialist, Western-inclined secular elites and other organisations are also unable to offer any meaningful alternative rhetoric against

the injustices of the autocratic Middle Eastern governments. The inadequacy of Western responses to the autocracy of their allies in the Middle East and to their massive human rights abuses present another barrier towards creating an alternative to Islamic frame of grievances and struggle. The attempts to depoliticise the civil societies by the regimes and prevent oppositional activities create an imperative within sections of the society to oppose these attempts. Again Islam as a religious ideology with its strong moral, and ethical values, and its history of political and religious reform movements presents the most eligible alternative. The precise shape of Islamic activism directly correlates with the shape and severity of the crisis and the opposing government's policies.

Take two neighbouring countries as examples to study the demeanour and responses of the plethora of Islamic movements towards their respective governments. Jordan's measured and carefully studied response to Islamic activism and the relative freedom given to participate in local and general elections created a working relationship between

PHOTO: LUDWIGERS



the two. Contrarily, the Syrian regime spared no effort in trying to eradicate all opposition forces eventually enticing violent responses from Islamists and others alike.

Nonetheless strain is not an imperative to engender violent or even moderate responses by social groups or ideologically-based movements. In most cases, the strain was to such an intensity, and the consequences for political and non-governmental activism so dire as to make it a virtual suicide to move against the regime's violence (extreme affluence of the rentier states will also engender similar consequences). Again the failure of the international community to properly deal with violent and autocratic regimes mainly for economic and geopolitical considerations allowed the massive human rights abuses to continue and indirectly contributing to the salience of violent and terrorist responses.

Extreme cases of state-repression and the closed path towards opening-up any sort of political entities or organisations other than those sponsored by the state

will only lead to the formation of ethnically and religiously exclusive organisations. Unmitigated violence against members of these groups will facilitate the expansion of violence into sections of society that have no part in the state's repressive campaign. It was noticed that this reactive violence led to defections to the regimes in the form of anti-opposition militant groups. This natural human tendency to resort to protection from the state despite its repressive dynamics in the face of movements and groups' violence encouraged the regimes to carry out acts of terrorism against the civilians to speed up the process and bolster the ranks of its militias. This unfortunate state sponsored terrorist dynamics was adopted in Algeria, Iraq, Chechnya and Syria.

The vast majority of terrorist acts, violence and human rights abuses has and will always be perpetrated by autocratic regimes, state actors and even by few democratic governments. Unless the international community comes together to examine and investigate the root causes and to find and activate binding remedies, the cycle of violence and suffering will continue unabated. In today's world of



This tendency towards violence... against the state and citizenry would often occur when the opposition groups lack access to legitimate means to challenge the regime.

competing economies, scarce natural resources, poverty and violence developing countries cannot continue at the current rate of massive military spending. This will make it much more difficult to counter the increased sophistication of terror groups, plus it will make it more difficult to alleviate social and economic injustice. A vicious cycle of violence will be the result since state coffers will be inadequate to instigate economic and social development and reform.

Consequently, opposition groups will create opportunities for their members and sections of society most affected by the injustice and inequality, not forgetting the external factors stocking the fire of the opposition. This is exactly what has happened in Syria. For more than 45 years, the Syrian regime was busy in its most atrocious abuses of the rights of its people. In 1982 alone, the regime killed nearly 40 thousand people in the city of Hama and imprisoned double this number throughout the country. Again for geopolitical reasons and the need for the services of the regime to check the myriad of revolutionary Palestinian groups in neighbouring Lebanon, the West, and France

in particular looked the other way. Today Syria is a dysfunctional state and a hub for revolutionary forces, extremism and utter mayhem.

Violence and eventually terrorism is mainly a symptom and a reaction to external factors rather than inherent ideological persuasions, social or psychological dysfunction or a choice of will. This tendency towards violence which could mutate into terrorist acts against the state and citizenry would often occur when the opposition groups lack access to legitimate means to challenge the regime coupled with the regime's loss of part of its ability to exact violence on the population as they did previously. To stop political or religious violence and eventually terrorism the threshold of regime violence has to be high to such a degree where political, social and civil life has to be curtailed and circumscribed like in Iraq before the invasion and Syria during the reign of Hafiz al-Asad.

The choices of the international community are very clear. They can either turn a blind eye to human rights abuses



The United States spent nearly a trillion dollars on its maelstrom in Iraq and it continues to spend billions on its War on Terror campaign.

or even lend support to tyrannical and autocratic regimes including the rentier states to keep their populations in check and prevent violence and terrorism at bay. This is a strategy which is practically impossible to sustain in the present pervasive international media and light-speed flow of information. The alternative is to challenge and hold to account tyrannical regimes and persuade them to open-up and keep the flow of political, social and economic mobility. At the end of the day all of the terrorists who attacked the United States in 2001 came from countries known for widespread human rights abuses and for having strong ties with the West and the United States in particular.

On the other side, the United States spent nearly a trillion dollars on its maelstrom in Iraq and it continues to spend billions on its War on Terror campaign. A fraction of this vast amount of financial resources, human lives, and effort would have been better spent and yielded better results if it focused on the core source of violence and terrorism. In the 1990s, the new democratic administration under the

leadership of President Bill Clinton proposed an ethical foreign policy to encourage the move towards democracy in the Middle East. His policy was vehemently opposed by Israel and autocratic Arab regimes alike. Eventually the Clinton Administration succumbed to its geopolitical and economic calculations, leading to more state-repression, hence increased terrorist attacks. For the strategy of imposing the will of the international community on the autocratic regimes to succeed it has to first be sanctioned by the world democracies in a new and binding declaration to stop the autocracies from slipping through the gap between these nations. Second, it is essential to creating opportunities for democratic opposition through a system of incentives, recognition and appropriation of state assets. In a world of trans-national political exchange and diffusion of policies and movements, the issue of human rights should dominate the index of progress and development.

Such a dream of an international consensus requires morally-driven policies and honest international brokers to put aside



national interests for the common good of humanity. A rarity in reality, it is not impossible since world leaders and nations succeeded, though on few occasions, to come together and endeavour to reduce human suffering and mayhem.

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1. [http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/attach/TCF\\_MENA\\_JUNE\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/attach/TCF_MENA_JUNE_FINAL.pdf)
  2. This involved a flight from Rome which was hijacked by members of the militant Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).
  3. <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/terrorism.pdf.p148>
  4. <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/terrorism/terrorism-definition>
  5. <http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/resources/res-sc.html>
  6. [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/crisis-and-terrorism/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/crisis-and-terrorism/index_en.htm)
  7. [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/60/288](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/60/288)
  8. *Ibid*
  9. Interview conducted with prominent Sunni politician and ex-high ranking government official (2004-2010). He claimed to have met Saudi officials and they confessed to him their links to al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq. London, 18/10/2013
  10. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the Algerian military coup in 1991 and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

11. The infighting between the different Algerian violent, moderate and terrorist organisations after 1992 and between the different armed organisations in Iraq after 2004 is well documented. Not to mention the present infighting between the different Sunni-based resistance organisations. It is usually instigated by al-Qaeda affiliated groups such as al-Nusra, Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyya and the GIA – the latter has always been suspected of being infiltrated and directed by regional and local regimes.
12. There are ample evidence against the Algerian, Syrian and Saudi regimes in their attempts to use terrorist organisations locally and abroad to influence policies or destabilise other countries. As shown earlier, the French and British governments were alert to the Algerian government's active involvement in radicalising then after running GIA (the most violent terrorist organisation sprung after the political mayhem in Algeria early 1990s).

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# INTERVIEW WITH MOAZZAM BEGG

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Moazzam Begg works as Director of Outreach at Cage Prisoners, London. He is one of nine British citizens held at Camp X-Ray, Guantánamo Bay by the United States. He was released on January 25, 2005 without charge though he received no compensation or apology.

He has authored numerous pieces that have appeared in major broadsheets around the world – and regularly writes for the *Guardian's Comment is Free*. He is the author of *Enemy Combatant*, where he relates his experience whilst in Guantánamo. Begg is also a published poet and some of his poetry appears in the highly acclaimed anthology, *Poems from Guantánamo*. Begg is a patron of the charity HHUGS and one of the founders of the Guantanamo Justice Centre, established in July 2009 for the welfare of prisoners released and return from Guantanamo Bay.

**The MENA Report:** How do you define the term terrorism?

**Moazzam Begg:** It is an irony but the word terrorism first began being used in the English Language as a result of 'The Great Terror' which is how the ruling elite described the aftermath of the French Revolution at the time. Since then the term has been used and re-used, often in an attempt to criminalise legitimate struggle against state repression and foreign occupation, as well as the more contemporary use of the term by governments today who almost exclusively use it to define groups and individuals that use violence for religious and political aims, but not governments.

**TMENAR:** The American government has different definitions for terrorism. Why do you think this is? Could it be an attempt to give its politicians more leeway as a tool to aid its strategic foreign policy?

**MB:** There are countless definitions of terrorism given in numerous dictionaries which describe the various perceptions of terrorism. The American revolutionaries were regarded as terrorists by the British Empire during the War of Secession while the former saw themselves as freedom-fighters. The "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom-fighter" cliché can be applied time and again: Soviet forces regarded the Afghan *mujahedeen* as terrorists during their occupation of Afghanistan while the USA saw them as freedom-fighters.

An extraordinary exchange between the counsel for the defence of 'terrorism publications' suspect Ahmad Faraaz - who was charged with disseminating books like Syed Qutb's classic, *Milestones* - and a crown prosecution terrorism expert witness at trial in Kingston Crown Court in 2011 illustrates the paradox changing definitions of terrorism.

The defence counsel asked, hypothetically, if the prosecution witness regarded a 17-year old Afghan boy who fired an RPG (rocket propelled grenade) at a tank of occupying Soviet forces during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan as a terrorist. The witness replied in the negative. Defence then asked, if the witness believed the same boy, 15 years later, using the same rocket-launcher, fires an RPG at a tank of US occupation forces. The initial incoherent response was most telling, after which the witness agreed with the defence that terrorism didn't occur in either case. Of course Soviet forces would most certainly have disagreed.

The same can be said of the French resistance during World War 2. Allied forces saw and dealt with them as resistance fighters while the Nazi's saw and treated them as terrorists.

**TMENAR:** In your opinion, has the War on Terror been successful or do you think it exacerbated the threat?

**MB:** It is hard to measure the success or failure of a war against a crime. "Wars" of varying nature have been waged

by various governments against drugs, child abuse, knife crime and benefit fraud. The current terminology of the former Bush administration's "war on terror" was officially dropped by Obama but put in *de facto* practice. Clearly, in name at least, even the current US government which has carried out more extrajudicial killings than the past government had carried out extrajudicial detention, recognised the futility in continuing the usage of the highly discredited "war on terror" phraseology largely due to the real - and perceived - failures therein. Even after the much lauded 16-year old Malala Yousafzai - arguably a victim of both the Taliban and Western exploitation - told President Obama that his policy of using drone strikes in Pakistan and elsewhere was "fuelling terrorism".

It is highly unlikely that the US government will change course. This was also true of previous post-9/11 attitudes: the torture and abuse of terrorism suspects led to the extraction and consequent use of highly flawed intelligence which was in turn utilised to perpetuate violent military action: invasion, detention, targeted assassination; laws, measures

and language that alienate vast sections of the world's populace, namely politically-active Muslims, continue to proliferate. As a result, violence carried out in the name of religion or politics is now more widespread than during any other peacetime era.

**TMENAR:** Terrorism is as old as history itself. Since antiquity terrorist acts were mainly committed by states against civilian population to entice fear and keep a check on revolt. Why do you think even after what happened in the Second World War, the West and the international community didn't give attention to the act of terrorism itself rather than the perpetrators? (for example, American definitions exclude state acts of terror).

**MB:** It is interesting to note that the Concise Oxford Dictionary describes the terrorist as "one who favours or uses terror-inspiring methods of governing or of coercing government or community," while the American Heritage Dictionary, omits the inclusion of governments as potential candidates: "The unlawful use or threatened use of force or

violence by a person or an organised group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons."

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes terrorism as: "The systematic use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population to bring about a particular political objective. It [terrorism] has been used throughout history by political organizations of both the left and the right, by nationalist and ethnic groups, and by revolutionaries. Although usually thought of as a means of destabilizing or overthrowing existing political institutions, terror also has been employed by governments against their own people to suppress dissent; examples include the reigns of certain Roman emperors, the French Revolution (see Reign of Terror), Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union under Stalin, and Argentina during the "dirty war" of the 1970s."

What is clear from these definitions is that the (mis)use of language occurs based upon political interests and



Although at times the US has designated certain countries as “state sponsors of terrorism” it has been reluctant in blatantly describing them as terrorists.

motivations. Although at times the US has designated certain countries as “state sponsors of terrorism” it has been reluctant in blatantly describing them as terrorists. This is partly due to the fact that the US - and allied states - can easily be accused of state terrorism through its use of violence to achieve political goals.

**TMENAR:** Would you say that the lack of a water-tight definition and preventative, punitive measures and the indifference of the international community towards acts of violence by autocratic governments played a major factor in persuading some people into taking the law into their own hands? Or even resorting to terror acts to counter terror campaigns conducted by the state?

**MB:** There is no doubt that state repression will always produce the result of at least some people fighting back and others going beyond the pale - like deliberately targeting civilians - but it is a simple equation: no suppression = no (a very little) likelihood of terrorism. Conversely, when Britain agreed to take part in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 British

intelligence services claimed that the likelihood of terrorism in the UK significantly increased.

Though situations vary between time and place to place we can clearly see that state repression and injustice also leads to grievance and reprisals. The case of Algeria during the 1990s after the government cancelled elections that the Islamist FIS was poised to win and the ensuing violence is one example. Other examples are those of Libya, Syria and Egypt where peaceful protestors were cast as terrorist by autocratic dictators who sought to -- and continue to -- delegitimise opposition by labelling them as the minions of al-Qaeda.

**TMENAR:** Syria is an avid example of the blurring of definitions relating to terrorism. For the first nine months the regime used every single terror tactic against ordinary civilians. In the absence of international support, some people resorted to terror tactics to counter the regime's unabated terror campaign. Do you agree with this analysis?



Although it is important to register the full extent of the severe human rights violations that are occurring with bodies like the UN it would be naive to consider that the latter has any real power.

**MB:** I spent many months in Syria recently and discovered first-hand how peaceful protestors were forced to become fighters by a government that was - and is - quite happy to wipe out its own people. The merits of the atrocities of the war aside, it is interesting to note not only how the Asad regime continues to describe all the opposition as terrorists but, even after its use of chemical weapons and having killed in excess of 100,000 people, it is never described as a terrorist nation - even in the West where some pretence of being anti-Asad abounds.

Syria is devastated: the relatively poorly armed fighters face tanks, heavy artillery, aerial bombardment, starvation and little international support. On the opposite side, the Asad regime is supported by Hezbollah fighters, Russian weapons, Iranian know-how, Iraqi regional pressure, Western inaction and Arab apathy. It is little wonder that the Syrian rebels resort to the tactics some of them have used.

**TMENAR:** In places like the Gulf and the Middle East in general, state security apparatus use torture and summary

executions as a deterrent to those who either challenge the autocratic regimes or simply follow a different political persuasion. Can we resort to the United Nations to effectively challenge such state tactics as acts of terror? There is the UN Convention against Torture, but that seems to be ineffective.

**MB:** Although it is important to register the full extent of the severe human rights violations that are occurring with bodies like the UN it would be naive to consider that the latter has any real power when the interests of the most powerful nations are not at stake. UN Conventions Against Torture, arbitrary detention and "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" have been transgressed by state actors at every level in countries like Syria and Egypt (both before the revolution and after the military coup) yet the UN has failed to act.

In fact, the largest loss of life in this century has occurred in Syria through both the use of conventional and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) yet there has been



PHOTO: TEARFUND

no UN resolution to use force to prevent the use of either. In contrast, the respective 2001 and 2003 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were not prevented by the lack of evidence of either state being involved in attacking the US - or any other country for that matter.

**TMENAR:** How do you propose that we stop autocratic governments from using the War on Terror for their own ends? For example, Russia was implicated in a long list of human rights violations in Chechnya in the 1990s. But despite all its human rights violations, Russia was allowed to escape unpunished. This was possible through bargaining its implicit approval for the array of comprehensive sanctions and bombing runs conducted against Iraq by the Americans in the 1990s. How do you respond?

**MB:** We cannot kid ourselves when it comes to holding the powerful nations to account. Being permanent members of the Security Council was supposed to bring with it responsibility and accountability - even against themselves. In reality it is - and always will be - about self-interest. That in

itself is not the problem: it is the notion that nations which hold this mantle constantly proclaim their piety to the rest of the world and are unwilling, for the most part, to hold themselves to account. When the biggest violators of human rights are also the most powerful on earth, unless they are as pious as they claim to be and can do no wrong, who else is going to take them to task for their transgressions?

**TMENAR:** There is no doubt that terrorism is driven and fuelled by ideology, nationalism, underdevelopment, failed governments, injustice and crime. These different factors need a multi-faceted strategy to win the battle against terrorism. What measures could be added or enhanced to the West's strategy for fighting terrorism?

**MB:** The West may claim it is waging a war against terrorism. In reality it is more at war against itself and its own once cherished ideals than it cares to admit. Whereas once the West was known very widely for its freedoms, human rights, appearance of defending the oppressed, and welcoming asylum-seekers, these traits have now begun to diminish,

slowly but surely. In fact, in a bizarre twist of fate of the more recent draconian and repressive policies introduced in traditionally Western liberal democracies seem to have been adopted from the annals of nations with stories of notorious human rights abuses. Detention without trial, torture, cruelty, targeted assassination, house-arrest, prosecution for the publication, possession and dissemination of books, songs and poetry are not measures one would have normally associated with the West. The net result of such policies, that claim to have been necessary as a direct result of foreign policy matters, which governments are loathe to accept, has been a further sense of alienation and produced little real security.

Ending terrorism requires ending the environment in which terrorism is fostered. That doesn't mean the religion, faith, ethnicity or ideals of people. Like any crime, we must look at the motives. It is odd but I believe terrorism is the only crime where *mens rea* (the guilty mind) is increasingly side-lined when it comes to politicians. Most will claim that an attempt to explain acts of politically-inspired violence is Trojan Horse

for justification. However, perhaps some of our leaders should apply the Sherlock Holmes principle of crime-fighting to the reasons behind the crime of terrorism:

"When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth"

**TMENAR:** Dictatorships and military governments often label opposition forces as "terrorists" and "extremists" to justify their grip on power and stifle democracy. What do you make of the case in Egypt, of the military rule that forcefully removed the country's first-ever elected president?

**MB:** There appears to be a symbiotic relationship between powerful Western nations and Egypt's past - and present - military rulers. Almost no Western nation objected to the military coup in Egypt this year. Numerous Western and several Western-allied Gulf nations showed their solidarity towards Egypt's new military rulers.

Mubarak was supported by the US and UK during his time





It is evident that the Egyptian generals staged a military coup using clever manipulation of language which they knew would be likely to placate critics.

in power while his brutal repression of Islamist opposition escaped criticism or accountability. In return he stemmed off any opposition to Western policy in the region, largely by imprisoning and banning Islamic parties.

It was just a word but the battle over who would and who wouldn't call it a 'coup' ended up determining which camp a person or a state was in after the ouster of President Morsi. It is evident that the Egyptian generals staged a military coup using clever manipulation of language which they knew would be likely to placate critics. The plan was simple: stage a coup, make it appear populist, demonise the Islamists - who the West is at best suspicious of or at worst downright hostile towards, and who the dictators of Arab lands are openly at war with, close down television and radio stations, shut down mosques (because of the fear of Friday gatherings), imprison tens of thousands of members - and non-members - of organisations (despite their popularity), imprison the entire cabinet of the first ever democratically-elected government in Egyptian history - after just one year in power - citing "urgency" (despite having been ruled

by dictators for over fifty years), reintroduce emergency laws and claim legitimacy because as inheritors of an army which almost fought off the Israelis forty years ago (but which has since only ever fought its own people in the Sinai and elsewhere), kill off a few thousand demonstrators - whether they are on the streets, in their homes or on their way to prison and finally, declare "we did it for the sake of democracy".

The result: Egypt hasn't descended into the chaos of Algeria after similar events, but neither have the supporters of Morsi given up their struggle for what they believe is right.

**TMENAR:** How do you interpret the counter-terrorism strategies in the West, the Prevent in the UK for example?

**MB:** The effects of Prevent in the UK have been accepted even by its proponents as an overall failure. I believe the biggest problem with it has been the perception by people from the outset. By nature, when the government is pumping millions into a project where they are looking

for but cannot identify proper experts in the field it will by necessity attract everyone but the experts. Hence, organisations continue to spring-up claiming they are de-radicalising Britain's Muslim youth who would otherwise become suicide-bombers by helping them feel more British, getting higher education, finding a job, receiving counselling, going on outings and meeting with kids from other backgrounds. These may be good initiatives in and of themselves but they do not solve the problem of people wanting to fight abroad or at home.

Notwithstanding the fact that the former is not the same as the latter, Prevent would be better served by simply conducting a survey of those who willingly have pled guilty - because they believed in the cause, not those who were forced into a plea deal - to terrorist acts about why they acted the way they did. Whatever the conclusions of such a survey, they should be made public alongside a government pledge to act no matter how difficult.

Another easy way to prevent radicalisation is by banning newspapers, TV and radio stations, mosques, meetings and the internet, a bit like Egypt.

**TMENAR:** What is best way to respond and counter the threat of terrorism, no matter where it originates from?

**MB:** Dialogue. That was the lesson of the Northern Ireland which most people have forgotten. It is not a silver-bullet but put simply, it is hard to be engaged in fighting each other when you're talking to each other. Demonising the "other" makes little sense, even when you detest them. There is still terrorism in Northern Ireland but there is no populist desire to return to the "Troubles" of the past. Talks with the Taliban have been going on and off for a while. There must be talks with all groups - even the most dangerous. The alternative is more and worse of the same.

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# INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD JACKSON

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Professor Richard Jackson is Deputy Director of the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (NCPACS), Otago, New Zealand. Prior to taking up this position, he was Professor of International Politics at Aberystwyth University in the United Kingdom, and was the Honourable Secretary of the British International Studies Association (BISA) from 2009-2011. He is the founding editor and current editor-in-chief of the journal, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*.

Professor Jackson is the author and editor of eight books and more than fifty journal articles and book chapters. His books include: *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism* (Routledge, 2012; co-edited with Samuel Justin Sinclair); *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counterterrorism* (Manchester University Press, 2005); and his first research-based novel, *Confessions of a Terrorist*, will be published by Zed Books in early 2014.

**The MENA Report:** How do you define the term terrorism?

**Richard Jackson:** At one level, it can be reasonably concluded that the term terrorism is little more than a rhetorical label that actors apply to forms of violence they disapprove of. In other cases, it is the term used to describe any violence at all by actors which they disapprove of. This is certainly how the term is used in the media and in the political arena. In the academic literature, however, terrorism is defined as a form of violence or its threat which is intended as a kind of violent political communication. That is, it is an act of violence designed to send a message to a government, the public or to specific groups of people, such as a particular communal group. In the process, the direct victims of the violence are treated simply as a means to create a psychological effect of intimidation and fear in the watching audience. Importantly, this definition of terrorism

does not restrict the term to one type of actor, but suggests that both governments and non-state groups can use violence as a means of sending a message of intimidation and fear to a target audience. The idea that states can be terrorists too, and that in fact, states have committed much more terrorism over the past century than all the non-state terrorist groups put together, is largely ignored in Western societies.

**TMENAR:** The American government has different definitions for terrorism. Why do you think this is? Could it be an attempt to give its politicians more leeway as a tool to aid its foreign policy?

**RJ:** At one level, the lack of a consensus on the definition of terrorism is directly related to the way it is typically used as a label. What constitutes terrorism is a subjective



judgement, which then leads to the proliferation of different understandings. The truth is that there are different definitions of terrorism both within and between states. In some cases, this results in different agencies and countries having different lists of terrorist groups. There are groups which are banned under terrorism legislation in the United States, but free to operate as ordinary political groups in the United Kingdom. At the same time, I don't believe that politicians have deliberately conspired to keep the definition of terrorism vague and unclear. Rather, I think they have discovered that it is a very powerful and potentially useful term which can be employed to great effect, and therefore, there are advantages to letting it continue as a very loose, floating term that can be applied in different contexts. This attitude intensified after 9/11 when the horror of those attacks created an atmosphere in which terrorists could be demonised and dehumanised, and new draconian laws could be passed. The effect of this was to increase the power and flexibility of lawmakers, particularly when they needed to crush certain forms of opposition or

promote specific projects of national security. In those cases, describing certain groups as a terrorist threat, or arguing that certain measures were necessary in the fight against terrorism, freed their hands and gave them greater room to manoeuvre. Since then, of course, the counter-terrorism approach has been embedded within numerous institutions and procedures. It now exists as a vast, self-perpetuating counter-terrorism industry.

**TMENAR:** In your opinion, has the War on Terror been successful or do you think it exacerbated the threat of terrorism?

**RJ:** The consensus among scholars is that the War on Terror has been a disaster in a multitude of ways. For example, there's no question that it has undermined international law and human rights norms; damaged the reputation of international organisations such as the United Nations; damaged peace-making and peace-building efforts in a great many regions; increased levels of anti-Americanism;



The attack on Iraq which was considered the second front of the War on Terror led to a whole new generation of militants determined to attack the United States in retaliation.

harmed community relations within countries; and securitised aid and development in negative ways.

In my view, it has also greatly exacerbated the threat of terrorism by creating new sources of grievance and conflict. There's no doubt, for example, that the attack on Iraq which was considered the second front of the War on Terror led to a whole new generation of militants determined to attack the United States in retaliation, as did the abuses at Guantanamo Bay and the atrocities committed in Afghanistan. The expansion of the drone killing programme is having a similar effect. I have no doubt that in years to come, terrorists attempting to attack the United States and Europe will cite Afghanistan, Iraq and the drone attacks as their primary motivation. From another perspective, it is simply the case that on 9/11 there was one al-Qaeda group in Afghanistan, while today there a half a dozen different al-Qaeda groups from North Africa to the Middle East. The War on Terror has been nothing short of a self-fulfilling prophesy.

**TMENAR:** Terrorism is as old as history itself. Since antiquity terrorist acts were mainly committed by states against civilian population to entice fear and keep a check on revolt. Why do you think even after what happened in the Second World War, the West and the international community didn't give attention to the act of terrorism itself rather than the perpetrators? (for example, American definitions exclude state acts of terror).

**RJ:** I think it is simply that states have been the main actors setting the definition of terrorism and trying to establish laws which they could use to counter it, and they did not want to tie their own hands or risk having their own actions put under legal scrutiny. In other words, they recognised that as a strategy, terrorism could in fact be useful in some circumstances. Thus, they made sure that all the international definitions and laws excluded their own actions. This means that states and their agents cannot be prosecuted when they commit terrorist acts. In addition, states have always been worried that non-state groups



If you violently attack another person or group, there is always a chance that they will respond in kind.

could challenge their power and their monopoly on the right to wield violence, and they wanted legal and political instruments that would delegitimise any violence except their own. A powerful discourse and set of laws focused solely on non-state actors therefore provides states with a very useful tool for keeping certain groups and individuals under control.

**TMENAR:** Would you say that the lack of a water-tight definition and preventative, punitive measures and the indifference of the international community towards acts of violence by autocratic governments played a major factor in persuading some people into taking the law into their own hands? Or even resorting to terror acts to counter terror campaigns conducted by the state?

**RJ:** There is no doubt in my mind that terrorism by non-state groups is always a response to state violence and oppression, or the lack of opportunity for meaningful political participation. There is no evidence or clear case where someone or some group arose for no other reason

than that they wanted to kill and destroy for its own sake. Terrorism is always a symptom of a deeper political conflict, and always has a set of deep grievances at its root. There is also a growing body of evidence that it is most often a direct response to state violence, usually oppressive, disproportionate state violence. State and non-state violence are two sides of the same coin. This accords with what we know about the dynamics of violence: if you violently attack another person or group, there is always a chance that they will respond in kind. Interestingly, there are well-known studies showing that a rise in anti-American terrorism is directly correlated with US military intervention overseas. In other words, to reduce terrorism, reduce the number of military attacks on other countries or groups.

**TMENAR:** Syria is an avid example of the blurring of definitions relating to terrorism. For the first nine months the regime used every single terror tactic against ordinary civilians. In the absence of international support, some people resorted to terror tactics to counter the regime's unabated terror campaign. Do you agree with this analysis?

**RJ:** There is little question that the harsh, disproportionately violent response of the Syrian government to the largely peaceful protests tempted some elements of the protest movement to take up armed struggle. In other words, a campaign of state-terrorism lead directly to a violent insurgency, some elements of which are now engaging in terrorist acts of their own. This kind of pattern is well-established and explains a great many of the world's well-known terrorist campaigns, including virtually all of the anti-colonial movements of previous decades, as well as many of the left-wing insurgencies in Latin America during the Cold War. More specifically, British violence in Northern Ireland, Spanish violence towards the Basques, South African violence against the ANC, continued Israeli violence against Palestinians, and a great many others, has played a key role in generating anti-state violence. State violence, in the majority of cases, provokes violent resistance from those being targeted.

**TMENAR:** In places like the Gulf and the Middle East in general, state security apparatus use torture and summary

executions as a deterrent to those who either challenge the autocratic regimes or simply follow a different political persuasion. Can we resort to the United Nations to effectively challenge such state tactics as acts of terror? There is the UN Convention against Torture, but that seems to be ineffective.

**RJ:** Unfortunately, as I mentioned, states have defined and legislated terrorism as a form of violence which is exclusive to non-state actors. Existing laws and processes related to terrorism are deliberately designed to exclude their own actions. This means that there is no real way of using the United Nations' own procedures to stop states from engaging in terrorist violence, because the UN is a state-based organisation. However, this does not mean that pressure cannot be brought to bear in other ways and through other types of organisations. However, it requires determined and creative efforts to document and publicise state violence as a means of shaming them into better behaviour. I also believe that human rights groups need to be more adept at using the global media to challenge



Powerful states will not voluntarily give up their power and privileges. At the same time, we must work hard for disarmament and the complete demilitarisation of politics.

states. Related to this, I would argue that a group of scholars needs to develop a major dataset on state terrorism, similar to those that currently exist on non-state terrorism. Once a major public dataset exists which clearly defines and documents acts of state terrorism, it will then be more difficult for states to deny their role in forms of violence which they have outlawed for non-state actors.

**TMENAR:** How do you propose we stop autocratic governments from using the War on Terror for their own ends? For example, Russia was implicated in a long list of human rights violations in Chechnya in the 1990s. But despite all its human rights violations, Russia was allowed to escape unpunished. This was possible through bargaining its implicit approval for the array of comprehensive sanctions and bombing runs conducted against Iraq by the Americans in the 1990s. How do you respond?

**RJ:** The Russian case, as well as China in Tibet and the United States in Iraq, among others, demonstrates the limitations and inequities of the current international order.

As members of the P5, as well as being the most militarily powerful nations in the world, there is no real way to punish or force them into better behaviour through diplomacy and state politics. The current system effectively gives them a free pass. This means that the only real possibility of change will come from below when social movements arise, link up and construct new alternative institutions and processes of political decision-making. In other words, we should look to other individuals, groups and movements for democratic participation, human rights promotion, and the like.

Only when tens of millions of people refuse to accept the *status quo* and take it upon themselves to act differently will the powerful states be forced to change their ways. The fact is that powerful states will not voluntarily give up their power and privileges. At the same time, we must work hard for disarmament and the complete demilitarisation of politics. This is the only way to delegitimise and stop all forms of violence which threaten human dignity and well-being.





PHOTO: GIOVANNI DE CARO

**TMENAR:** There is no doubt that terrorism is driven and fuelled by ideology, nationalism, underdevelopment, failed governments, injustice and crime. These different factors need a multi-faceted strategy to win the battle against terrorism. What measures could be added or enhance the West's strategy of fighting terrorism?

**RJ:** The first thing the West needs to do is to rethink its reliance on force and militarism as the primary method of counter-terrorism. All the evidence we now have is that such methods do not reduce terrorism, and they certainly do not deal with the root causes of violent political conflict. They also need to stop acting in ways which create new sources of grievance and anger. In other words, actions such as closing Guantanamo, ending the rendition programme, stopping the drone attacks, rooting out all torture, limiting the transfer of weapons to oppressive regimes, and refraining from military interventions, both overt and covert, would go some way towards reducing the grievances which drive terrorism. Instead, they need to seriously investigate the political causes of violent conflicts, engage in policy reforms,

revise draconian anti-terror legislation, and open channels of dialogue with groups they are currently in conflict with. The evidence we have is that there are no military solutions to terrorism, and that dialogue leads to a long-term reduction in terrorist violence.

A final key issue involves making a serious attempt to pressure Israel into genuine peace negotiations for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state – instead of continuing military and political support while land confiscations and colonisation continues. The West's support for Israeli annexation of Palestinian territory is one of the major drivers of anti-Western terrorism.

**TMENAR:** Dictatorships and military governments often label opposition forces as “terrorists” and “extremists” to justify their grip on power and stifle democracy. What do you make of the case in Egypt, of the military rule that forcefully removed the country's first-ever elected president?

**RJ:** The revolution in Egypt was only ever partial, and the

influence of the military was always going to be negative for democratic consolidation. While the Morsi government made its own mistakes and often acted in harsh ways, the solution was not to overthrow the elected government in a coup and then brutally suppress Morsi's followers. The great danger of such an approach is that, as occurred in Algeria in 1992, the Islamists will be tempted to give up on democracy and try and take back power through armed struggle. In other words, the state terror of the military government in Egypt may lead to a major terrorist campaign by the Islamist opposition. In Algeria, this led to more than a decade of terrible suffering in which hundreds of thousands of innocent people died in acts of both state and non-state terrorism. I hope that the West is currently using all its power and influence to make the military government in Egypt negotiate a political solution with the opposition.

**TMENAR:** How do you interpret the counter-terrorism strategies in the West, the Prevent in the UK for example?

**RJ:** Western counter-terrorism strategies are based on the belief that terrorism can be fought with good intelligence and the use of force overseas, and with prevention and surveillance at home. In both cases, Western states believe that they can contain the terrorist threat without making any major changes to their foreign policy. For example, in terms of Prevent, the UK believes that it can convince extremists at home to refrain from using violence in pursuit of its political aims, even while it employs violence as a core policy instrument overseas. Western counter-terrorism is part of a broader security posture which believes that global threats, including those emanating from climate change, global inequality, arms proliferation, and the like, can be contained and controlled without fundamental revisions to the international order. However, it is doubtful that any actor can simply keep a lid on these kinds of growing threats. The only way to ensure a more peaceful and secure world is to deal with the roots of these problems and find collective solutions based on social justice, genuine cooperation and partnership, and non-violent politics.



Terrorism, as with other forms of organised political violence, is always rooted in some form of historical injustice and sense of grievance.

**TMENAR:** What is the best way to respond and counter the threat of terrorism, no matter where it originates from?

**RJ:** Terrorism, as with other forms of organised political violence, is always rooted in some form of historical injustice and sense of grievance. The only way to remove the deeper motivations for terrorism is to deal with the causes of the political conflict and sense of grievance. This involves meaningful political participation and reform of political systems. It is a long-term solution, and it ought to be the goal of every government that faces a terrorist threat. At the same time, while dealing with the immediate insecurity posed by terrorist attacks, governments should adhere to three key principles in responding, namely: proportion, legitimacy and effectiveness. That is, *first*, they should respond in ways that are proportionate to the actual threat. Deploying tanks at airports, torturing thousands of prisoners and mass surveillance are not proportionate to the present terrorist threat. *Second*, they should ensure that all their actions are legitimate and do not violate legal and normative standards of behaviour.

Clearly, torture, rendition, extra-legal killing and invasive surveillance undermine the legitimacy of the West's counter-terrorism efforts. *Finally*, governments should only employ counter-terrorism measures which are known to be effective, and which will reduce rather than increase the terrorist threat. The War on Terror has been both ineffective and counter-productive to date. This is not surprising because we know that force-based forms of counter-terrorism are not effective in reducing terrorism in the medium to long-term.

In short, responding to terrorism in ways which will substantially reduce it instead of simply reinforcing the cycle of violence requires resisting the impulse to automatically respond to each terrorist attack with even greater violence.



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