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**Report on Working Group 4  
Terrorism**

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**Abstract**

*Terrorism is not a new phenomenon, but what is new today is its scope and magnitude. Whilst acknowledging that terrorism does not exist in a vacuum; the simplistic notion that poverty leads to terrorism must be rejected. At best poverty is a facilitating condition not a necessary one. There can be no justification for the taking of innocent life! Today's terrorists do not only have traditional small arms and explosives in their arsenals but the potential to access nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. In responding to terrorism, the centrality of the United Nations must be stressed as must the legal as opposed to military approaches. This would entail the strengthening of international legal instruments such as the International Criminal Court as well as the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. In responding to terrorism a fine line should be maintained between the need for security and the encroachment of civil liberties. Responding to terrorism should not only be the preserve of governments and inter-governmental bodies. Indeed members of civil society have a social responsibility to join in this global scourge.*

**Introduction**

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon but what is new today is the scope and magnitude of this global scourge. This report is divided into four sections. In the first section we look at definitions. In the second, the origins of terrorism are explored. Third, the scope and magnitude of terrorism is analyzed and finally we turn to responses to terrorism.

**On Definitions**

Two of the most interesting definitions to emerge on terrorism are the following:

- (1) "Terrorists are people who think their ideas are more important than other peoples' lives"; and
- (2) "Terrorism is the deliberate targeting of civilians with a view to kill and to intimidate".

What is interesting about the latter definition is that it makes no distinction between terrorist acts committed by states from those committed by non-state actors.

The need for a precise definition of terrorism does not only stem from the fact that there are more than 200 definitions of terrorism but that various governments have opportunistically sought to label legitimate political opponents in an effort to narrow the political space.

The need for greater precision in our terminology also extends to the term "weapons of mass destruction" or WMD. This stems from the fact that the term places in the same category - chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons. This is inappropriate and misleading bearing in mind that nuclear weapons are many orders of magnitude more powerful, and hence more damaging than the other three and its characteristics and ease of manufacture are completely different. As the choice of words we use shape responses, it is imperative that we are as precise as possible with the words we so loosely use.

## **On the Origins of Terrorism**

Terrorism stems at individual and group levels. At the individual level, the Oklahoma bombing committed by Timothy McVeigh springs to mind. Given the random nature of such acts they are far more difficult to control. At the level of groups; one has leaders of racial, ethnic, religious or national groups mobilizing followers to commit terrorist acts on the basis of a commonly perceived grievance or wrong.

Whilst acknowledging that terrorism does not exist in a vacuum, the simplistic notion that poverty leads to terrorism must be rejected. Under no circumstances can a Mohamed Atta, the leader of the 9/11 hijackers or Osama bin Laden, leader of the Al-Qaeda network be regarded as poor. At best, poverty can be a facilitating condition, not a necessary one. In similar vein, the pro-Israeli policies pursued by the US as well as its support to autocratic Arab regimes was similarly jettisoned. In the final instance, there can be no justification for the taking of innocent life!

But, the origins of this current wave of terrorism are also intimately related to opportunity. Indeed, Al-Qaeda owes its emergence to the decision by the US government to organize a Great Jihad against Soviet forces in Afghanistan in 1979. The CIA actively recruited radical Muslims from Algeria, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and further afield to fight the holy cause as mujahedeen. Saudi Arabian money and support from Pakistani intelligence services also came to support US objectives in Afghanistan. Washington actively supported the development of a militant Islam and provided advanced military training to such mujahedeen as Osama bin Laden. By 1988, the USSR withdrew but the terror camps remained until 2001. By that time, 70,000 terror graduates from fifty countries emerged from its camps and formed the basis of today's Al-Qaeda network.

This is clearly a lesson of where long-term stability and security is sacrificed by short-term strategic considerations. Neither were Washington's policy-makers alone in this folly. The Indonesian government also encouraged Islamic radicalism as a bulwark against communism and in Algeria militant Islam was mobilized in the national independence struggle against the French. Having given birth to Frankenstein monsters, both countries now find they cannot control these forces as the 100,000 dead Algerians will testify to in the vicious battle between Algiers and Islamic militants.

Opportunity, however, does not only arise from the changing geo-strategic nature of world politics but also from new weapons and communication technology. The fact that terrorists have in their possession iridium satellite phones eases communication as does the growing

interconnectedness of the world economy where millions of dollars can be transferred by the press of a button.

The growing relationship between terrorist networks and organized crime syndicates is also cause for concern.

## **The Scope and Magnitude of Terrorism Today**

Terrorism today takes the form of global networks functioning at local, national, regional and international levels. Responses therefore have to occur at all these levels if one wants to effectively deal with this scourge.

It is quite interesting that the continent which is most plagued by terrorism - Latin America - does not feature on the 'war on terrorism'. Pugwash must seek to give the terrorism plaguing Latin America greater visibility in the media and amongst policy-makers.

Terrorists are opportunistic and seek to achieve their objectives by any and all means available. In this respect, the five million illegal firearms circulating among the MERCOSUR states of South America is a cause for concern as is the highly enriched uranium stockpiles in the former Soviet Union, which is enough to produce 20,000 nuclear devices. If such HEU falls into the hands of terrorists via say organized crime syndicates, it would be relatively easy to gather the rest of the components and build a crude non-transportable nuclear device in the city to be destroyed. Possibilities also exist of chemical weapon technology passing into the hands of terrorists since most reasonably developed states possess crude chemical weapon technology. The sarin gas attack in a Tokyo subway by the apocalyptic sect, Aum Shinrikyo, is a case in point.

One should also not under-estimate the power of biological weapons. Ten milligrams (or one fiftieth the weight of a paper clip) of botulinal toxin could in principle kill 25,000 people.

The possibility that terrorist could target a nuclear power plant for attack is also not beyond the bounds of possibility. As such the probabilities for terrorist attacks to occur should form an integral part of studies that investigate the potential future of nuclear energy production. In particular, its vulnerability to terrorist attack should be part of programs intended to design innovative reactor types, in which passive safety features play an important role, and options such as the construction of nuclear power plants underground should perhaps be revisited. The construction of rod-or cage-like structures around nuclear facilities to protect against in-flying airplanes as well as the installation of short-range air-defence systems should also be considered.

## **Responding to Terrorism**

Earlier mention was made of how words contribute to mind-sets that shape policies. This point needs repetition in our attempt to understand responses to terrorism. Why a 'war' on terror? This suggests the primacy of the military approach to dealing with terrorists. This military-led approach has also seen military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq where the chief protagonists, Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein and sons in Iraq, have disappeared. This military-led approach has also seen large numbers of Taliban and Baathists leaving their positions in the face of the US military juggernaut and fading into the local population. This military approach has also seen organized attacks by

these elements against government authorities and US soldiers in these countries. In Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai is referred to as the "Mayor of Kabul" on the basis that his writ does not extend beyond the capital. Others believe even this is charitable given the assassination of members of his own cabinet and attempts on his life within the city limits of Afghanistan! Moreover, the resumption of heroin production in Afghanistan and their export to Western Europe and the US should also be viewed as a source of concern. In Iraq, the killing on average of one American soldier a day since the fall of the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein also shows up the limitations of a military-led campaign on terrorism. Indeed, the invasion and occupation of foreign territory in dealing with the threat posed by a global terror network is itself a questionable military strategy. As the most recent attacks in Riyadh and Casablanca demonstrate Al-Qaeda retains its military capabilities and global reach.

Is there an alternative? We believe that there is. Stressing a 'crimes against humanity' approach is a possible alternative. This would stress strengthening influential legal instruments like the International Criminal Court as well as the structures of the UN system. Such an approach would not mean the abandonment of the military approach but rather that the military exists to enforce legal decisions.

But should we stress this legal approach then we need to take stock of certain shortcomings in the legal anti-terror regime. For instance, both the Chemical Weapons Convention and Biological Weapons Convention is designed to counter atrocities committed by states and does not really make provision for terrorism committed by non-state actors. This would need to be rectified. Given the multidimensional nature of the terrorist threat posed, strengthening the legal anti-terror regime means not only strengthening it at international level but also at regional level such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU).

Responses would also need to reduce the opportunities available to terrorists. In the light of this, the amount of fissile materials from weapons and other sources that are held in poorly guarded sites all over the former Soviet Union and the related possibility of theft remains a grave threat to world security. Under these circumstances, should we consider a revitalized Nunn-Lugar initiative to buy these materials?

Responding to terrorism however is not only the preserve of governments and inter-governmental bodies; civil society also has a duty to play a key role. Here the important work of organizations like the Bioweapons Prevention Project which aims to strengthen the norms against using disease as a weapon needs to be supported.

Over the past three decades we have been experiencing a revolution in biotechnology that are having great impacts on domains as diverse as medicine and food security. However, the techniques used to improve health or to protect people from the worst consequences of biological warfare can also be applied to create a new generation of biological weapons. Because of the dual-use aspect of biotechnologies, the prohibition of any type of biological research is not feasible. Instead, the close monitoring of developments in technology can serve as an early warning of activities that could prove dangerous. Also it is imperative to educate students on relevant weapon control regimes in carrying out research.

The desire to prevent sensitive information from getting into the wrong hands is understandable and wise. However there are some who wish to take this further with

measures, which may encroach on civil liberties. In January 2003 in the US, for instance, a group of journal editors and authors discussed strategies to enhance security. One of these strategies read as follows: "*We recognize that on occasions an editor may conclude that the potential harm of publication outweighs the potential societal benefits. Under such circumstances, the paper should be modified, or not published*". Meanwhile, the editorial comment of Physics and Society of January 2003 states, "... *since good science, often underlines national advantages conducive to security, it is occasionally vital to live with effective secrecy in order to enhance security*".

In this charged atmosphere there is also talk of boycott of scientific colleagues and research laboratories being closed to foreign students. Under these circumstances, we must ask who determines which publication may be published or not or which parts to excise before publication? Who determines which scientific colleagues do we interact with and what is the criteria on which these judgments are to be made? This is something that needs the direct intervention of the scientific community such as that contained in Pugwash.