

Who are the Global Terrorists?

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After the atrocities of 11 September, the victim declared a "war on terrorism," targeting not just the suspected perpetrators, but the country in which they were located, and others charged with terrorism worldwide. President Bush pledged to "rid the world of evildoers" and "not let evil stand," echoing Ronald Reagan's denunciation of the "evil scourge of terrorism" in 1985 -- specifically, state-supported international terrorism, which had been declared to be the core issue of US foreign policy as his administration came into office. NOTE{*New York Times*, Oct. 18, 1985.} The focal points of the first war on terror were the Middle East and Central America, where Honduras was the major base for US operations. The military component of the re-declared war is led by Donald Rumsfeld, who served as Reagan's special representative to the Middle East; the diplomatic efforts at the UN by John Negroponte, Reagan's Ambassador to Honduras. Planning is largely in the hands of other leading figures of the Reagan-Bush (I) administrations.

The condemnations of terrorism are sound, but leave some questions unanswered. The first is: What do we mean by "terrorism"? Second: What is the proper response to the crime? Whatever the answer, it must at least satisfy a moral truism: If we propose some principle that is to be applied to antagonists, then we must agree -- in fact, strenuously insist -- that the principle apply to us as well. Those who do not rise even to this minimal level of integrity plainly cannot be taken seriously when they speak of right and wrong, good and evil.

The problem of definition is held to be vexing and complex. There are, however, proposals that seem straightforward, for example, in US Army manuals, which define terrorism as "the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature...through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear." NOTE{*US Army Operational Concept for Terrorism Counteraction* (TRADOC Pamphlet No. 525-37), 1984.} That definition carries additional authority because of the timing: it was offered as the Reagan administration was intensifying its war on terrorism. The world has changed little enough so that these recent precedents should be instructive, even apart from the continuity of leadership from the first war on terrorism to its recent reincarnation.

The first war received strong endorsement. The UN General Assembly condemned international terrorism two months after Reagan's denunciation, again in much stronger and more explicit terms in 1987. NOTE{GA Res. 40/61, 9 Dec. 1985; Res. 42/159, 7 Dec. 1987.} Support was not unanimous, however. The 1987 resolution passed 153-2, Honduras abstaining. Explaining their negative vote, the US and Israel identified the fatal flaw: the statement that "nothing in the present resolution could in any way prejudice the right to self-determination, freedom, and independence, as derived from the Charter of the United Nations, of people forcibly deprived of that right..., particularly peoples under colonial and racist regimes and foreign occupation..." That was understood to apply to the struggle of the African National Congress against the Apartheid regime of South Africa (a US ally, while the ANC was officially labelled a "terrorist organization"); and to the Israeli military occupation, then in its 20th year, sustained by US military and diplomatic support in virtual international isolation. Presumably because of US opposition, the UN resolution against terrorism was ignored. NOTE{See my *Necessary Illusions* (Boston: South End, 1989), chap. 4; my essay in Alex George, ed., *Western State Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity/Blackwell, 1991).}

Reagan's 1985 condemnation referred specifically to terrorism in the Middle East, selected as the lead story of 1985 in an AP poll. But for Secretary of State George Shultz, the administration moderate, the most "alarming" manifestation of "state-sponsored terrorism," a plague spread by

"depraved opponents of civilization itself" in "a return to barbarism in the modern age," was frighteningly close to home. There is "a cancer, right here in our land mass," Shultz informed Congress, threatening to conquer the hemisphere in a "revolution without borders," a interesting fabrication exposed at once but regularly reiterated with appropriate shudders. NOTE{Shultz, "Terrorism: The Challenge to the Democracies," June 24, 1984 (State Dept. Current Policy No. 589); "Terrorism and the Modern World," Oct. 25, 1984 (State Department Current Policy No. 629). Shultz's congressional testimony, 1986, 1983, the former part of a major campaign to gain more funding for the contras; see Jack Spence and Eldon Kenworthy in Thomas Walker, ed., Reagan versus the Sandinistas (Boulder, London: Westview, 1987).}

So severe was the threat that on Law Day (1 May) 1985, the President announced an embargo "in response to the emergency situation created by the Nicaraguan Government's aggressive activities in Central America." He also declared a national emergency, renewed annually, because "the policies and actions of the Government of Nicaragua constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."

"The terrorists -- and the other states that aid and abet them -- serve as grim reminders that democracy is fragile and needs to be guarded with vigilance," Shultz warned. We must "cut [the Nicaraguan cancer] out," and not by gentle means: "Negotiations are a euphemism for capitulation if the shadow of power is not cast across the bargaining table," Shultz declared, condemning those who advocate "utopian, legalistic means like outside mediation, the United Nations, and the World Court, while ignoring the power element of the equation." The US was exercising "the power element of the equation" with mercenary forces based in Honduras, under Negroponte's supervision, and successfully blocking the "utopian, legalistic means" pursued by the World Court and the Latin American Contadora nations -- as Washington continued to do until its terrorist wars were won. NOTE{Shultz, "Moral Principles and Strategic Interests," April 14, 1986 (State Department, Current Policy No. 820).}

Reagan's condemnation of the "evil scourge" was issued at a meeting in Washington with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who arrived to join in the call to extirpate the evil shortly after he had sent his bombers to attack Tunis, killing 75 people with smart bombs that tore them to shreds among other atrocities recorded by the prominent Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk on the scene. Washington cooperated by failing to warn its ally Tunisia that the bombers were on the way. Shultz informed Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir that Washington "had considerable sympathy for the Israeli action," but drew back when the Security Council unanimously denounced the bombing as an "act of armed aggression" (US abstaining).NOTE{ NYT_, Oct. 17, 18; Kapeliouk, Yediot Ahronot, Nov. 15, 1985. Foreknowledge, Los Angeles Times, Oct. 3; Geoffrey Jansen, Middle East International, Oct 11, 1985. Bernard Gwertzman, NYT, Oct. 2, 7, 1985.}

A second candidate for most extreme act of Mideast international terrorism in the peak year of 1985 is a car-bombing in Beirut on March 8 that killed 80 people and wounded 256. The bomb was placed outside a Mosque, timed to explode when worshippers left. "About 250 girls and women in flowing black chadors, pouring out of Friday prayers at the Imam Rida Mosque, took the brunt of the blast," Nora Boustany reported. The bomb also "burned babies in their beds," killed children "as they walked home from the mosque," and "devastated the main street of the densely populated" West Beirut suburb. The target was a Shi'ite leader accused of complicity in terrorism, but he escaped. The crime was organized by the CIA and its Saudi clients with the assistance of British intelligence. NOTE{Boustany, Washington Post Weekly, March 14, 1988; Bob Woodward, Veil (Simon & Schuster, 1987, 396f.).}

The only other competitor for the prize is the "Iron Fist" operations that Peres directed in March in occupied Lebanon, reaching new depths of "calculated brutality and arbitrary murder," a Western diplomat familiar with the area observed, as Israel Defense Forces (IDF) shelled villages, carted off the male population, killed dozens of villagers in addition to many massacred by the IDF's paramilitary associates, shelled hospitals and took patients away for "interrogation," along with

numerous other atrocities. NOTE{Guardian, March 6, 1985. For details and sources, see my "Middle East Terrorism and the American Ideological System," in Pirates and Emperors (New York: Claremont 1986; Montreal: Black Rose, 1988), reprinted in Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens, eds., Blaming the Victims (London: Verso, 1988).} The IDF high command described the targets as "terrorist villagers." The operations against them must continue, the military correspondent of the Jerusalem Post (Hirsh Goodman) added, because the IDF must "maintain order and security" in occupied Lebanon despite "the price the inhabitants will have to pay."

Like Israel's invasion of Lebanon 3 years earlier, leaving some 18,000 killed, these actions and others in Lebanon were not undertaken in self-defense but rather for political ends, as recognized at once in Israel. The same was true, almost entirely, of those that followed, up to Peres's murderous invasion of 1996. But all relied crucially on US military and diplomatic support. Accordingly, they too do not enter the annals of international terrorism.

In brief, there was nothing odd about the proclamations of the leading co-conspirators in Mideast international terrorism, which therefore passed without comment at the peak moment of horror at the "return to barbarism."

The well-remembered prize-winner for 1985 is the hijacking of the Achille Lauro and brutal murder of a passenger, Leon Klinghoffer, doubtless a vile terrorist act, and surely not justified by the claim that it was in retaliation for the far worse Tunis atrocities and a pre-emptive effort to deter others. Adopting moral truisms, the same holds of our own acts of retaliation or pre-emption.

Evidently, we have to qualify the definition of "terrorism" given in official sources: the term applies only to terrorism against us, not the terrorism we carry out against them. The practice is conventional, even among the most extreme mass murderers: the Nazis were protecting the population from terrorist partisans directed from abroad, while the Japanese were laboring selflessly to create an "earthly paradise" as they fought off the "Chinese bandits" terrorizing the peaceful people of Manchuria and their legitimate government. Exceptions would be hard to find.

The same convention applies to the war to exterminate the Nicaraguan cancer. On Law Day 1984, President Reagan proclaimed that without law there can be only "chaos and disorder." The day before, he had announced that the US would disregard the proceedings of the International Court of Justice, which went on to condemn his administration for its "unlawful use of force," ordering it to terminate these international terrorist crimes and pay substantial reparations to Nicaragua (June 1986). The Court decision was dismissed with contempt, as was a subsequent Security Council resolution calling on all states to observe international law (vetoed by the US) and repeated General Assembly resolutions (US and Israel opposed, in one case joined by El Salvador).

As the Court decision was announced, Congress substantially increased funding for the mercenary forces engaged in "the unlawful use of force." Shortly after, the US command directed them to attack "soft targets" -- undefended civilian targets -- and to avoid combat with the Nicaraguan army, as they could do, thanks to US control of the skies and the sophisticated communication equipment provided to the terrorist forces. The tactic was considered reasonable by prominent commentators as long as it satisfied "the test of cost-benefit analysis," an analysis of "the amount of blood and misery that will be poured in, and the likelihood that democracy will emerge at the other end" -- "democracy" as Western elites understand the term, an interpretation illustrated graphically in the region. NOTE{For details, see my Culture of Terrorism (Boston: South End, 1988), 77f.}

State Department Legal Advisor Abraham Sofaer explained why the US was entitled to reject ICJ jurisdiction. In earlier years, most members of the UN "were aligned with the United States and shared its views regarding world order." But since decolonization a "majority often opposes the

United States on important international questions." Accordingly, we must "reserve to ourselves the power to determine" how we will act and which matters fall "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of the United States, as determined by the United States" -- in this case, the terrorist acts against Nicaragua condemned by the Court and the Security Council. For similar reasons, since the 1960s the US has been far in the lead in vetoing Security Council resolutions on a wide range of issues, Britain second, France a distant third. NOTE{Sofaer, _The United States and the World Court_ (State Dept. Current Policy 769), Dec. 1985.}

Washington waged its "war on terrorism" by creating an international terror network of unprecedented scale, and employing it worldwide, with lethal and long-lasting effects. In Central America, terror guided and supported by the US reached its most extreme levels in countries where the state security forces themselves were the immediate agents of international terrorism. The effects were reviewed in a 1994 conference organized by Salvadoran Jesuits, whose experiences had been particularly gruesome. NOTE{Juan Hernandez Pico, _Envjo_ (Universidad Centroamericana, Managua), March 1994.} The conference report takes particular note of the effects of the residual "culture of terror...in domesticating the expectations of the majority vis-a-vis alternatives different to those of the powerful," an important observation on the efficacy of state terror that generalizes broadly. In Latin America, the 11 September atrocities were harshly condemned, but commonly with the observation that they are nothing new. They may be described as "Armageddon," the research journal of the Jesuit university in Managua observed, but Nicaragua has "lived its own Armageddon in excruciating slow motion" under US assault "and is now submerged in its dismal aftermath," and others fared far worse under the vast plague of state terror that swept through the continent from the early 1960s, much of it traceable to Washington. NOTE{ _Envjo_ , Oct. 2001. For a judicious review of the aftermath, see Thomas Walker and Ariel Armony, eds., _Repression, Resistance, and Democratic Transition in Central America_ (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000).}

It is hardly surprising that Washington's call for support in its war of revenge for 11 Sept. had little resonance in Latin America. An international Gallup poll found that support for military force rather than extradition ranged from 2% (Mexico) to 11% (Venezuela and Colombia). Condemnations of the 11 Sept. terror were regularly accompanied by recollections of their own suffering, for example, the death of perhaps thousands of poor people (Western crimes, therefore unexamined) when George Bush I bombed the barrio Chorillo in Panama in December 1989 in Operation Just Cause, undertaken to kidnap a disobedient thug who was sentenced to life imprisonment in Florida for crimes mostly committed while he was on the CIA payroll. NOTE{ _Envjo_ , Oct. 2001; Panamanian journalist Ricardo Stevens, NACLA _Report on the Americas_ , Nov/Dec 2001.}

The record continues to the present without essential change, apart from modification of pretexts and tactics. The list of leading recipients of US arms yields ample evidence, familiar to those acquainted with international human rights reports.

It therefore comes as no surprise that President Bush informed Afghans that bombing will continue until they hand over people the US suspects of terrorism (rebuffing requests for evidence and tentative offers of negotiation). Or, when new war aims were added after three weeks of bombing, that Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, chief of the British Defense Staff, warned Afghans that US-UK attacks will continue "until the people of the country themselves recognize that this is going to go on until they get the leadership changed." NOTE {Patrick Tyler and Elisabeth Bumiller, _NYT_ , Oct. 12; Michael Gordon, _NYT_ , Oct. 28, 2001; both p. 1.} In other words, the US and UK will persist in "the calculated use of violence to attain goals that are political... in nature...": international terrorism in the technical sense, but excluded from the canon by the standard convention. The rationale is essentially that of the US-Israel international terrorist operations in Lebanon. Admiral Boyce is virtually repeating the words of the eminent Israeli statesman Abba Eban, as Reagan declared the first war on terrorism. Replying to Prime Minister Menachem Begin's account of atrocities in Lebanon committed under the Labor government in the style "of regimes which neither Mr. Begin nor I would dare to mention by name," Eban

acknowledged the accuracy of the account, but added the standard justification: "there was a rational prospect, ultimately fulfilled, that affected populations would exert pressure for the cessation of hostilities." NOTE{Jerusalem Post, Aug. 16, 1981.}

These concepts are conventional, as is the resort to terrorism when deemed appropriate. Furthermore, its success is openly celebrated. The devastation caused by US terror operations in Nicaragua was described quite frankly, leaving Americans "United in Joy" at their successful outcome, the press proclaimed. The massacre of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians in 1965, mostly landless peasants, was greeted with unconstrained euphoria, along with praise for Washington for concealing its own critical role, which might have embarrassed the "Indonesian moderates" who had cleansed their society in a "staggering mass slaughter" (New York Times) that the CIA compared to the crimes of Stalin, Hitler, and Mao. NOTE{For extensive review, see my Necessary Illusions and Deterring Democracy (London: Verso, 1991) (Nicaragua); Year 501 (Boston: South End, 1993) (Indonesia).} There are many other examples. One might wonder why Osama bin Laden's disgraceful exultation over the atrocities of 11 Sept. occasioned indignant surprise. But that would be an error, based on failure to distinguish their terror, which is evil, from ours, which is noble, the operative principle throughout history.

If we keep to official definitions, it is a serious error to describe terrorism as the weapon of the weak. Like most weapons, it is wielded to far greater effect by the strong. But then it is not terror; rather, "counterterror," or "low intensity warfare," or "self-defense"; and if successful, "rational" and "pragmatic," and an occasion to be "united in joy."

Let us turn to the question of proper response to the crime, bearing in mind the governing moral truism. If, for example, Admiral Boyce's dictum is legitimate, then victims of Western state terrorism are entitled to act accordingly. That conclusion is, properly, regarded as outrageous. Therefore the principle is outrageous when applied to official enemies, even more so when we recognize that the actions were undertaken with the expectation that they would place huge numbers of people at grave risk. No knowledgeable authority seriously questioned the UN estimate that "7.5 million Afghans will need food over the winter -- 2.5 million more than on Sept. 11," NOTE{Elisabeth Bumiller and Elizabeth Becker, NYT, Oct. 17, 2001.} a 50% increase as a result of the threat of bombing, then the actuality, with a toll that will never be investigated if history is any guide.

A different proposal, put forth by the Vatican among others, was spelled out by military historian Michael Howard: "a police operation conducted under the auspices of the United Nations...against a criminal conspiracy whose members should be hunted down and brought before an international court, where they would receive a fair trial and, if found guilty, be awarded an appropriate sentence." NOTE{Foreign Affairs, Jan/Feb 2002; talk of Oct. 30. See Tania Branigan, Guardian, Oct. 31, 2001.} Though never contemplated, the proposal seems reasonable. If so, then it would be reasonable if applied to Western state terrorism, something that could also never be contemplated, though for opposite reasons.

The war in Afghanistan has commonly been described as a "just war," indeed evidently so. There have been some attempts to frame a concept of "just war" that might support the judgment. We may therefore ask how these proposals fare when evaluated in terms of the same moral truism. I have yet to see one that does not instantly collapse: application of the proposed concept to Western state terrorism would be considered unthinkable, if not despicable. For example, we might ask how the proposals would apply to the one case that is uncontroversial in the light of the judgments of the highest international authorities, Washington's war against Nicaragua; uncontroversial, that is, among those who have some commitment to international law and treaty obligations. It is an instructive experiment.

Similar questions arise in connection with other aspects of the wars on terrorism. There has been debate over whether the US-UK war in Afghanistan was authorized by ambiguous Security Council resolutions, but it is beside the point. The US surely could have obtained clear and

unambiguous authorization, not for attractive reasons (consider why Russia and China eagerly joined the coalition, hardly obscure). But that course was rejected, presumably because it would suggest that there is some higher authority to which the US should defer, a condition that a state with overwhelming power is not likely to accept. There is even a name for that stance in the literature of diplomacy and international relations: establishing "credibility," a standard official justification for the resort to violence, the bombing of Serbia, to mention a recent example. The refusal to consider negotiated transfer of the suspected perpetrators presumably had the same grounds.

The moral truism applies to such matters as well. The US refuses to extradite terrorists even when their guilt has been well established. One current case involves Emmanuel Constant, the leader of the Haitian paramilitary forces that were responsible for thousands of brutal killings in the early 1990s under the military junta, which Washington officially opposed but tacitly supported, publicly undermining the OAS embargo and secretly authorizing oil shipments. Constant was sentenced in absentia by a Haitian court. The elected government has repeatedly called on the US to extradite him, again on September 30, 2001, while Taliban initiatives to negotiate transfer of bin Laden were being dismissed with contempt. Haiti's request was again ignored, probably because of concerns about what Constant might reveal about ties to the US government during the period of the terror. Do we therefore conclude that Haiti has the right to use force to compel his extradition, following as best it can Washington's model in Afghanistan? The very idea is outrageous, yielding another prima facie violation of the moral truism.

It is all too easy to add illustrations. NOTE{For a sample, see George, *op. cit.*. Exceptions are rare, and the reactions they elicit are not without interest.} Consider Cuba, probably the main target of international terrorism since 1959, remarkable in scale and character, some of it exposed in declassified documents on Kennedy's Operation Mongoose and continuing to the late 1990s. Cold War pretexts were ritually offered as long as that was possible, but internally the story was the one commonly unearthed on inquiry. It was recounted in secret by Arthur Schlesinger, reporting the conclusions of JFK's Latin American mission to the incoming President: the Cuban threat is "the spread of the Castro idea of taking matters into one's own hands," which might stimulate the "poor and underprivileged" in other countries, who "are now demanding opportunities for a decent living" -- the "virus" or "rotten apple" effect, as it is called in high places. The Cold War connection was that "the Soviet Union hovers in the wings, flourishing large development loans and presenting itself as the model for achieving modernization in a single generation." NOTE{FRUS, 1961-63, vol. XII, American Republics, 13f., 33.}

True, these exploits of international terrorism -- which were quite serious -- are excluded by the standard convention. But suppose we keep to the official definition. In accord with the theories of "just war" and proper response, how has Cuba been entitled to react?

It is fair enough to denounce international terrorism as a plague spread by "depraved opponents of civilization itself." The commitment to "drive the evil from the world" can even be taken seriously, if it satisfies moral truisms -- not, it would seem, an entirely unreasonable thought.