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Why 9/11?

The Root Causes of International Terrorism

**Preventing Violent Protest Behaviour.
An Arab region perspective; A role for Europe?**

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Brussels, 20 November 2003

This article starts from a concept of development, or human progress, that goes beyond traditional concepts of 'economic' development or even 'human resources development'. In this concept, human welfare is not limited to satisfaction of basic needs or having a decent income. Human welfare as defined by 'human development' is predicated on the premise that having access to knowledge throughout life and enjoyment of freedom, beauty, peace security, and human dignity are no less important than material and economic standards for development.

It is taken for granted in some discussions of terrorism from an American-western perspective that terrorism is closely associated with Arabs and Moslems, or with Arab culture and Islam. I find this notion, simplistic and naive. I also submit it is incorrect. Terrorism, in fact, has had many faces and national origins throughout history, definitely not all of them Arab. And if religion has sometimes been instrumentalised to justify terrorist activities, this surely has not been limited to Islam. Nevertheless, this naive stereotype has gained currency because of the ideological orientation of the so-called 'war on terrorism' waged by the present American administration. As a result, this labelling of Arabs and Moslems as terrorists as much as it is wrong, is motivated by sinister political purpose, which should disqualify it in any serious intellectual discourse.

In fact the term 'terrorism' itself has come to carry a value judgement and, in these days, is loaded with political purpose that is not always benign. Hence I choose to avoid it.

I believe that deprivation and injustice done by political arrangements on the national, regional, and perhaps most importantly on the global level, *in the absence of effective political machinery to address injustice and deprivation*, offers a more robust explanation of violent protest behaviour.

Most of the time, discussions of terrorism focus on acts by informal dissident groups. In my view, however, state terrorism, i.e. terrorism at the hand of the state, represents a more important threat to peace, security and prosperity throughout the world. A variant of state terrorism, super power terrorism, has become especially dangerous in the Arab region. The two prominent examples have been, first the unconditional support accorded to Israel in the Arab-Zionist conflict by the West, led by the USA, in flagrant violation of the ideals of human rights espoused by the West. Sometimes

even when Israel committed serious violations of the international humanitarian law, i.e. war crimes in the Palestinian occupied territories. The second prominent example is the invasion and occupation of Iraq by a coalition led by the USA composed, again, of a dismal group of European and, shame of shames, Arab states, in the face of overwhelming popular opposition even in the coalition countries, and recently in spite of fierce resistance to the occupation in Iraq itself. Since Arab countries have suffered from these two varieties of terrorism to a great extent, I propose that these two varieties be accorded due importance in the treatment of terrorism from an Arab perspective.

I submit that building good governance regimes on the national, and perhaps more importantly on the global level, would in my opinion represent the essential ingredient in combating effectively violent protest behaviour since such a regime would help eradicate the breeding grounds of 'terrorism' by opening up the currently unavailable or constrained channels for addressing deprivation and injustice effectively at the national and global level. By comparison, security-based responses to terrorism are non-solutions.

By a good governance regime, I mean a system that is fully representative (inclusive) of the person at large that is rigorously institutional. The institutional requirement is institutions that function effectively, transparently and that are accountable, to each other and to the people at large. The system must be based on the strict rule of law; law that protects freedom and is upheld by a strictly independent and efficient judiciary.

An Assessment

Arab citizens suffer intolerable injustices/deprivations brought about by bad governance at the national, regional and global level. In the absence of *effective* peaceful channels for the lifting of injustice, people are cornered into violent expressions of dissent. Unless some serious governance reform takes place, at the three levels mentioned, sooner rather than later, this violent expression of dissent is bound to become the primary shaper of the Arab future.

The main thesis of this article is that individuals, and groups, resort to violent behaviour as an act of **desperation**, under two conditions:

1. They feel a great injustice, and
2. They have no recourse to a peaceful but at the same time *effective* political mechanism to address this injustice.

These two conditions breed deep anger and helplessness, a state that represents an invitation to violence. Not surprisingly, this state does trigger violent behaviour with the individual perpetrator oblivious to the fact that when the temple caves in it will bury her/him as well as the 'enemies'.

This is *not* legitimising violent behaviour; it is merely an attempt to understand it fully in order to be able to formulate effective strategies to prevent the resort to violence in politics that are at the same time consistent with the human ideals of freedom, peace, prosperity, security and justice.

Let me give a couple of examples of resort to violent protest behaviour in the Arab region.

On the *national* level, where unemployment and poverty is the only future that is certain to befall the vast majority of young people, except the small minority that basks in the benefits of access to power and wealth. This bleak future is constantly contrasted to signs of extreme and ostentatious luxury linked to corruption, cronyism and nepotism. At the same time, all possibility of *effective* political action is blocked by a system of rigid, and villainous oppression. What are the marginalized and downtrodden to do?

Caught in this tight noose, violent behaviour will always remain an expected, if not condoned, response to injustice, in the absence of effective political machinery to address injustice peacefully.

Ruling regimes call those who resort to violent protest behaviour ‘terrorists’. The oppressors assign the blame to those protesting the misery brought about by their despotic rule. They tout this all-too-facile explanation in their controlled mass media, and set out to implement tough security measures that do nothing but exacerbate present injustices while leaving the root causes of ‘terrorism’ intact, indeed augmenting them all the time.

From the vantage point of human progress, however, building up a good governance regime would be a much superior response, because a good governance regime would among other things, facilitate peaceful negotiation of change. But that scenario also means uprooting corruption and nepotism, i.e. doing away with the privileges of the present oppressors. That is why governance reform remains a remote possibility fraught with tremendous trouble.

On the *regional* level, take first the case of Palestine.

Palestinians have suffered occupation and sheer oppression, exacerbated by the excessive use of force by the government of Israel and its army in the Palestinian territories that has been unconditionally supported by the hegemonic superpower. This pattern of atrocities reached the proportions of war crimes in the judgement of even American human rights organisations (e.g. Human Rights Watch).

Since resisting occupation is a legitimate right, even a duty. This state of injustice brought about Palestinian acts of resistance conditioned by the extremely limited means available to the people whose lives, homes and institutions were ravaged in their own ransacked homeland. These reactions resulted sometimes in Israeli civilian casualties.

In a purely humanitarian perspective, the loss of innocent civilian casualties is always a human tragedy. Nevertheless, it has to be kept in mind that the number of Israeli casualties, which are not army personnel or armed settlers, is negligible compared to what the Palestinians endure, or for that matter acts of savagery sustained by non-Palestinians at the hands of Israel’s government and army in the occupied Palestinian territories¹. Furthermore, Israeli casualties can ultimately be ascribed to the policies of the government of Israel and the very act of occupation to start with.

Again, Israel and the US call these Palestinians freedom fighters ‘terrorists’. Once again, the oppressors assign the blame to those protesting the misery brought about by their illegitimate, and inhumane, actions.

Now Israel wants to expel the (*elected*) Palestinian president from his homeland while some Israeli hawks declared that it would be even better to liquidate him. In the face of a large majority of members of the Security Council (11 out of 15 with Germany

¹ Such as the deliberate crushing of the American young woman “ Rachel Courie” under an Israeli Bulldozer.

abstaining), the USA vetoed a resolution calling on Israel to refrain from doing so. A few days later, the UN general assembly -a more transparent expression of the will of the international community unhampered by the veto power- voted overwhelmingly (133, out of 191, for; with 15 abstentions, again including Germany; and only 4 against, including the USA and Israel, of course) to the same effect (rejecting the expulsion of the Palestinian president).

Lately we witnessed a replay of the Palestinian scenario in Iraq, which under the Anglo-American occupation suffers injustices all too similar to those inflicted on the Palestinians. The main difference is that the US in this case is in the driver's seat rather than being the back seat driver in the case of the Palestinian occupation. An occupation by sheer force, and the wholesale destruction of the country, naturally invites all forms of resistance, can anybody expect otherwise?

It is certainly true that national, as well as Pan-Arab, governance is decidedly bad and ineffective. Nevertheless, in these two cases, of Palestine and Iraq, bad governance on the *global* level has been instrumental in creating the injustices that lie at the core of violent protest behaviour. The title of bad global governance in the first case has been "double standards". In the second case the present US administration deliberately destroyed the present institutional structure for ensuring peace and security in the world, the UN, especially the Security Council, in the service of its designs for the Arab region.

The purpose, in my opinion, was to usher in a new architecture for global governance in which the one 'hyper-power' has the only voice that counts in international affairs. Can we expect a 'just despot' regime worldwide?

I am afraid not. Under the neo-conservative 'junta' bent on global domination, in the US, we are likely to witness further injustices throughout the world especially under the pretext of the US-declared 'war on terrorism', nothing but a smoke screen for American imperialism under the neo-conservative elite in control in Washington, DC. Once again, influential actors in the present global bad governance regime opt for tough security measures (wars and occupations, no less) on a world scale that add to the current backlog of injustice, thereby feeding the fountainhead of 'terrorism'.

Europe is not innocent in all this. The West, European countries included, has not hesitated to deal with oppressive authoritarian Arab regimes as long as these served European interests while condoning the erosion of civil and political liberties of Arabs and Moslems. They have also generally supported Israel rather than upheld international law and human rights. In the case of Iraq the leaders of the UK, Spain and Italy joined the US government in the invasion under clearly false pretexts and in the face of overwhelming opposition in their own country and throughout the world. A seemingly principled initial stand against the invasion of Iraq by France and Germany soon gave way to political appeasement of the US.

Now that the US administration, in collaboration with its wretched European allies, has destroyed this rich and beautiful country it wants the rest of the world to help pick up the pieces and shoulder the cost as well!

Under such conditions Europe appears to have lost credentials to being a credible global power upholding peace and security worldwide, or preaching democracy and human rights to the rest of the world, definitely not to the Arabs.

For another example of the culpability of Europe, on September 6, only a couple of hours after the EU announced that it is looking into adding the political wing of the

Islamic resistance movement (HAMAS) to its list of 'terrorist' organisations, an Israeli F16 fighter- a virtual gift from the USA- flew over Gaza city and fired a rocket on a residential building aiming to assassinate an 80-year old invalid confined to a wheel chair, who happens to be the *spiritual* leader of HAMAS.

Amazingly, it is this frail old man, the target of the attack, which is labelled a 'terrorist' but not those who fly F16s over Palestinian residential areas and fire rockets on civilian targets.

Towards a solution

Building *good* governance regimes at the national, regional and *global* level would represent the essential ingredient in combating effectively violent protest in the Arab region and in a manner consistent with the preservation of peace and justice, and human development throughout the world.

1. National governance

Unless a serious and vigorous process of negotiation involving all active societal forces in Arab countries is initiated and maintained, until a radical transformation in the power structure leads to a process of social innovation that can eventually result in the building of good governance regimes in Arab countries at both the national and pan-Arab level, violent protest behaviour is likely to persist and escalate into a state of protracted and violent societal conflict that should be in the interest of all to avert.

2. Global governance, a role for Europe?

Since the fundamental defect of the present global governance regime is uni-polarity, a more engaged and proactive Europe would help reform global governance and contribute towards building a good global governance regime.

Europe has a major role and responsibility in this quest to combat violent protest behaviour. A role and responsibility that it has not lived up to yet!

A More Effective Europe as a global player is needed to help ensure a global good governance regime aimed at preserving peace and security, and building human development, in the world at large and especially in the Arab Region.

Reform of the present global governance regime, the UN and its specialised agencies, is one direction that the search for a global good governance regime can take.

This would entail curtailing the veto power of some members of the council widening the base of decision-making in the Security Council and the specialised international agencies, by governments as well as *beyond* governments.

This, however, calls for a new Europe. A self-confident Europe that speaks with one voice and possessing of the prerequisites of independent decision-making and defending its choices if need be.

It is hoped that the two major events facing the European Union, drawing the constitution and expansion, will contribute to this purpose. Indeed every effort should be made to ensure that they do.

A third direction is for Europe to build effective coalitions beyond the Atlantic block. Asia surely offers important prospects in this respect but supporting the revival and vitality of an Arab and Third World block should not be ignored.

The reasons for this direction go far beyond the borders of Europe or any specific region of the world. They concern the welfare of all of humanity.

But make no mistake, this is NOT, I repeat NOT, an invitation for intervention from outside.

It is an invitation to Europe, and the West in general, to live up to its ideals of democracy and human rights, ideals that it has too often compromised for opportunism and political convenience. Change in governance regimes in Arab countries however has to come from within, otherwise it would constitute an infringement of the right to self-determination and would be near impossible to sustain in the long run!