

9/11: A TIME FOR RE-THINK

Reference to be provided by Prof. Khurshid

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America's "War on Terror" unleashed allegedly in response to the terrorist attacks on 9th September 2001 on the Twin Towers (New York) and Pentagon (Washington) has turned into the LONGEST WAR of contemporary history. Even the two World Wars and the war in Vietnam did not go beyond five years. After six years of global witch-hunt and military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq resulting in their virtual destruction, the world is nowhere near the end to this unique war. The alleged culprits — Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaida remain uncaptured; instead "bin Ladenism" is becoming a global phenomenon and countries where al-Qaeda had no existence are now playing fields of many a version of al-Qaeda. World has become more insecure. The entire global security system is threatened. Whatever was achieved over the centuries towards establishment of rule of law within and among nations and whatever understanding about norms, principles, protocols and structures for establishing peace and justice among nations and resolution of conflicts through resort to peaceful and constitutional means is in jeopardy? The real question that confronts mankind today is: What has turned out to a greater threat – terrorist attacks of 9/11 or the U.S. and its coalition's response to it. Prof. John Mueller, of the Department of Political Science, Ohio University, U.S.A., has in his recent book OVERBLOWN (Free Press, New York, 2006) succinctly focused on the crux of the challenge: "Which is the greater threat! Terrorism or our reaction against it? A threat that is real, but likely to prove to be of limited scope, has been massively, perhaps even forcefully, inflated to produce widespread and unjustified anxiety. This process has then led to wasteful even self-periodic expenditure and policy over-action, ones that not only very often do more harm, and count more money than anything the terrorists have accomplished, but play into their hands."

There is almost universal aversion to, often seeking articulation in condemnation of, the U.S. policies in relation to this crusade against so-called terrorism. The Annual Transatlantic Trend, a study sponsored by the German Marshall Foundation, published in September 2007, covering the U.S. and 12 European countries, claims that 77 percent of the Europeans disapprove of President Bush's international policies. Bush's rating in the U.S. is all time low for any U.S. President i.e. 72 disapproving his performance. The extent of disapproval is still higher (between 90 and 98 per cent) in the Muslim World, which is at the receiving end of most of the US terrorizing policies. In human terms, as against the less than 3000 persons (60 percent American, around 25 percent Muslims from forty countries, not a single Israeli Jew), the U.S. soldiers killed in Afghanistan and Iraq are approaching four thousand and those injured are over twelve thousand.

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As against these US casualties, those who have been killed in Afghanistan, mostly civilians, according to conservative estimates, are over one hundred thousand, men, women and children! Those killed in Iraq are now more than seven hundred thousand! Add to these figures teeming hundreds of thousands of persons injured or incapacitated for life and over five million people forced to migrate from their homes or homelands, and the picture becomes more horrific. In financial terms, direct cost of this six year war to the U.S. taxpayer is estimated to be around \$ 1 trillion, the indirect costs between another \$1 to 2 trillion and yet another one trillion dollars for the rest of the world. This U.S. gamble of war has turned out to be an unmitigated disaster.

9th September has now become a moment of truth. It is time to seriously reflect upon all that has plagued the world during these six blood-letting years. There are a number of searching questions and fundamental issues that must be looked into with objectivity and integrity. Some of these questions and issues are highlighted as food for thought and critical examination on this sixth anniversary of the events that shook the world.

Within hours of the tragic attack on the Twin Towers, a new connotation was thrust upon to the term 'war'. This event was projected as war on America' and the American response as global "War on Terror". Even the NATO was dragged into the arena of war by invoking Article 5, expounding the principle that war on one NATO country is a war against all. A natural consequence of this was that 'terrorism' was no longer to be treated as a "crime" and those involved in it as suspect 'criminals', to be punished in accord with due process of law. Terrorists began to be treated as "combatants" and as such legitimate targets for attack and annihilation. This was the first major violation of international law, creating a space for committing crimes against humanity in the name of war against terrorism. Wesley K. Clark, the former Supreme Commander of NATO and Professor Kal Raustiala, Professor of Law and the Director Berklev Centre, among others, have challenged this formulation and declared that "treating terrorists as combatants is a mistake" and that "in the years since 9/11 the Bush Administration's approach to terrorism has created more problems than it has solved. We need to recognize that terrorists, while dangerous are more like modern day pirates than warriors; they ought to be pursued, tried and convicted in the courts. At the extreme, yes military force may be required. But terrorists themselves are not "combatants". They are merely criminals."

Secondly terrorism remains a vague, undefined and elusive term. There cannot be a war without a well-defined enemy as the target. You cannot have war against shadows. Absence of a clear definition has robbed the whole exercise of any legitimacy or usefulness.

War on terror has become an instrument of terrorizing the world, invading sovereign countries, abducting, imprisoning and torturing "suspects" and unleashing a reign of terror in different parts of the world.

It is therefore imperative to look into the conceptual, political and humanitarian costs of the present US War on 'terrorism. How many innocent civilians have been the victims of the terrorist's attacks, and how many have been killed as a result of this war against terrorists? Has the war to eliminate terrorists succeeded in weeding them out or has it actually resulted in the production of larger and larger numbers of "terrorists"? How is the US looked upon even in the 'beneficiary countries' it has attacked to destroy alleged terrorists and to give its citizens gifts of "regime change" and "nation-building"? Has America won the confidence, love and respect of the people of the world? Or has it caused an increase - even at an explosive rate - in the discontent and hatred against America the world over, and made the world on the whole a much more insecure place to live in? It must be admitted that vast political landscapes that were peaceful before the War against Terrorism have now been turned into fertile grounds for the emergence and up-breeding of terrorisms. What was limited to a few islands of discontentment has been turned into a global phenomenon.

Some more fundamental issues are agitating the minds of thinking people all over the world, including those in the United States of America. The gross human rights violations - particularly the right to privacy; the right to freedom from detention, save through due process of law; the right to be treated as innocent until proven guilty; and the right to defense through lawyers of the defendant's own choice are mind boggling. Thousands of people have been arrested and detained without trial after 9/11. The percentage of those who have been formally charged is hardly around two percent of those detained. Those finally convicted in a court of law can be counted on fingers; this wanton and large scale violation of human rights has eroded the entire fabric of the rule of law, and damaged the fortress of constitutionalism in a number of countries, including the United States. What is happening in the name of "patriotism" and "national security" to the civil liberties of common men and women in general, and certain targeted religious and ethnic groups particularly the Muslims in America and elsewhere, is a crime against humanity and recipe for alienation and violent reactions. New threats have been posed to the values of dignity of man, equality of all human beings, and their right to be treated according to the law, within the framework of civilized behavior. Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghuraib and Bagram are not the only festering soars. Is it not a fact that "rendition" and "coercive interrogation" are now rampant in many parts of the so-called civilized world? The nightmares portrayed in Huxley's Brave New World, Orwell's 1984 and Solzhenitsyn's Gulag is now haunting the ordinary people in many part of the 'Free World.'

Whatever has been achieved over the centuries in terms of international law and consensus as to the norms of civilized conduct in war and peace is dangerously at stake. Basic precepts of law and of international law are being re-written, at least in practice, in a unilateral and arbitrary manner. The powerful are trying to bully and bulldoze others only because they are weak and powerless. This is what is producing an unending army of terrorists, because terrorism is the weapon of the weak against the strong, which are not prepared to respect any rules of law and norms of just behaviour.

Another fundamental question that must be faced squarely relates to the serious limitations of any military strategy in fighting terrorism. Is it possible to bring terrorism to an end by resort to military force alone? Can this stateless and faceless enemy be chained down in that manner? Is it not time to reflect on alternative strategies addressing the causes and factors that breed terrorism? How long are we going to fight the branches while ignoring the roots of the problem? The resistance to occupation, oppression and injustice, is not the problem - the real problem is occupation, oppression and injustice, which cannot but generate resistance. If we target the resistance instead of the causes of injustice and discontent, how can we succeed? Focusing on resistance and ignoring the gruesome realities that give rise to struggles for freedom and search for justice are bound to be exercises in futility. In fact, it could be the very recipe for promoting further terrorism and hatred.

It is time to change the focus and address the real issues in a forthright manner. The crying need is for a paradigm change, and not for marginal changes within the paradigm. Logic, and not rhetoric, should guide our policies. Only then might the world become a more peaceful place for all of us.

Finally, the people of Pakistan must squarely face yet another fundamental question. Why have we been drawn into this wretched US war of aggression and aggrandizement? U.S. has its own global hegemonistic designs. Why has Pakistan become an accomplice in this war, which is considered by the Muslims as a war against Islam and Muslims? Whatever be the compulsions in 2001, now in 2007 we must rethink our entire policy of unconditional cooperation and participation in this war on terror. We have earned the enmity of our Afghan brothers and have turned our own tribal areas into theatres of war. The surrender of some three hundred personnel of the armed and security forces this week is an index of the failure of this policy and a message from the armed forces that in the heart of their heart, they do not want to kill their own kith and kin simply to please Bush and his war monger allies back home. 9/11 is a time for rethink. Are we prepared to raise to the occasion to seek liberation from US imposed shackles that chain us to this "war on terror"!
