

Terrorism

and its responses since 2001



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Terrorism - introduction

- A definition - politically-motivated violence
- Predominantly state-sponsored
 - governments believe they have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence
 - authorised by the state?
 - used to demonise, stigmatise & delegitimise political opponents & their causes
 - commonly equated with anti-colonialism by colonial powers
 - 'we are good, they are evil' or 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'
 - the West is always the innocent victim of terrorism, never its perpetrator (true?)
 - Western state terrorism - a non term? (Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Palestine, etc)
 - Mandela, Arafat, Mugabe, Gusmao, Gaddafi - revolving door
- Did not begin on 11 September, 2001
 - has always been with us
 - first of a series of major strikes on Western soil
 - did the world 'change forever'?

Islamist terror - key issues

- A threat to primarily to individuals rather than states (Afghanistan? Pakistan?)
 - doesn't alter the balance of global strategic or economic power
 - statistical threat to individuals is grossly exaggerated
 - no overall co-ordination, no mastermind, no coherent or clear objectives (autonomous cells)
 - no compromise, no prospect of victory
 - Al Qaeda is more a franchise & methodology than an organisation
- Violence which is unpredictable, unconstrained (no respect for rules of war, targeting civilians) and indefensible (morally & tactically)
- Legitimate grievances (Palestine, Iraq, corrupt Arab regimes) or irrational hatred?
 - no root causes, just extremism (contest of values - humanity & civilization v barbarians)
 - self-defence, revenge & retaliation (persecution of Muslims, occupation of holy sites)
 - primarily a struggle within Islam between fundamentalists and reformers
 - responsibility of the West ('blowback', US backing for Arab tyrants, Iraq occupation, Palestine)
 - a cultural revolt against the West (fear of secularism & modernity, denial of role of religion)
 - a battle for survival, an existential threat

Islamist terror - the West responds

- 9/11 “changed everything” (John Howard)
 - they hate our ‘innate goodness, our freedom and democracy’
 - a question of values?
 - an attack on US foreign policy?
 - we have done nothing to incite these attacks (true?)
 - a window of opportunity to attack political opponents as “terrorists” (eg Israel, Algeria, Russia, China, Turkey)
 - the ‘war on terror’ conflated a number of separate and distinct conflicts (Israel v Palestinians, Israel v Syria, Iran, Hamas, & Hezbollah, occupation of Iraq, NATO’s war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, etc)
- Curtailing civil liberties in the West
 - draconian domestic laws, more money for intelligence services, wider surveillance
 - revising international law (pre-emption)
- Approaches to counter-terrorism (asymmetrical conflicts)
 - negotiation, policing, intelligence or conventional war (Afghanistan, Iraq)?
 - expansion of US military presence (bases) around the world
 - success or exacerbating the problem (anti-Americanism)?
 - no dialogue or compromise possible with fanatics
 - what constitutes victory? when will it end, if ever?