The 'War on Terror' in Historical Perspective

Adam Roberts

Today's international terrorism has assumed organisational forms and means of operating that are historically new. The shadowy entities labelled 'al-Qaeda' are different from earlier terrorist movements in the extremism of their aims, and in the far-flung, coordinated and ruthless character of their operations. No less novel is the contemporary US and international campaign against international terrorism. And yet, despite all the unprecedented aspects of this conflict, there are dangers in neglecting the history of terrorism and counter-terrorism. These dangers include the repetition of mistakes made in earlier eras.

President George W. Bush won the 2004 US presidential election partly on the basis of a clear line on terrorism. Despite its strengths and electoral appeal, the US doctrine on the 'war on terror' is vulnerable to the criticism that it takes too little account of the history of the subject. There is a need to articulate what might be called a British (or, more ambitiously, a European) perspective on terrorism and counter-terrorism – one that is more historically informed, encompassing certain elements distinctive from the US doctrine.

Defining 'terrorism'

The word 'terrorism', like many abstract political terms, is confusing, dangerous and indispensable. Confusing, because it means very different things to different people, and its meaning has also changed greatly over time. Dangerous, because it easily becomes an instrument of propaganda, and a means of avoiding thinking about the many forms and causes of political violence. Indispensable, because there is a real phenomenon out there that poses a serious threat. That threat, as indicated below, is especially to the societies from which it emanates.

'Terrorism' is used here mainly to refer to the systematic use of violence and threats of violence by non-state groups, designed to cause dislocation, consternation and submission on the part of a target population or govern-

Adam Roberts is Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at Oxford University and a Fellow of Balliol College. His books include (as joint author), *Terrorism and International Order* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul for Chatham House, 1986).

ment. This non-definitive definition is deliberately broad – essential if one is considering the history of terrorism over a long period.

The reference to non-state groups in this definition in no way excludes awareness that states, too, notoriously use terror – often systematically – and that states sometimes secretly sponsor non-state terrorist groups. Except where it has a bearing on the causes of, and action against, terrorist movements, such state terror is not a central focus of this essay. Most forms of terroristic state violence, whether against a state's own citizens or against foreigners, are prohibited in international law.

Attempts to define terrorism in recent years, especially since 2001, have reflected the fact that much contemporary terrorism is targeted against civilians. UN Security Council Resolution 1566 of 8 October 2004 comes close to a definition of terrorism when it refers to it as:

> criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.

Similarly, the UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which issued its report in December 2004, focused on civilians in its suggested definition of terrorism:

> any action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the Geneva Conventions and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004), that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.[1]

These UN definitions may contain a basis for a formal international legal definition of terrorism. However, a limitation of both (and especially of the second) should be noted. The emphasis being quite largely on the threat to civilians or non-combatants, they might appear not to encompass certain acts such as attacks on armed peacekeeping forces, attacks on police or armed forces, or assassinations of heads of state or government. They might not include the attack on the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, but for the fact that it involved the hijacking of a civilian airliner.

There are traps in these or any other definitions of terrorism, and in the uses made of the term. The most serious is that the label 'terrorist' has sometimes been applied to the activities of movements which, even if they did resort to violence, had serious claims to political legitimacy, and also exercised care and restraint in their choice of methods. Famously, in 1987 and 1988 the UK and US governments labelled the African National Congress of South Africa 'terrorist': a shallow and silly attribution even at the time, let alone in light of Nelson Mandela's later emergence as statesman.

In certain circumstances, the repeated use of the term 'terrorist' to describe a particular class of adversaries can itself conceal key aspects of the political environment. In the 1960s many writers and journalists freely used the word 'terrorist' to describe a member of the Vietcong, the military arm of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. The Vietcong did undoubtedly use the weapon of terror ruthlessly and systematically against the South Vietnamese population. However, serious studies suggested that terror was not on its own an adequate basis of control: a sense of the moral justice of the cause was also present. The two factors were mutually reinforcing – and this helped to explain the capacity of the Vietcong to endure.[2]

What is perhaps easier to define than the grand abstraction of terrorism is *terrorist acts*. While still surrounded by a dense thicket of thorny problems, this term has the merit of keeping the focus on specific types of action. It encompasses certain violent acts that contravene national laws and, in some cases, specific international agreements on such matters as aerial hijacking. The term can also encompass acts that, in their targeting and manner of execution, contravene the basic principles of the laws of war. It is possible, at least sometimes, to draw a distinction between such acts and other types and forms of armed resistance.

Denial of history

Since 11 September 2001, statements by the principal Western leaders on the subject of the 'war on terror' have contained few references to the previous experience of governments in tackling terrorist threats, or to the ways in which certain international wars of the twentieth century were sparked off by concerns about terrorism. This appears to be true also of their inner deliberations, as revealed by Bob Woodward, Seymour Hersh and others. In particular, Woodward's *Plan of Attack* shows that there was little reference to historical precedents in the two years of decision-making leading up to the invasion of Iraq. An honourable exception occurred when Secretary of State Colin Powell, at a planning meeting on Iraq, asked sarcastically: 'Are we going to be off-loading at Gallipoli?'[3]

General Bernard Montgomery's first rule of warfare was 'Don't march on Moscow'.[4] Regarding terrorism and counter-terrorism there is no such

straightforward rule. The history of these matters repays study, not because it offers a single recipe for action, but rather because it enriches our understanding of a peculiarly complex subject. It indicates a range of possibilities for addressing it, and a number of hazards to avoid. Historians are neither agreed nor infallible in addressing this subject, any more than are my own colleagues in the field of International Relations. A profession that encompasses both Professor Sir Michael Howard and Professor Bernard Lewis is not about to reach a unanimous party line on a subject as contentious as what to do about terrorism.

Yet it remains odd that since 2001 much writing on terror, particularly in the United States, has tended to neglect the long history of terrorism and counter-terrorism. This is true even of historians and historically informed writers: some, such as John Gaddis and Walter Mead, have written books about the war on terror that contain much important insight into US history and the US role in the world, but say almost nothing about the history of terror and counter-terror.[5] On the other hand, since 2001 there has been a good deal of writing touching on the history of these matters. A few works have covered only the last few decades.[6] Some works, however, have taken into account experiences of terrorism and counter-terrorism from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries – an excellent example being the work of Michael Ignatieff.[7]

In practice, the response of each country to the 'war on terror' has been deeply influenced by its own particular experience of terrorism and counter-terrorism. In the United Kingdom there has been frequent reference to the experience of countering terrorism in Northern Ireland. British ministers and officials, however, refrained from pointing out bluntly, and in public, that almost everything about the language and manner in which terror in Northern Ireland has been opposed, and about the attempts at underwriting its end through mediation and even negotiation, has been very different from the US approach to the 'war on terror'. Partly, of course, this is because the problems faced have been different: the IRA is far removed from al-Qaeda in ideology, in political goals and in methods. Yet the British may have been too reticent about their experience of terrorism.

The tendency to approach terrorism without benefit of history has, itself, a long history. Political debates about terrorism have perennially been ahistorical. Both terrorists and their adversaries tend to talk and write publicly about their campaigns with little reference to the centuries-long history of terrorism and counter-terrorism. This is not to say that they do not articulate a view of history more generally. Terrorists, for example, often focus on deep resentments based on perceptions of alien domination of the societies they claim to defend. When terrorists have put pen to paper, either at the time of their activism or subsequently, they have sometimes shown consid-

erable awareness of international developments and the history of their own and earlier epochs.[8] At the same time, the long and tangled history of both terrorism and counter-terrorism is frequently airbrushed out of the picture. The publicly articulated world-view of terrorists and their adversaries is often a world of moral and political absolutes, in which terrorism, or the war against it, is seen as an essentially new means of ridding the world of a unique and evil scourge. On both sides, the favoured form of argument is phrased in terms of morality – and a relatively simple morality at that, in which the adversary's actions are seen as such a serious threat as to create an overwhelming necessity for the use of counter-violence.

Many specialists in counter-insurgency have seen their subject more as a struggle of light versus darkness than as a common and recurrent theme of history. A fine example of such an ahistorical approach to the subject is the French group of theorists writing in the 1950s and early 1960s about *guerre révolutionnaire*. These theorists denied the complexities – especially the mixture of material, moral and ideological factors – that are keys to understanding why and how terrorist movements come into existence. Colonel Lacheroy, a leading figure in this group and head of the French Army's *Service d'Action Psychologique*, famously stated: 'In the beginning there is nothing.'[9] Terrorism was seen as having been introduced deliberately into a peaceful society by an omnipresent outside force – namely International Communism. It is a demon-ological vision of a cosmic struggle in which the actual history of particular countries and ways of thinking has little or no place. These French theories – no doubt because they date from a period of failed military campaigns, attempted military *coups d'état*, systematic use of torture against insurgents, and a generally disastrous period in French history – are now almost entirely forgotten, even in France itself. They are also ignored in the United States, even though they, and the events with which they are connected, provide object-lessons in how not to conduct a counter-terrorist campaign.

If terrorists and counter-terrorists have often forgotten history, history has not entirely forgotten them. Many historians have written subtly and interestingly about the evolution of terrorism (which, like so much else, has significant European as well as extra-European origins), about its ever-changing philosophy, about its sociology and its consequences. Those historians who have combined historical analysis of terrorism with advo-cacy have tended to favour a tough line against terrorism, but biased more towards a strong police response than towards military interventions.[10]

In present circumstances there are powerful reasons to buttress the claim that the threat faced is totally new, and needs to be tackled in new ways. Today's terrorist incidents can involve a combination of elements, many of which are new: elaborate planning carried out far from the location of the

attack; a suicide mission; an assault on a nuclear-armed power; the destruction of major buildings; and the killing of hundreds or even thousands of people, usually civilians. Such an attack may be on behalf of a movement many of whose demands are probably unachievable and certainly non-negotiable. Something new is undoubtedly happening, whether at the World Trade Center in Manhattan or at Beslan in North Ossetia. The difference between the scale of carnage now and what resulted from earlier phases of terrorism brings to mind the grim biblical statement that is inscribed on the Machine Gun Corps monument in London:

> Saul hath slain his thousands
> but David his tens of thousands.[11]

So sharp is the distinction from earlier eras that, from today's grim perspective, it would be easy to implore earlier terrorists: 'Come back: all is forgiven.' Former terrorists themselves, in the manner of old soldiers, have often deplored the terrible things that later generations of terrorists did, and the impurity of their motivations.[12] Because the changes have been so great, it would also be easy to brush aside earlier historical experience of terrorism on the grounds of diminished relevance – and this indeed appears to have happened in much contemporary analysis. It is a huge mistake.

Eight propositions based on earlier campaigns

At the risk of over-simplification, the following eight propositions can be drawn from the long history of terrorism, and action against it. These propositions all have a bearing on the conduct of, and language regarding, today's international campaign against terrorism.

1. Terrorist action often has unintended consequences. Most terrorist movements and individuals have notions of change with two main strands. Firstly, a spectacular act of violence will transform the political landscape, particularly by mobilising and radicalising the dormant masses. Secondly, a long terrorist campaign will wear down the adversary, leading to demoralisation, doubt and withdrawal. These are the terrorist equivalents of blitzkrieg and war of attrition.

Such movements have arisen in response to autocratic regimes, and (even in democracies) to one part of a population's dominance over another. They have also frequently arisen in response to foreign occupation. The common thread in the growth of suicide bombing since the attack on the US Embassy in Beirut in 1983 is not just religious extremism but the presence of foreign military occupation. As Robert Pape has written:

the close association between foreign military occupations and the growth of suicide terrorist movements in the occupied regions should give pause to those who favor solutions that involve conquering countries in order to transform their political systems.[13]

There is no doubt that some terrorist campaigns have achieved significant objectives. Certain temporary international presences have proved vulnerable to terrorist campaigns, including especially those of over-stretched colonial powers, and, more recently, of international bodies such as the United Nations. The one sure consequence of a sustained terrorist campaign in a particular area is that it is bad for tourism – especially when, as has happened in several attacks in this past decade, from Egypt to Indonesia, it is the tourists themselves who are targets. Yet only rarely has the discouragement of tourism been the principal goal of a terrorist movement.

Other consequences of terrorist campaigns are much more unpredictable. For example, political assassinations have very seldom had the effects for which terrorists hoped, and more often have led to a strengthening of the regime against which they were fighting. An exhaustive study concentrating particularly on the effects of 56 assassinations of heads of government or state in the period 1919–68 concluded: 'We are dismayed by the high incidence of assassination indicated by our collected data … We are also surprised by the fact that the impact of any single assassination, even of a chief executive or dictator, normally tends to be low.'[14]

Political assassinations have seldom had the effects for which terrorists hoped

Sometimes terrorist actions lead to major consequences that are different from what the terrorists anticipated. They may lead to vigorous political or military campaigns against the terrorists, and even to the outbreak of international wars, as in Europe in 1914. According to a friend who was close to him, Gavril Princip, the 19-year-old Bosnian Serb student who killed Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914, had no idea that the result of the assassination would be war, let alone world war.[15]

In some cases terrorist action has been so callous that it has aroused antagonism even among the population that has some sympathy with, even involvement in, the terrorist cause. For example, in August 1949, when Communist terrorists in the Philippines murdered the popular widow of President Quezon, for the first time there was widespread popular wrath against the insurgents.[16] Such actions can contribute to the isolation of terrorist groups. Indeed, the terrorist dream of awakening the masses through their actions has almost never worked in the way in which terrorists have perennially hoped.

A terrorist leader may seek to provoke a repressive response from the adversary's regime, thus exposing its supposedly true nature – the iron fist inside the velvet glove. As Lawrence Durrell wrote in *Bitter Lemons*, his rich and subtle account of the Eoka insurgency in Cyprus:

> his primary objective is not battle. It is to bring down upon the community in general a reprisal for his wrongs, in the hope that the fury and resentment roused by punishment meted out to the innocent will gradually swell the ranks of those from whom he will draw further recruits.[17]

In some cases an aim may be to provoke not just government repression, but foreign military intervention. The possibility that these may be prime terrorist aims confirms the need for caution in crafting a counter-terrorist policy.

2. Terrorism's endemic character. One of the most pernicious aspects of terrorism is its capacity to become endemic in particular regions, cultures and societies. Because of its unofficial and clandestine character, and because of the extreme bitterness it engenders within and between communities, it easily becomes a habit. The experience of terrorism suggests that, after it has been taken up in one cause, it is adopted by others, and by splinter-groups, and how difficult it is to reach a definitive end to terrorist activities. Started by the Right, it gets taken up the Left, or vice versa. Started by nationalists, it may get taken up by so-called religious fundamentalists. Started by the Stern Gang, it gets taken up by the PLO. Started by the high-minded, it gets taken up by criminals, drug-smugglers and mafiosi. Moreover, it can be difficult to call off terrorist struggles. A hard-core splinter group within a movement may refuse all compromise; and may be able to continue the struggle because the decentralised nature of terrorist organisation and action makes that easy.

This view of terrorism as damaging to the societies in which it takes place is confirmed by the history of the Middle East, Latin America, the Balkans and Ireland over the past two centuries. It forms an important buttress to moral condemnations of terrorism. An understanding of its destructive character within the societies that produce terrorist movements – which are of course the very societies that they purport to save – provides a better basis for securing international action against terrorism than do certain views of terrorism that focus on it as a threat principally to the democratic states of the West, or indeed to the United States in particular.

3. Capacity of counter-terrorism to achieve results. Contrary to myth, counter-terrorist activities and policies can sometimes succeed – at least in the sense of contributing to a reduction or ending of the activities of terrorists without

yielding power to them. For example, the forces opposed to terrorists were successful in this sense in the long-running Malayan 'emergency' that began in 1948; in the Philippines at the same time; and against the 'Red Brigades' that were active in Italy and Germany in the early 1970s. Arguably, they have had a measure of success in Northern Ireland since 1969.

Perhaps 95% of the important action in any campaign against terrorism consists of intelligence and police work: identifying suspects, infiltrating movements, collaborating with police forces in other countries, gathering evidence for trials and so on. This underlying truth is far from denied by President Bush or other leading figures involved in the 'war on terror'. However, their rhetoric, being much more that of open war and of victory, has sometimes obscured this basic fact.

4. Need to address underlying grievances. While there is no simple formula for how terrorism can be undermined or defeated, the process often, perhaps even generally, requires action that is sensitive to the political environment. Where counter-terrorist strategies have succeeded, success has often been in combination with a political package that either responded to certain terrorist demands while rejecting others, or undercut the terrorists by reducing their pool of political support, or both. In Malaya, for example, the promise, and the actuality, of unqualified national independence was crucial to containing the terrorist threat.

Apropos the 'war on terror', John Gaddis has reminded us that during the Cold War it was perfectly well accepted that there was a need to address social issues on which Communist propaganda played:

> With the rehabilitation of Germany and Japan after World War II, together with the Marshall Plan, we fought the conditions that made the Soviet alternative attractive even as we sought to contain the Soviets themselves.[18]

It is sometimes suggested that making changes that respond in some way to terrorist demands constitutes appeasement, or at least implies recognition that a campaign of terrorism is justified. Such a suggestion is flawed. To say that a movement responds to real grievances – as for example over Palestine – is not to say that it is justified in resorting to terror, but it is to say that the terrorist movement reflects larger concerns in society that need to be addressed in some way. The exact way in which they are addressed may not be the way the movement is demanding. To refuse all changes on an issue because a terrorist movement has embraced that issue is actually to allow terrorists to dictate the political agenda.

5. Respect for a legal framework. Respect for law has been an important element in many operations against terrorists. One of the key figures involved in the Malayan campaign in the 1950s, Sir Robert Thompson, distilling five basic principles of counter-insurgency from this and other cases, wrote of the crucial importance of operating within a properly functioning domestic legal framework:

> The government must function in accordance with law.
>
> There is a very strong temptation in dealing both with terrorism and with guerrilla actions for government forces to act outside the law, the excuses being that the processes of law are too cumbersome, that the normal safeguards in the law for the individual are not designed for an insurgency and that a terrorist deserves to be treated as an outlaw anyway. Not only is this morally wrong, but, over a period, it will create more practical difficulties for a government than it solves.[19]

It is not only national legal standards that are important, but also international standards, including those embodied in the laws of war. A perception that the states involved in a coalition are observing basic international standards may contribute to public support for military operations within the member states; support (or at least tacit consent) from other states for coalition operations; and avoidance of disputes within and between coalition member states. In short, there can be strong prudential considerations (not necessarily dependent on reciprocity in observance of the law by all the parties to a war) that militate in favour of observing the laws of war.

There are some well-known difficulties in applying the laws of war to terrorist and counter-terrorist activities. Most terrorists do not conform to the well-known requirements for the status of lawful belligerent, entitled to full prisoner-of-war status. Further, few states could accept application of the law if it meant that all terrorists were deemed to be legitimate belligerents on a par with the regular uniformed forces of a government. However, application of the law does not require acceptance of either of these doubtful propositions. Rather it means recognition that, even in a war against ruthless terrorists, the observance of certain restraints may be legally obligatory and politically desirable – especially as regards treatment of detainees. Understandable doubt over the formal applicability of some provisions of existing law should not be turned into a licence to flout basic norms.[20]

6. Treatment of detainees. The treatment of detainees is an issue of crucial importance in the history of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Indeed, the defining moment in the birth of modern terrorism was an event in Russia in

1878 in response to the flogging of a political prisoner. This was what led a young woman, Vera Zasulich, to shoot and seriously wound General Trepov, the Police Chief of St Petersburg, who had had the prisoner flogged.[21] Walter Laqueur has said of this event: 'Only in 1878, after Vera Zasulich's shooting of General Trepov, the governor of the Russian capital, did terrorism as a doctrine, the Russian version of "propaganda by the deed", finally emerge.'[22] Likewise, torture meted out in Egyptian jails from Nasser's time onwards has often been cited as part of the explanation for the emergence of radical purportedly Islamic terrorism.

When fighting an unseen and vicious enemy, who may have many secret sympathisers, all societies encounter difficulties. In such circumstances, most states, even democratic ones, resort to some form of detention without trial. There are huge risks in such detentions. Firstly, a risk of arresting and convicting the wrong people; and secondly, maltreatment of detainees. Both tend to create martyrs and to give nourishment to the terrorist campaign.

The United Kingdom's long engagement against terrorism in Northern Ireland affords ample evidence for both these propositions, and it also points in the direction of a possible solution. This was one of many conflicts in which those deemed to be 'terrorists' were aware of the value, including propaganda value, of making claims to PoW status and publicising claims of ill-treatment. While denying that there was an armed conflict whether international or otherwise, and strongly resisting any granting of PoW status to detainees and convicted prisoners, the UK did slowly come to accept that they had a distinct status, and that international standards had to apply to their treatment. After initially using methods that were legally questionable and highly controversial, the UK used a different approach, in effect applying basic legal principles derived from the laws of war. This helped in the long and difficult process of taking some of the political sting out of the emotionally charged issue of treatment of detainees.[23]

Treatment of prisoners has been one of the major failures of the 'war on terror'

The treatment of detainees and prisoners has been one of the major failures of the 'war on terror' ever since it began in late 2001. In January 2002 US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld infamously said of the prisoners in Guantanamo, 'I do not feel even the slightest concern over their treatment. They are being treated vastly better than they treated anybody else over the last several years and vastly better than was their circumstance when they were found.'[24] Needless to say, this and similar remarks were widely broadcast on radio and TV stations critical of the United States. The

episodes of maltreatment and torture in Iraq since April 2003 have reinforced the damage. Those who suggest that humane treatment is a relatively unimportant issue – and those far fewer individuals who argue that torturing prisoners is a way to combat terrorism – do need to address the criticism that ill-treatment and torture have in the past provided purported justifications for the resort to terrorism, and also discredited the anti-terrorist cause.

7. Evil vs error. In the history of both terrorism and counter-terrorism there has long been a temptation to depict the adversary as evil. In terrorist movements, many otherwise decent and serious individuals have been seduced by the simple and attractive notion of the power of the deed: that a cleansing act of violence can rid the world of uniquely evil forces.

In counter-terrorist operations, the depiction of the adversary as evil, while it may faithfully reflect understandable feelings in a society under terrorist assault, poses severe practical problems. One hazard of treating terrorism as a problem of evil is that many people in the population from whom the terrorists come will know that such an explanation is too simple. They will have a broader idea of the mixture of characteristic traits that can make a terrorist: idealism, self-sacrifice, naiveté, hope, despair, ignorance, short-sightedness, thuggishness, hatred, sadism, cleverness and stupidity. The population may have sympathy with the cause for which the terrorists stand but not with the method. If the terrorist group is described as simply 'evil', the population will therefore be further alienated from the anti-terrorist cause, which they will see as depending on a caricature that they do not recognise.

In the struggle against terrorism, it may be most useful to conceive of terrorism as a problem, not so much of extreme evil (although it may be that), but rather of dangerously wrong conduct and ideas. The difference in approach – the view of terrorism more as a dangerous idea and as morally reprehensible than as absolute evil – has significant implications for how terrorist campaigns may be opposed, and how they may end.[25]

8. Similarities between terrorists and some of their opponents. A student of the history of terrorism cannot help being struck by certain similarities between terrorists and at least some of their opponents. Both share not only a vision of the world as a struggle of good versus evil, but also a belief that particular new weapons and tactics now give an opportunity to strike directly at the heart of the adversary's power. Russian terrorists in the nineteenth century believed that their new and quite accurate weapons – the pistol, the rifle and the bomb – could enable them to attack the source of all evil (namely the Tsar) directly and with limited side-effects.[26]

The similarity between so-called terrorists and their adversaries was noted by Régis Debray in his little-known novel *Undesirable Alien*. In this remarkably unsentimental view of his fellow revolutionaries in Latin America, he mocks his comrades in the struggle for having a taste for cowboy films, and suggests that red revolutionaries may be propounding nothing more than the ideology of the American western.[27] Sadly, events have moved on since then, and it is the Hollywood disaster movie that is emulated by Osama bin Laden and his colleagues.[28] The general philosophy of radical Islam also has Californian roots due to the presence there in the 1950s of its founding father, Sayyid Qutb.[29]

In the 'war on terror', a vision of clean and well-targeted war against dictatorial regimes has informed much US policymaking. As George W. Bush put it in his infamous (because premature) 'Mission Accomplished' speech on 1 May 2003:

> In the images of falling statues, we have witnessed the arrival of a new era. For a hundred of years of war, culminating in the nuclear age, military technology was designed and deployed to inflict casualties on an ever-growing scale. In defeating Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, Allied forces destroyed entire cities, while enemy leaders who started the conflict were safe until the final days. Military power was used to end a regime by breaking a nation.
>
> Today, we have the greater power to free a nation by breaking a dangerous and aggressive regime. With new tactics and precision weapons, we can achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians. No device of man can remove the tragedy from war; yet it is a great moral advance when the guilty have far more to fear from war than the innocent.[30]

This vision of the 2003 Iraq war as a more or less clinical excision of an evil regime looks to have been a desert mirage – just as many terrorist visions of achieving change through violence have also led to disappointment.

The 'war on terror'

The major pronouncements of what has been variously termed in official US speeches the 'war against terrorism' and the 'war on terror' have been self-consciously historic in character; they have enunciated historically novel and ambitious goals, but have contained only limited reference to the history of terrorism and counter-terrorism. In his address to Congress nine days after the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, President Bush stated:

> Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated...

> Americans are asking: 'How will we fight and win this war?' We will direct every resource at our command – every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war – to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network. [31]

At the end of September 2001 President Bush added, in a radio address:

> our war on terror will be much broader than the battlefields and beach-heads of the past. This war will be fought wherever terrorists hide, or run, or plan. Some victories will be won outside of public view, in tragedies avoided and threats eliminated. Other victories will be clear to all.[32]

The term 'war' is not being used here in a purely rhetorical sense, as in the 'war on drugs' or 'war on poverty'. It has such a rhetorical side, but is being used to describe a notably broad and multi-faceted overall campaign of a type that is essentially new, and that includes major military operations (starting with Afghanistan) as one important aspect. In respect of both aspects of the war – the visible and the invisible – what is sought is 'victory'.

The most important subsequent articulation of the 'war on terror' was the February 2003 White House document, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. This began by emphasising the unique nature of the current threat:

> The struggle against international terrorism is different from any other war in our history. We will not triumph solely or even primarily through military might. We must fight terrorist networks, and all those who support their efforts to spread fear around the world, using every instrument of national power – diplomatic, economic, law enforcement, financial, information, intelligence, and military.[33]

The oft-repeated claim of uniqueness has provided a justification for much of the rhetoric and strategic direction of the 'war on terror', and has provided, too, an implied justification for making little more than ritual reference to earlier history. However, the February 2003 document did contain at least a nod to history: 'Americans know that terrorism did not begin on 11 September 2001'. It continued: 'For decades, the United States and our friends abroad have waged the long struggle against the terrorist menace. We have learned much from these efforts.' In particular, past successes in destroying or neutralising various movements that had been active in the 1970s and 1980s 'provide valuable lessons for the future'.[34] However, the document was unclear about exactly what terrorist movements were being referred to, and about what lessons had been learned.

Subsequent articulations of US doctrine offered little further reference to the history of terrorism and counter-terrorism. The most extraordinary omission in most US statements in the 'war on terror' is the lack of reference to the existing US counter-insurgency doctrine, and the reluctance to embrace it even when faced with an insurgency in Iraq. By contrast, the UK military view tends to be that counter-insurgency doctrine is a principal basis of addressing terror.

Can military interventions be effective against terrorism?

In countries faced with terrorist attacks, there are often strong reasons for attacking terrorism at what is seen as its source. A state that allows terrorists to organise on its territory to wage operations elsewhere is naturally the object of suspicion, and may well be thought to deserve whatever it gets. Yet in the 'war on terror' the question of military intervention proved extremely divisive.

Counter-terrorist operations, when taking the form of open war and a conventional military response, have often led to tragedy. The First World War began when the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914 by a young Serbian nationalist led to an Austrian determination to root out the 'hornet's nest' that was Serbia. Similarly, Israel's disastrous intervention in Lebanon in 1982 was explicitly a response to a persistent and intense pattern of terrorist attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets not only in Israel but also internationally.

It is not surprising, therefore, that historians have generally been sceptical about waging war as a response to terrorist acts. However, they tend to be admirably discriminate: more sceptical than dogmatic. Two or three months after 11 September, the American historian Paul Schroeder wrote:

> Three lessons emerge from reasoning by historical analogy from the early summer of 1914 to the late summer of 2001. The first is that a great power must avoid giving terrorists the war they want, but that the great power does not want. The second is that a great power must reckon the effects of its actions not only on its immediate circumstances, but also with regard to the larger structure of international politics in which it clearly has a significant stake. The third is that a great power must beware the risks of victory as well as the dangers of defeat. If it is not careful and wise, the United States could find itself enmeshed even deeper in the Middle East and Southwest Asia than it is today, and risk generating greater prospective dangers in the process of containing smaller near-term ones.[35]

He drew a crucial distinction between Afghanistan, where the war had a legitimate objective and was widely understood internationally, and other possible target countries, including Iraq.[36] Within 18 months of this warning,

the United States was deeply involved in Iraq in exactly the way he had feared, with no prospect of an early exit. He was right that the two cases, and the nature of the US involvements in them, were very different, both in the justifiability of the intervention and in the consequences that followed.

Afghanistan: war and its aftermath

The first major engagement of the 'war on terror', *Operation Enduring Freedom,* which encompassed the US-led coalition military operations in and around Afghanistan that began on 7 October 2001, was widely viewed as a justifiable use of force – a term greatly preferable to the more familiar term 'just war'. It had a great deal of diplomatic support, and received significant legitimation from resolutions passed at the United Nations.[37] There appeared to be no other means of stopping the activities of al-Qaeda, protected as they were by the Taliban regime. The war did result in a victory – at least of sorts. By the end of the year, the Taliban regime had gone, replaced by the Afghan Interim Authority, and then in June by the Afghan Transitional Government. In the course of 2002 a total of 1.8 million Afghans, 1.5m of whom had come from Pakistan, resettled in Afghanistan. Although the return of refugees was not the main objective of the campaign – and the capture of the main al-Qaeda leaders, which was an objective, was *not* achieved – this huge refugee return was evidence that the 'war on terror' could achieve at least some positive effects, by helping to depose a reactionary, oppressive and thoroughly dangerous regime. The remarkably successful presidential election on 9 October 2004 provided a further small sign of progress in post-war Afghanistan.

> *Huge refugee return was evidence that the 'war on terror' could achieve some positive effects*

On the first day of the US bombing campaign in Afghanistan, Donald Rumsfeld said of the Taliban: 'Ultimately they're going to collapse from within. That is what will constitute victory.'[38] That is what happened in November and December 2001. Some were critical of the fact that the main achievement was regime change. Richard Clarke, the White House counter-terrorism specialist, criticised the otherwise successful handling of the Afghan war on the grounds that 'we treated the war as a regime change rather than as a search-and-destroy against terrorists'.[39]

Three unique facts enabled the Afghan campaign to succeed. Firstly, the Taliban regime was weak both within Afghanistan and internationally. Secondly, the fanatical character of the bombing of the World Trade Center, and the persuasive evidence of links to Afghanistan, contributed to the

Taliban's loss of allies, especially Pakistan, and also meant that the world accepted the legitimate element of self-defence in the US-led campaign. Thirdly, the role on the ground of the US-supported forces of the Northern Alliance enabled the US-led bombing campaign to be effective rather than merely punitive, and then provided a basis for post-war administration.

In respect of Afghanistan some historians doubted whether any positive result could be achieved in the US-led campaign in late 2001. They could and in some cases did point out, very reasonably, that Afghanistan is not a country in which foreign armed forces have ever had a happy time; that there is good reason to be cautious about the prospects of changing Afghanistan's violent political culture; and that there are problems in waging a bombing campaign against so devious and elusive a target as a terrorist movement.

Sir Michael Howard, former Regius Professor of History at Oxford, criticised the Afghan war during its opening phase, when its main aspect was bombing rather than support for ground forces. In a lecture in London on 30 October 2001 (and subsequently published in *Foreign Affairs*), he said that it would be 'like trying to eradicate cancer cells with a blow-torch'.[40] Three months later, in a thoughtful reappraisal, he said: 'I got it wrong, and I apologize.'[41] Yet in a broader sense he did not get it entirely wrong. Despite the achievement of results in Afghanistan, historians have good reasons to be sceptical about the efficacy of military interventions as a response to terrorist campaigns. Howard's vivid image of hazardous use of the blow-torch may fit other cases, including Iraq since 2003, better than it fitted Afghanistan.

Iraq: war and its aftermath
The Iraq war of 2003 provides a very different context for exploring the question of whether invasion of states believed to assist terrorism is an effective way to achieve the aims of a counter-terrorist policy. The rhetoric of the 'war on terror', with its emphasis on open war, may be part of the explanation of the US-led assault on Iraq in 2003. In his television address of 17 March 2003 presenting Saddam Hussein with an ultimatum to get out of Iraq within 48 hours, President Bush included the statement that Iraq had 'aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of al-Qaeda'.[42] Yet in reality Iraq's links to al-Qaeda up to March 2003 appear to have been very limited. There were some Iraqi connections with terrorists, especially those involved in the Arab–Israel conflict, but Iraq does not appear to have had any significant part in the ruthless campaign of international terrorist attacks for which al-Qaeda had been seen as responsible. Within the US government, there was already in early 2003 some official awareness that the accusation of the link between Iraq and al-Qaeda was weak. When on 20 March 2003 the US government gave to the UN Security Council a letter

containing its justification for attacking Iraq, the letter dealt exclusively with Iraq's non-compliance with a range of UN Security Council resolutions on weapons issues. Terrorism was not even mentioned.[43]

Against this background, it is peculiar that the US government called the war in Iraq part of the 'war on terror', and issued medals for both the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns which are called 'the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal' (for those who served in Afghanistan or Iraq) and 'the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal' (for those whose service was elsewhere). Naturally, critics objected that the administration was 'subtly using the single campaign medal to buttress its contention that the war in Iraq was undertaken as part of the worldwide battle against al Qaeda and other Islamic extremists'.[44]

Overall, the Iraq war has probably done more harm than good to the US and UK efforts to combat terrorism. The principal criticisms of the use of force in Iraq are that certain of the stated grounds for going to war (especially violations of the UN resolutions on disarmament) have proved to be weak; that the planning for the aftermath of war was so feeble; that the results of the war have proved so violent; and that a perception has arisen that Western countries seek to force Muslim populations into a single, externally imposed political template, a perception that damages attempts at coalition-building.[45] Historians were right to warn, as Michael Howard did in interviews in March 2003, that Iraq might be easy to defeat in a military campaign, but would be difficult to occupy and administer. At least in terms of the struggle against terrorism the results so far of the Iraq war appear to be distressingly negative. There is much force in the criticism of Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson:

> The pattern of the first Iraq war, in which an overwhelming victory set aside the reservations of most sceptics, has failed to emerge in the aftermath of the second. If anything, scepticism has deepened.[46]

The presence and role of foreign (mainly US) armed forces in Iraq is cited as justification for terrorist bombings, kidnappings and executions there, and also in other countries. Critics seized on this point. As Richard Clarke argued, Bush 'launched an unnecessary and costly war in Iraq that strengthened the fundamentalist, radical Islamic terrorist movement worldwide'.[47]

There are, to be sure, grounds for questioning the generally negative picture of the results of the Iraq war. Within Iraq, the removal from office of Saddam Hussein was widely welcomed, and some still retain the hope that a stable democratic order can emerge slowly from the twisted wreckage of his brutal regime. The elections in January 2005, with participation of close to 60%

of those entitled to vote, strengthened hopes that something could be salvaged from the country's disasters. Outside Iraq, the war may have helped to induce an element of prudence in the conduct of policy of some governments.

One possible case is Libya. In December 2003 Colonel Gadhafi made his decision to bring Libya in from the cold, confirming his renunciation both of terrorism and of ambitions to develop nuclear weapons. Whether his decision owed anything to the Iraq war is debated. Although the process which bore fruit in December had begun long before the initiation of hostilities in Iraq in March 2003, it is possible that seeing a fellow Arab leader unceremoniously deposed may have helped to concentrate Gaddafi's mind. At the very least the Iraq War did not foreclose a highly significant policy development in Libya.

UK and US doctrine on military intervention

Iraq suggests a need to revisit the argument that attack is the best form of defence – an argument that had been expressed in two key documents of the 'war on terror', both issued in 2002. The UK *Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter* says: 'Experience shows that it is better where possible, to engage an enemy at longer range, before they get the opportunity to mount an assault on the UK.'[48] *The National Security Strategy of the United States* commits the United States to attack terrorist organisations by 'convincing or compelling states to accept their sovereign responsibilities'.[49] The implication here is that states won't get rid of terrorists on their soil, the United States will do it for them. The argument is buttressed by the more fundamental ideas that lack of democracy is a principal cause of terrorism, and that a forcible intervention could lead to the growth of a stable democratic system.

In addition to the questions about the circumstances in which democracy can be imposed from outside, there are three serious grounds of criticism of the proposition that terrorism should be attacked at source rather than warded off defensively.

Firstly, *it is a false choice.* However desirable it may be to engage the enemy at longer range, there is no substitute for defensive anti-terrorist and counter-terrorist activities. Granted the imperfections of intelligence, the multiplicity of possible sources of attack and the hazards of taking military action against sovereign states, it may not always be possible, or sensible, to attack terrorism at source. Meanwhile, much can be done at home to reduce the risk of terrorist attack. The astonishing casualness of US airport security before 11 September 2001 illustrates the point.

Secondly, *the history of counter-terrorist operations suggests no such simple conclusion.* True, some counter-terrorist operations have involved military action in states perceived to be the sources of, or providers of support to, terrorist movements. However, by no means all have been successful.

Furthermore, many counter-terrorist campaigns have been effectively conducted with only limited capacity to engage the enemy at longer range. For example, the UK and Malayan governments had to engage in the long struggle against terrorism without attacking the People's Republic of China, despite the fact that the PRC was aiding and abetting the communist terrorist movement in Malaya from 1949 onwards. Similarly, the UK government had to deal with terrorism in Northern Ireland without resorting to military action in the Republic of Ireland, despite claims that the Provisional IRA was deriving benefit from resources and support there – not to mention from communities in the United States.

> ## It is ill-advised to lunge into the mirage of empire

Thirdly, *it is a recipe for a revival of imperialism.* Military intervention in states in order to eliminate the sources of terrorism must inevitably mean, in many cases, exercising external domination for a period of decades. This was the pattern of much European colonialism in the nineteenth century, including in Egypt. By a perverse paradox, external control, intended to stop terrorism in its tracks, frequently has the effect of provoking it and providing a ready-made justification for it.

Paul Schroeder has argued persuasively that the United States can legitimately and sensibly aim to exercise hegemony, but it is ill-advised to lunge, on the basis of blinkered historical ignorance, into the mirage of empire. His conclusion is that America's leaders, because they are ignorant of the past, are actually stumbling backwards into it:

> What they are now attempting therefore is not a bold, untried American experiment in creating a brave new world, but a revival of a type of nineteenth and early-twentieth century imperialism that could succeed for a time then (with ultimately devastating consequences) only because of conditions long since vanished and now impossible to imagine reproducing. Launched now, this venture will fail and is already failing. Its advocates illustrate the dictum that those unwilling to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.[50]

Any assessment of the US and UK doctrines of intervention in response to terrorism has to differentiate between cases. On both legal and prudential grounds, there was a stronger case for intervention in Afghanistan than in Iraq. In particular, there was a real chance of reducing by such means Afghanistan's involvement in terrorism. An assessment must also be provisional, as eventual outcomes will necessarily affect judgements of the interventions. However, what is clear is that there was a curious and historically uninformed optimism

about the Iraq venture, which led to a lack of planning for those traditional consequences of distant empires – military occupation and counter-insurgency. Furthermore, the debate about intervention needs to be set in a larger context of an understanding of how terrorist campaigns end.

How do terrorist campaigns end?

The advocates of the 'war on terror' offer a limited vision of how the war might end. The focus is more on victory than other visions of possible endings, but it is victory of a special kind. Some elements of it were outlined in the White House *National Security Strategy* document of September 2002;[51] and they were further elaborated in the White House doctrinal statement of February 2003:

> Victory against terrorism will not occur as a single, defining moment. It will not be marked by the likes of the surrender ceremony on the deck of the USS Missouri that ended World War II. However, through the sustained effort to compress the scope and capability of terrorist organizations, isolate them regionally, and destroy them within state borders, the United States and its friends and allies will secure a world in which our children can live free from fear and where the threat of terrorist attacks does not define our daily lives.
>
> Victory, therefore, will be secured only as long as the United States and the international community maintain their vigilance and work tirelessly to prevent terrorists from inflicting horrors like those of September 11, 2001.[52]

In his State of the Union address on 3 February 2005, President Bush, while referring to the importance of 'eliminating the conditions that feed radicalism and ideologies of murder', reiterated the key central conception of offensive action as the main way to defeat terrorism: 'Our country is still the target of terrorists who want to kill many, and intimidate us all – and we will stay on the offensive against them, until the fight is won.'

Such glimpses of how victory might come about are essentially schematic and prescriptive rather than historical. They have an abstract and euphemistic quality. Because they leave little room for complexity, they have enabled some individuals to focus on the idea of destruction more than other possible mechanisms. When Timothy Garton Ash asked a very high US administration official how the 'war on terror' would end, he received the answer: 'With the elimination of the terrorists.'[53]

Such simple prescriptive views of how a terrorist campaign should end are also to be found in a book by two supporters of the Bush administration, David Frum and Richard Perle. Published in 2003, *An End to Evil: How*

to Win the War on Terror is modestly described by its authors as 'a manual for victory'.[54] This paean of praise for Bush's anti-terrorist policy is also a diatribe against all those allies and bureaucrats who fail to support it properly: 'While our enemies plot, our allies dither and carp, and much of our government remains ominously unready for the fight.'[55] What does it say about how terrorist campaigns end? Virtually nothing. In true American fashion, this is a 'How to' book which is full of hectoring instruction but which gives no clue about how terrorist campaigns actually end.

How past terrorist campaigns ended

The talk of 'winning' and 'victories' suggests a decisive result. Yet such a result is seldom encountered in counter-terrorist struggles. There is a need for much broader understanding, based on historical evidence, of how terrorist campaigns do in fact end.[56] The processes – some of them deeply flawed – by which terrorist campaigns end are far more complex than is suggested by the language of the 'war on terror'. They usually include what is part and parcel of the 'war on terror': debilitating losses to the terrorist movement caused by military action, arrests and trials. However, they can also involve any or all of the following five elements.

Firstly, *awareness on the part of terrorist movements that they are being defeated politically, or at least are not making gains.* The actions of terrorists usually fail to arouse the masses: indeed, they frequently cause antagonism in the very population whose support is sought. Such failures can often lead to defections and splits, and to a political decision by all or part of a terrorist movement or its political allies to move to a different phase of struggle or of political action.

In November 2004 it was reported that six senior members of the Basque separatist group ETA had called on the organisation from their prison cells to lay down its arms. In their letter they stated: 'Our political–military strategy has been overcome by repression … It is not a question of fixing the rear-view mirror or a burst tyre. It is the motor that does not work.' This letter was 'the closest Eta members have come to recognising that, after more than 30 years in which it has killed more than 800 people, the group is facing defeat'.[57]

Secondly, *recognition by governments which organised or assisted terrorism that they must renounce this method of pursuing a cause.* Such recognition may sometimes (as in the case of Libya in 2003) be coupled with compensation to the families of victims of terrorist acts.

Thirdly, *the amelioration of conditions in order to weaken the strength and legitimacy of their support.* Such amelioration is something in which messianic terrorists have no interest. It may include a change in the political context, which side-steps some of the issues that provided grist to the mill of the

terrorist movement, provides new opportunities for pursuing its aims in a different manner, or emphasises a new range of attainable goals of general appeal, for example in the field of human rights.

Fourthly, *the holding of genuine multi-party elections.* Democratic procedures, especially where there are safeguards for minorities, can undercut terrorist claims to speak for a specific nation or section of society.

Fifthly, *a shared awareness of stalemate, giving both sides a possible incentive to reach a negotiated or tacit settlement involving mutual concessions.* This may encompass a recognition by its adversaries that the terrorist movement, however criminal its actions, did represent a serious cause and constituency – leading to a reluctant acceptance that certain concessions should be made to some positions held by terrorists.

Sometimes terrorist campaigns wind down rather than end. They may degenerate into mafia-like activities, including kidnappings for ransom, drug trafficking and bank robberies. Or a few terrorist leaders, hidden in a jungle or a city, maintain their faith, even continue to plot or to detonate the occasional bomb, but lose completely their following and their impact.[58]

In some cases the combatants, or at least a proportion of them, may be retrained. This happened in Guatemala following the civil war of the 1980s and 1990s. The former Marxist guerrillas, who had been called terrorists by their enemies, received extensive retraining at a centre in Quetzaltenango. When I visited it in 1997, the work of the centre, supported mainly by European funds, appeared to be effective, the main concern being whether there would be jobs for the suitably retrained guerrillas.

Not all these processes whereby terror campaigns end are relevant to the current struggle against al-Qaeda and other terrorist movements. However, we do need a greater sense that terrorist campaigns, while they may go on for a long time, do eventually end; and do so not because every last terrorist is captured or killed, or because they are comprehensively defeated in military operations, or because there is a clear victory, but rather because terrorism is seen for what it is: a highly problematic means of bringing about change. It cannot be the sole basis for a movement, it often damages the very people in whose name it is waged, and it may burn itself out or backfire on its own authors.

UK policy to eliminate terrorism as a force in international affairs
On the ending of terrorist campaigns, UK policy is subtly different from that of the United States. It is also flawed, but in a different way. The key UK statement of doctrine about terrorism, published in July 2002, *The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter,* says that the goal of the government's efforts is 'to eliminate terrorism as a force in international affairs'.[59] This is a carefully thought-out phrase, and of course it is properly recognised that 'countering

terrorism is usually a long-term business requiring the roots and causes to be addressed as well as the symptoms'.[60] Nonetheless, there are two main disadvantages to proclaiming as a goal 'the elimination of terrorism as a force in international affairs'.

Firstly, *terrorism is notoriously difficult to 'eliminate'*. The proclamation of this goal is not only unrealistic, but it also undermines one of the strongest arguments against terrorism – namely that, once started, it easily becomes endemic. The unofficial, decentralised and hydra-headed character of terrorism provides the main explanation for the difficulty of eliminating it.

Secondly, *if 'elimination' is the proclaimed goal, then every subsequent terrorist incident represents a victory for the terrorists*. The UK faced this problem in Northern Ireland. A number of government pronouncements in the 1970s and early 1980s had indicated the UK's aim was the complete ending of terrorist activity. Thereafter, every terrorist assault, including the IRA's mainland campaign, had a possible added bonus of 'proving' that the government had failed to achieve its proclaimed goal. Eventually the UK's aims were restated in more modest terms as being the reduction of terrorist activities: this was accepted by the public with remarkably little complaint, and may have helped in the slow winding down of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Main lines of criticism

Any conclusions about how a historical perspective may affect views of the 'war on terror' must begin by acknowledging that this extraordinary 'war' is unique in having achieved something, however incomplete, in military operations in Afghanistan; in having put the full weight and ingenuity of the United States into the struggle; and in having involved a remarkable degree of international collaboration, much of which has survived the fall-out over Iraq. This struggle is not a single campaign, but is highly variegated. The responses to certain events, such as the Bali and Madrid bombings, have been much less military in character than the responses to other outrages. The overall verdict is not entirely negative.

Yet, against a background of the long historical record of the subject, six main lines of criticism of the US-led international campaign arise.

Firstly, the title and language of the so-called 'war on terror' is misleading. It conjures up the image and expectation of open war being a major and recurrent part of the action against international terrorist movements; and it suggests the unrealisable aim of the complete elimination of terrorist movements. There is a need for words to describe the overall policy with regard to terrorism that convey toughness but do not rely so heavily on the imagery of war. The core idea has to be a vigorous and sustained countering of terrorist threats, involving action at many levels, and aimed

at achieving a significant reduction and marginalisation of terrorist activities. A better term, more accurate if less dramatic, would be 'international campaign against terrorism'. It may not be too late to use this term in at least partial substitution for 'war on terror'.

Secondly, the 'war on terror' risks becoming an exercise in latter-day imperialism. There is a need for intervention in certain societies, but it needs to be handled with extraordinary skill and care. The risk of stumbling into a colonial role is especially great because in US political culture there is a caricature vision of European colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In consequence it is believed, erroneously, that nothing the United States does today could remotely resemble such deplorable European practices. Yet to many the similarities are all too real. The irony of the situation is that foreign rule, especially foreign military occupation, is notoriously a producer of terrorist movements.

It does not make sense to give terrorists more credit than they deserve

Thirdly, some official statements made in the course of the 'war on terror' have inadvertently credited terrorist movements with a greater capacity to achieve intended results than can be justified on the basis of the record. For example, in several passages the UK *Strategic Defence Review* states or implies that international terrorist attacks have 'the potential for strategic effect'.[61] This phrase is used for a good reason – to avoid implying that it is essential to tackle absolutely all terrorist movements everywhere simultaneously and with equal vigour – but it is flawed. It ignores the important distinction between *intended* and *actual* strategic effect. Although terrorist actions frequently have major effects, they are seldom those that the terrorists intended. It does not make sense to give terrorists more credit than they deserve for the size and capacity of their organisations, for the accuracy of their political calculations, or for the effectiveness of their actions.

Fourthly, the history of counter-terrorist operations in the twentieth century suggests that in the long struggle against terrorism, four assets are important:

- public confidence in official decision-making;
- public confidence in the intelligence on which that decision-making is based;
- operation with respect for a framework of law;
- a willingness to address some of the problems that have contributed to the emergence of terrorism.

Tragically, all of these assets risk being undermined by many events connected with the 'war on terror', especially the 2003 intervention in Iraq and the subsequent insurgency.

Fifthly, the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, of which there has been much evidence in the 'war on terror', is, to quote Talleyrand, worse than a crime: it is a mistake. Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib have provided propaganda gifts to adversaries.

Sixthly, the international campaign against terrorism stands in need of a more realistic vision of how terrorist campaigns end than the simple picture of the elimination or incarceration of terrorists.

On the basis of the historical record, some positive recommendations can be advanced about the most appropriate basic aims and character of the international campaign against terrorism. The struggle should be presented, not just as a fight against evil or as a defence of free societies, but also as a fight against tragically erroneous ideas. It should be seen as a means of ensuring that the societies from whence terrorism comes do not succumb to endemic violence. An important aim must be, not the capture of every last terrorist leader, but their relegation to a status of near-irrelevance as life moves on, long-standing grievances are addressed, and peoples can see that a grim terrorist war of attrition is achieving little and damaging their own societies. It needs to encompass close attention to after-care in societies that have been torn apart by terrorism.

The problem of terrorism can diminish over time. Such diminution will require continued resolution and toughness, including arrests, trials and a willingness to take military action where appropriate. It will also require a patient and more prudent approach that would mark a departure from certain major aspects of what we have seen so far in the 'war on terror'. Above all, the international campaign against terrorism needs to take account of the long history of terror and counter-terror – and of the way historians have understood it.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1]   UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, UN doc A/59/565, 2 December 2004, paragraph 164(d).

[2]   This is the conclusion, for example, of two exceptionally thorough and impressive US studies of the Vietcong published during the war: Douglas Pike, *Vietcong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966); and Nathan Leites, *The Vietcong Style of Politics*, Rand Memorandum RM-5487-1-ISA/ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1969).

[3]   Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 324.

[4]   General Bernard Montgomery said of US policy in Vietnam: 'The US has broken the second rule of war. That is, don't go fighting with your land army on the mainland of Asia. Rule One is don't march on Moscow. I developed these two rules myself.' Alun Chalfont, *Montgomery of Alamein* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, [1976]), p. 318.

[5]   John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004). See also John Lewis Gaddis, 'And Now This: Lessons from the Old Era for the New One', in Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda (eds), *The Age of Terror: America and the World After September 11* (Oxford: Perseus Press, 2001), pp. 1–22.

[6]   Bruce Maxwell, *Terrorism: A Documentary History* (Washington DC: CQ Press, [2003]). The documents in this book cover only a 30-year period, 'from 1972, when international terrorism bust into the public consciousness with live TV pictures of Palestinian terrorists holding Israeli athletes hostage at the Munich Olympics'. In some countries the public was aware of terrorism decades, or even centuries, earlier.

[7]   Michael Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

[8]   See e.g. David C. Rapoport, 'The International World as Some Terrorists Have Seen It: A Look at a Century of Memoirs', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 10, no. 4, December 1987, pp. 32–58.

[9]   Col. Charles Lacheroy, 'La guerre révolutionnaire', talk on 2 July 1957 reprinted in *La Défense Nationale*, Paris, 1958, p. 322; cited in Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), p. 15. Paret comments that 'nothing', in this case, means 'the secure existence of the *status quo*'.

[10] See e.g. Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, [1987]). Also Professor Michael Howard, 'What's in a Name? How to Fight Terrorism', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2002, pp. 9–13.

[11] Monument 'erected to commemorate the glorious heroes of the Machine Gun Corps who Fell in the Great War (1914–1918)', Hyde Park Corner, London. As the monument's inscription notes, the Machine Gun Corps was formed on 14 October 1915, and its last unit was disbanded on 15 July 1922. The quotation is from 1 Samuel 18: 7.

12 A good example is Ratko Parezanin, a member of the Young Bosnia movement in 1914 and a friend of Gavril Princip, the assassin of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914. Parezanin's memoirs, published in 1974, are mentioned below (note 15).

13 Robert A. Pape, 'The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 3, August 2003, p. 357.

14 Murray Clark Havens, Carl Leiden and Karl M. Schmitt, *The Politics of Assassination* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, [1978]), p. 153.

15 See the remarkable and detailed memoir by a fellow-student in the Young Bosnia movement who was a friend of Princip, Ratko Parezanin, *Mlada Bosna I prvi svetski rat* [Young Bosnia and the First World War] (Munich: Iskra, 1974). The book was published on the 60th anniversary of the Sarajevo assassination. A useful short report is Iain Macdonald, 'Sarajevo: When a Teenager with a Gun Sent the World to War', *Times*, 28 June 1974, p. 18.

16 Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1976), p. 811; drawing on N. D. Valeriano and C. T. R. Bohannan, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations: The Philippine Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

17 Lawrence Durrell, *Bitter Lemons* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956), p. 216.

18 Gaddis, 'And Now This', p. 20.

19 Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 52. From 1957 to 1961 the author was successively deputy secretary and secretary for defence in Malaya. As his and other accounts make clear, in the course of the Malayan Emergency there were certain derogations from human-rights standards, including detentions and compulsory relocations of villages.

20 For a fuller account, see Adam Roberts, 'The Laws of War in the War on Terror', in Paul Wilson (ed.), *International Law and the War on Terrorism*, US Naval War College, International Law Studies, vol. 79 (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2003), pp. 175–230.

21 Roland Gaucher, *The Terrorists: From Tsarist Russia to the OAS*, trans. Paula Spurlin (London: Secker & Warburg, [1965]), pp. 10–11.

22 Laqueur, *Age of Terrorism*, p. 33.

23 The key document in this process was Lord Gardiner's minority report in *Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors Appointed to Consider Authorized Procedures for the Interrogation of Persons Suspected of Terrorism*, Cmnd. 4901 (London: HMSO, March 1972). His minority report was accepted by the government, as announced by Prime Minister Edward Heath in the House of Commons on 2 March 1972.

24 Donald Rumsfeld roundtable with radio media, 15 January 2002, available at http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t01152002_t0115sdr.html.

25 The problematic character of defining the 'war on terror' as one of good vs evil is recognised in Talbott and Chanda, *The Age of Terror*, p. xiv.

26 Laqueur, *Age of Terrorism*, pp. 36-8.

27 Régis Debray, *Undesirable Alien*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Allen Lane, 1978), pp. 121, 123 and 172. first published as *L'Indésirable* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975).

28 This may be literally true, although reports of information by detainees given during interrogation need to be treated with extreme caution. According to numerous reports, Abu Zubaydah (a Palestinian captured in Pakistan in 2002 who was allegedly Osama bin Laden's chief of operations) told his interrogators in Guantanamo that terrorists might be taking clues from the film *Godzilla*, which had been remade in 1998 and showed a monster attack on Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty. Timothy W. Maier, 'Has FBI Cried Wolf Too Often?', *Insight on the News*, 5 August 2002, available at http://www.insightmag.com/news/2002/08/26.

29 On possible connections between southern California and religious radicalism see the brief references in Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 10 and 38. Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), when he was in California in the 1950s, was deeply influenced by the Western culture that he opposed as degenerate and corrupt.

30 President George W. Bush, remarks from the *USS Abraham Lincoln* at sea off the coast of San Diego, California, 1 May 2003.

31 President George W. Bush, speech to Congress, 20 September 2001.

32 President George W. Bush, radio address to the nation, 29 September 2001, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/.

33 The White House, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington DC: February 2003), p. 1.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

35 Paul W. Schroeder, 'The Risks of Victory: An Historian's Provocation', *The National Interest*, no. 66, Winter 2001–02, p. 22.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–9. See also Schroeder's article warning against the likely effects of an attack in the Middle East, 'Iraq: The Case Against Preemptive War', *The American Conservative*, vol. 8, no. 20, October 2002, available at http://www.amconmag.com/10_21/iraq.html.

37 While no UN Security Council resolution specifically authorised the US-led military operations in Afghanistan, several resolutions passed both before and after 11 September 2001 provided a significant degree of support for such action. Resolution 1189 of 13 August 1998 had emphasised the responsibility of Afghanistan to stop terrorist activities on its territory. Resolution 1368 of 12 September 2001 recognised 'the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence in accordance with the Charter', condemned the attacks of the previous day, and stated that the Council 'regards such acts, like any act of international terrorism, as a threat to international peace and security'. It also expressed the Council's 'readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and to combat all forms of terrorism'. These key points were reiterated in Resolution 1373 of 28 September 2001, which additionally placed numerous requirements on all states to bring the problem of terrorism under control.

38 Donald Rumsfeld, cited in news report by Brian Knowlton, *International Herald Tribune*, 8 October 2001, p. 1.

39 Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (London: Simon & Schuster UK, 2004), p. 274.

40 Michael Howard, lecture in London on 30 October 2001, reported in Tania Branigan, 'Al-Qaida is Winning War, Allies Warned', *Guardian*, 31 October 2001. The lecture was the basis of Howard, 'What's in a Name?'

41 His reappraisal was in 'September 11 and After: Reflections on the War Against Terrorism', a lecture at University College London, 29 January 2002.

42 President George W. Bush, speech from the White House, 17 March 2003.

43 The stated reason for going to war in March 2003 was 'Iraq's continued material breaches of its disarmament obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions.' Letter dated 20 March 2003 from the Permanent Representative of the USA, John Negroponte, to the president of the UN Security Council.

44 Vernon Loeb, 'Medals Couple Two Conflicts: Critics Seek Separate Awards for Afghanistan, Iraq Fighting', *Washington Post*, 6 January 2004.

45 Jonathan Stevenson, *Counter-Terrorism: Containment and Beyond*, Adelphi Paper 367 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 2004), pp. 108–113.

46 Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, 'The Sources of American Legitimacy', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 83, no. 6, November/December 2004, p. 18.

47 Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, p. x.

48 UK Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter*, Cm. 5566 vols. I and II (London: HMSO, July 2002), vol. I, p. 9.

49 The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, DC, September 2002, p. 6.

50 Paul W. Schroeder, 'The Mirage of Empire Versus the Promise of Hegemony', in Paul W. Schroeder, *Systems, Stability and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe*, ed. David Wetzel, Robert Jervis and Jack S. Levy (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 305.

51 *National Security Strategy of the United States*, pp. 5–7.

52 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, p. 12. This was the text under the heading 'Victory in the War against Terror'.

53 This answer was given by a senior administration official in Washington DC on 10 December 2002, as reported in Timothy Garton Ash, *Free World: Why a Crisis of the West Reveals the Opportunity of our Time* (London and New York: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 126.

54 David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, [2003]), p. 9.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

56 A useful distillation of conclusions on how terrorist campaigns end may be found in Adrian Guelke, *The Age of Terrorism and the International Political System* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), pp. 180–81.

57 Giles Tremlett, 'Old Guard Urges End to Eta Terror', *Guardian*, 3 November 2004, p. 15.

58 In 1987, nearly 40 years after the declaration of a state of emergency in Malaya, and over 35 years after the Malayan Communist Party decided to end the armed struggle (a decision that had been announced on 1 October 1951), some 600 guerrillas laid down their arms and started a new life as farmers in southern Thailand. Michael Fathers, 'Communist "Bandits" Lay Down Arms in Malaysia', *Independent,* 8 June 1987.

59 *New Chapter*, vol. I, pp. 4 and 7.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 7.