## Conference on the Study of Religion and Terrorism

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## The Role of Diplomacy In Combating Religious Terrorism

**By Paul Schulte**

*There was a fashion during this morning's conference session to begin remarks with imposing cultural quotations. I can't match Pascal, but I will offer a snatch of Leonard Cohen "there's a war between those who think there is a war/ and those who think there isn't." I shall be speaking, therefore, from a policy maker's perspective, about the responses of those who don't believe that there need be a religious war at all but who certainly don't intend to lose one. Although I have served as a British Defence official, my comments about how this can best be achieved, like all other statements at this conference, are of course entirely personal.*

Diplomacy is a notoriously worldly activity and it is not at first sight obvious how it can affect terrorists who claim to be acting in the name of God, without concern for earthly outcomes or indeed personal survival. But I shall argue that, precisely because it works largely by unimpassioned national adjustments to international tensions, it is indispensable to coordinate the global set of responses necessary to deal with the lethal passions of the religiously intoxicated.

Religious Terrorism, however vile and murderous, will not be relevant to Diplomacy if it remains a largely domestic affair, as mostly at present with Terror in the names of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism. The main transnational form of

religious terror is that now practised in the name of Islam. But other forms should not be excluded in the future

Those who now stand against religious terror, including hundreds of millions of humane, sensible and entirely non-fanatical Moslems, many of them citizens of non-Moslem states, have huge resources and possibilities. By applying them systematically and diplomatically it is not impossible — though it is far too early to be complacent — that we can in time thwart, reduce and marginalize Al Qaeda and related groups to the status of failed death cults, attempting a doomed revolt against historical change like, say, the Ghost Dancers or the Boxer or Mahdist Rebellions. That should surely be our goal.

**RESPONSES**

I shall suggest 7 main ways in which systematic efforts need to be made – Dissuasion, Disarmament, Denial, Disruption, Detection, Deterrence, and Defence. Some of these are new, some we should be doing anyway, many of them reinforce each other; others may sometimes conflict. They all need attending to. Different international actors, even if close allies, will differ in their reliance on and their application of the various responses. Differences derive from alternative priorities, worldviews, historical experiences, and national capabilities. There may be differences between America and Europe, which we shall have to face up to and understand. In particular because there is, as we have heard here today, no agreed or understanding of the origins of religious terror, we should not expect or try to insist on any single approach to dealing with it. We should of course be extremely concerned to discover the fundamental causes, which have given, rise to Bin Laden and al Qaeda. But the nature and current

standing of the human sciences do not entitle us to expect that any transformative breakthrough in understanding them will be achieved in the near future.

Diplomacy's overarching contribution to counter terrorism is to bridge those differences in diagnosis and prescription sufficiently to allow more or less smoothly evolving and concerted collective action.  But more broadly, in its own right, in brokering general international political progress, Diplomacy should aim at creating a climate in which extreme tensions are less likely to arise and to be given religious expression.

I shall now review seven main directions of effort, trying wherever possible to illustrate the practical Embassy objectives, the kind of things which diplomats specifically try to do, to further each one.

First, then, in roughly reverse order of concreteness

**"Non military Dissuasion"**

By this I mean the totality of peaceful attempts at resolving, moderating or at least detoxifying conflicts by cultivating 'hearts and minds', through political or economic measures which would reduce the risk that anyone would script themselves as a martyred activist in a cosmic war justifying mass murder – or at least minimizes their support, if they do.  World wide efforts to respond to injustice and dissolve root causes will be prudent and even morally necessary, but also slow and difficult.

Precise *Discrimination* between causes, doctrines and factions will be important, but so too will be *Non Discrimination* on irrelevant racial or religious grounds. Ideally this should form part of far sighted classic Diplomacy, which would again ideally, and

above all, end interminable, brutalizing, humiliating, and religiously polarizing inter-communal or Separatist territorial disputes like Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir or Northern Ireland.

*Public diplomacy* too is increasingly important to reach potentially alienated audiences. There are already broadcasts in Arabic or Malay or other relevant languages by a number of Western countries and the U.S. has recently set out a much reported new Arabic station, Radio Sawa, which is specifically aimed at the youthful audiences whose attitudes will be crucial. All of this effort will contribute to interfaith *Dialogue,* which we need to attempt very seriously. But if we are to remain intellectually honest, we should not forget that dialogue has so far historically favored the West's ingenious relativism and increasingly its huge cultural, intellectual and economic weight in the world. We are not likely to be changed by such a dialogue. Our favored means of disposing of enemies is to assimilate them. We should not, unfortunately, therefore expect our opponents to play our favorite persuasive language games, anymore than we should expect them to fight us physically in our preferred open hi tech ways. The insistence of Bin Laden's mentor, Sheik Azzam there that there should be "No Negotiations, No Conferences, No Dialogue. Only Jihad and the Rifle" was not irrational from his sectarian viewpoint of thwarted triumphalism.

But *we* should remain keenly interested in mixtures of altruism and propaganda and in the possible confluence of far–sighted political initiatives, enlightened and authentic Islamic theology, information operations and intelligent aid, trade and development policies. There are truthful and important messages, which should be publicly conveyed about the amount of investment, tourism, and growth in the developing world which are lost by each act of serious political violence, and who the losers are.

Overall, on this dimension, I think we can neither give up hearts and minds efforts nor rely much on them for early effect.  It may never be possible to dissuade some present and future fanatics.  But we need to carry on with soft, fuzzy, and indirect measures such as aid, assistance, birth control programs, pressure on international financial institutions to promote and insist on economic reform.  Similarly, it is important to persist with constructive political involvement, in assisting political evolution, pressing for democratic opening and in turn persuading religious parties to normalize their part in local political processes and for their governments to support and accept this.  All these things are worthwhile in themselves and can also help legitimate and leverage some of the harder responses I'll come on to.

Secondly there is

**"Disarmament"**

I will mention briefly the obvious desirability of strengthening global legal and moral taboos on the possession or use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).  Terrorists don't sign disarmament treaties.  But the fewer such weapons and materials possessed by states the less chance they will become available for terrorism.  And it is religious terrorists who seem most likely to be interested in chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) methods for creating apocalyptic events.  Progress in detente, strategic transparency and arms-control might help "deapocalypticfy" the world. These considerations have strong topical implications.  They argue inescapably, I think, for acting decisively to force Iraq to give up its prohibited weapons. The alternative is successful defiance of repeated UN resolutions and a progressive

collapse of the credibility of Disarmament obligations Religious terrorists in the longer term would thrive in such a rapidly proliferating world.

My Third proposed response is

## **"Denial"**

In a related sense, we need obviously to <u>deny</u> terrorists and state sponsors WMD materials.  The best-established method is through Export Control arrangements like the Australia Group, which in turn gain their foundation and justification from Disarmament Treaties.  We need to keep strengthening, extending and adjusting controls as technologies keep developing, and to reduce and better safeguard fissile material and other dangerous stocks throughout the world, through diplomatically coordinated and expensive measures like the Co-operative Threat Reduction Program in Russia.

More generally we have to deny financial and military resources to religious and other terrorists, especially flows across borders.  This will require enhanced International Corporation in tracking and blocking the funds of illicit networks with new or newly effective regulations or laws as necessary.  Practical diplomatic steps here will include targeted intelligence led, and multi nationally co-ordinated, prosecutions and asset freezes, together with aid in training of local bank or Treasury officials, and of police, paramilitary forces or coastguards.

Still more importantly, we need to actively deny <u>space</u> for bases and infrastructure facilities for terrorists, like the Al Qaeda laboratories discovered in Kabul. Diplomatically it has proved possible to enlist governments like that of Pakistan and

the Central Asian states into a wholesale commitment to prevent their territories being used as terrorist based areas. More far reachingly, it is apparent that we cannot any longer safely ignore endless civil conflicts or allow failing states to decompose into black holes on the map. Who knows now what pathological developments may emerge from them? So we need better 'global security hygiene' to sanitize the sites from which Terrorism can be expected to spread. This implies generous assistance in national capacity building and improved humanitarian assistance. Encouragingly, that would overlap benignly with dissuasion and the struggle for hearts and minds.

Fourth comes

## **"Disruption"**

We are now agonizingly alerted to the need to act vigorously against preparations for mass casualty terror. Strong pre-emptive international police or, if necessary, military action, will be necessary to rip up terrorist networks anywhere in the world as we become aware of them, because distances from our homelands now give little security. But disruption will often have to be achieved through local, sometimes very foreign, governments, which will put a premium on diplomacy and coalition building. Clumsy or over emphasized disruption operations may damage hearts and minds efforts. Judicious diplomatic consultation could help avoid the appearance, and perhaps the reality, of being drawn into a spiral of atrocity and revenge, which would be just what the terrorists would desire.

But the future intensity of Religious Terrorism *may* (and I emphasize may) call for what one of my Harvard colleagues, Chuck Cogan, calls an "Offensive Hunt" strategy, very possibly inside the territory of states which are either sympathetic to the

terrorists, as in Talibanised Afghanistan, or unable to contain them with their own resources, as apparently in present day Yemen.

Modifications of traditional concepts of sovereignty may be needed in more and more cases such as the recent Predator attack with Hell Fire missiles in Yemen. Clearly, authentic international co-operation over basing and over flight and the acceptance of offensive anti-terrorist operations will be important - and not necessarily easy to achieve. We might say in general that Diplomacy will be needed to mitigate the stopping power of international boundaries in acting against terror. The more states signed up to coalition action, the more legitimacy there will be for measures which infringe or override national sovereignty.

Perhaps equally important, but less high profile, in disrupting terrorist activity and reducing the hate which powers it, will be the cultivation of bilateral relationships with host governments, the building of intelligence cases against key religious rabble-rousers and activists in order to persuade the local authorities to act against them. Painstaking negotiation of extradition and mutual legal assistance treaties and the cultivation of a co-operative atmosphere in which they will be effectively applied will further add to the success of Disruption by legal process.

## "Deterrence"

We should also be interested in deterring terrorism through justified fear of its consequences. Everyone accepts that suicidal terrorist operatives may be undeterrable when launched on their mission. But their leaderships, or the leaders of sponsoring states, will notice that some nations and individual targets are less rewarding in their

vulnerabilities or (deterrence by denial) or more dangerous in their anticipated reactions (deterrence by retaliation) than others.

This second kind of deterrence, at least, depends upon credible coercive military capabilities and strong unmistakable signals of willingness to use them. There are good grounds for optimism about this. The military success of the US led coalition, with near global diplomatic support, in terminating the Taliban regime in a particularly remote, rugged and inaccessible country has been the best possible precedent. It will help to deter other regimes from being tempted into the dangerous game of sponsoring terrorists. Increasing US global military predominance from huge new investments will further raise the strategic credibility of the deterrent response by military means.

The more states beyond the present 69 who choose to commit themselves to the Coalition against Terror and whose representatives join the "coalition village" down at Centcom headquarters at Tampa, the greater the political legitimacy of current and possible coalition operations and the greater the overall deterrent effect. Geostrategically too, the basing of coalition forces in forward locations like Djibouti will increase both the military and political leverage with which those states thinking of sponsoring Terror would have to reckon. The agreement there of basing arrangements with the local authorities and the French government has been a soft diplomatic move, which has contributed to the hard response of Deterrence.

Sixth is

## **Detection**

I think this is important enough to be in a category in itself but Denial, Disruption, Deterrence and Defence will also gain from investment in excellent police, human intelligence and technical detection capabilities which can find and stop individuals and penetrate networks before they strike or catch and convict them afterwards.

The primary importance of human intelligence is obvious and it is often randomly obtained through contacts or family connections by different national services. So sharing amongst all those committed to combating terrorists would always in theory be a good idea. Yet intelligence agencies do not easily give away material, which might in any way risk revealing their sources or which might in time profitably be traded for nuggets of special interest to them. Just because the overall threat from Terrorism has risen does not mean, given the special economics of intelligence sharing, that intelligence agencies will therefore become automatically more inclined to share their products. They certainly will not do so if the diplomatic atmosphere between the other states concerned is not encouraging.

Technological improvements may be an important and non–obvious factor. International information sharing and improved data analysis capabilities should help the early recognition of patterns of movement, of association and of behavior by more and more sensors (including human agents) across the world. Consider face recognition systems matching images collected from cameras in Peshawar with crowds emerging from the New York subway. Science fiction possibilities will not be fully realizable without diplomatic encouragement and facilitation.

Seventh, if all else fails, there is

## "Defence"

Since 9/11 most western countries have publicized improved efforts in national defences against Mass Casualty Terrorist attack. Police, Military, Medical, Scientific, Legal and Administrative precautions and preparations are necessary but expensive and hard to practice. Many of these issues are essentially national responsibilities. But there will remain a constant need to ensure that collective arrangements between allies are as effective as they could be over matters like air space management, especially in Europe, where events over any one country could become the problem of neighbors in just a few minutes' flying time. Similarly, allies owe it to their people to ensure that assistance in the consequence management of major terrorist incidents, especially and above all, biological attacks with contagious agents, is arranged as effectively as possible in advance, without being impeded by a dogmatic over-concern about institutional frameworks, whether NATO or EU.

## A Sense Of Proportion

But there is one final perspective I want to emphasize: we should preserve or develop an international sense of proportion. The risk of serious outbreaks of Religious Terrorism is real. 'Megalomaniacal Hyperterrorism' like 11 September is a demonstrated possibility. But it will not necessarily be likely or frequent or technically successful. Even entirely ruthless terrorist leaderships may have strong practical or prudential reasons not to escalate to these levels, and as I have argued, we can and should strengthen those reasons. If we become generally culturally obsessed with worst-case possibilities, terrorists achieve an automatic success of a kind. They prove that their variously motivated cosmic wars are the main reality of the planet. While we should not be complacent, we should not let our imaginations or policy

decisions become overshadowed by this threat, among the many complexities we face.

For citizens of almost all societies, the realistic chance of occurrence or actuarial probability of falling casualty to Terrorism will be very small, though it will even so almost certainly be grossly exaggerated.

Let me end by zooming further out.  For the rest of human history most of us will be living in dense, complex, technically proficient, globally interconnected societies. Borders will matter less and less.  Human beings will go throwing up fundamental value disputes perhaps around issues we can't yet imagine (I would hazard a personal guess that controversial reproductive or bio modification technologies, inequality, race and mutated religious will be the most likely brew this century).

From this perspective, Religious Terrorism- even mass casualty terrorism – is just one more kind of network perturbation.  So we should plan systematically for trouble.  We should try holistically to identify, dissuade, disarm, disrupt and deter threats before they reach us, to deny our self declared enemies resources, to defend against them, but expect that bad unexpected things <u>will</u> go on happening. For this, the contribution of diplomacy will be far too important to the left only to professional diplomats. Diplomacy will have to be flexible and far-seeing enough to ensure that our total worldly response to Religious Terrorism is as global, effective, enlightened, energetic and coordinated as possible. That would be true worldly wisdom - and it need not exclude the other kind.