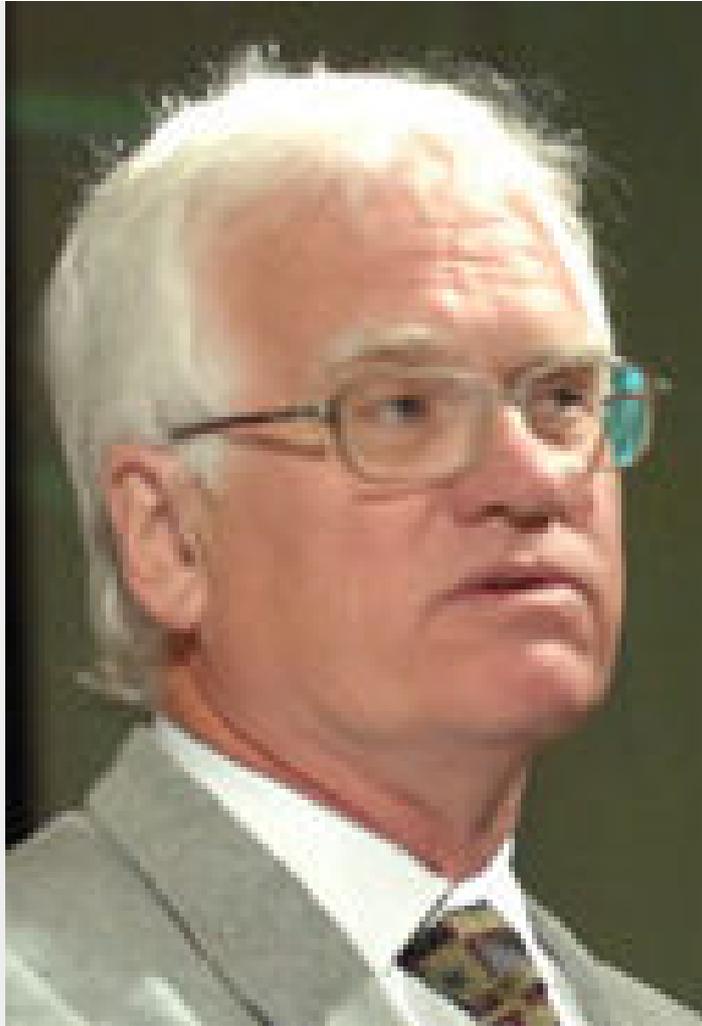


WEST NEEDS NEW STRATEGY ON TERROR

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By Thomas Walkom, [The Toronto Star](#), 9 January 2010

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A new strategy is needed.

The failed strategy is based on two principles: Hunt down the terrorists; protect the homeland. It is classic military doctrine, articulated after 9/11 by former U.S. president George W. Bush as part of what he called his war on terror.

His successor, Barack Obama, has left this military emphasis fundamentally unaltered.

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And if we were engaged in a normal fight against a defined enemy, this strategy and these remarks would suffice.

But we are not. In this struggle, every military action by the West creates only more terrorists. Bush's invasion of Iraq led to Al Qaeda terrorists establishing themselves there. His proxy war (carried out by Ethiopia) against the Islamists of Somalia created an even fiercer Islamist insurgency.

The West's war against the Taliban of Afghanistan created the Taliban of Pakistan.

Along the way, these wars also led a small group of Britons to bomb the London underground and at least one confessed Canadian terrorist to plan attacks in Toronto.

Now Obama is under pressure to expand the war more forcefully into Yemen, the country where alleged Christmas bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab is said to have been trained. If this happens, the precedents are ominous.

On the home front, defensive measures have almost certainly prevented a repeat of the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington. In that sense, they have worked.

But the case of Abdulmutallab, who allegedly tried to blow up a Detroit-bound jet with explosives hidden in his underwear, illustrates the limitations of that approach.

Indeed, every new air travel restriction creates new opportunities for those determined to terrorize.

When airport security banned box cutters, the terrorists tried explosive-laden shoes. When that was met with a requirement that passengers remove their footwear, the terrorists developed a scheme to mix carry-on explosive liquids. When shampoo bottles were banned from flights, they conceived the underwear bomb.

In August, one terrorist hid explosives in his rectum in an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate a Saudi prince.

What's next? The toupee bomb? Will terrorists take a lesson from drug smugglers and swallow explosive-filled condoms? Will airline passengers be forced to endure colonoscopies or MRIs before boarding a flight?

To raise these questions is to acknowledge the terrorists' achievement. Even their failures succeed, in that every attempt results in more expensive and intrusive countermeasures by the state as well as more fear on the part of Western populations.

For remember: The aim of terrorists is to terrify. Fear of death is more effective than death itself.

An effective anti-terror strategy would be based on four principles.

First, terrorism itself must be demystified. It is not new. It is not unique to Islam, nor is it necessarily an existential threat. It is simply a very old tactic – stretching back to the Zealots of ancient Judea who assassinated both Roman occupation forces and suspected Jewish collaborators.

These days, terrorism is associated with so-called non-state actors like Al Qaeda. But historically, most terror has been committed by states: The Romans themselves in Judea; the French revolutionaries who used the guillotine to remove rivals; the Soviet authorities who set secret police against their own citizens, the Argentine generals of the 1970s intent on "disappearing" their political opponents.

In most cases, state terrorism is harder to combat than its non-state counterpart.

Which brings us to the second principle of an effective anti-terror strategy: Terrorists are not nuts. Sadly, most are all too sane.

To disparage terrorists as freedom-haters and cowards is neither helpful nor accurate. As Al Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden pointed out in 2004, if he truly hated freedom, he would attack Sweden.

But he does not. Instead, he attacks the U.S. – not because American women wear short skirts but because he has a beef against Washington's actions in the Arabian peninsula.

That's why it is important to grapple with the causes of terrorism, with the nature of these beefs. That doesn't necessarily mean acquiescing to the terrorists' demands.

But it does mean understanding what they are. And in some cases it may mean striking deals.

This leads to a third principle: In most cases, the solutions to terror are political rather than military.

In 1930s and `40s, Britain fought a fierce campaign against Zionist terrorists in Palestine before, finally, agreeing to a Jewish state.

In the 1950s, the British fought an equally bitter battle against Mau Mau terrorists in colonial east Africa. Yet, in the end, they released alleged Mau Mau leader Jomo Kenyatta so that he could become the first prime minister of a newly independent Kenya.

More recently, and after years of inconclusive military action, Britain successfully defanged the terrorist Irish Republican Army by reaching a political settlement with its murderous leaders.

The final principle? Remember that terrorism is theatre. More North Americans die in road accidents each year than from terrorist attacks. Yet terrorists seem far scarier than cars

If terrorism is theatre, then anti-terrorism must be as well. A just solution to the dispute between Israel and Palestine would not satisfy Bin Laden, whose aims are more grandiose. But it would speak volumes to those tempted to support him.

Obama, a master showman in his own right, instinctively understands this. That's why his June 5 Cairo speech to the Muslim world, in which he spoke of "the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own," was initially so successful.

But his failure to follow through has left a sour taste in the mouths of those he hoped to influence. That's bad theatre and, as far as anti-terrorism goes, bad strategy.

