

Understanding and Addressing The Underlying Causes of International Terrorism

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Introduction

The September 11 2001 attacks in the United States, referred to as the “simultaneous attacks in the United States” in Japan, and as 9.11 elsewhere, victimized 3062 innocent citizens including 24 Japanese nationals.¹ The United Nations Security Council condemned the terrorists’ attacks as “a threat to international peace and security” in its Resolution 1368 dated September 12, 2001. Despite this condemnation, terrorist attacks have continued, including the bomb blast in Bali, Indonesia on October 12, 2002 which victimized around 180 innocent citizens including some Japanese, and the hostage-taking in a Moscow theatre on October 13, 2002 in which more than 100 died.

After the 9.11 incident, it was debated whether or not the act constituted war. In the field of political science, when the number of victims of an attack exceeds 1000, it is considered war. In this sense, 9.11 was an act of war. President George W. Bush did declare that it was war. On the other hand, Michael Howard argues that “to declare war on terrorists or, even more illiterately, on terrorism is at once to accord terrorists a status and dignity that they seek and that they do not deserve and that it confers on them a kind of legitimacy.”² The attack was not war because it was not declared as such and was not a war between states. No one announced the aim of the attack although it was successful. Kitaoka Shinichi argued that the 9.11 attack was not a war in the typical sense of the term, but was a massive crime.³

Likewise after 9.11 it was debated whether or not the event has changed the global security equation. It was debated whether 9.11 has changed the world in the same way that the gun shot in Sarajevo triggered World War I. Some strongly asserted that 9.11 was not a new incident at all. They asserted that there have been similar incidents with a similar scale of victims elsewhere, like in Rwanda. People were aware of terrorism as a major threat to security way before the 9.11 attacks took place, particularly after the end of the Cold War. This awareness was also reflected in the recent quadrennial public survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations entitled, “Worldviews 2002.” In the survey, while 91% of Americans polled responded that international terrorism is a critical threat to the United States, that represents only a 7% increase from their survey results on the same question in 1998.⁴ In this sense 9.11 did not add to the list of security threats.

Thus, 9.11 may not have changed the fundamentals of the global security equation. However, it has surely shaken up the equation. It has been a wake up call in the sense that it shattered our perception of security. 9.11 surely reawakened the conventional

perception of terrorism because it was systematic, large scale, violent terrorism against a superpower, instead of scattered and limited terrorist attacks like those we have witnessed in the past. The impact has been such that 9.11 surely sparked our debates on global security and internal safety. What has changed after 9.11 is an emerging new sense of vulnerability to a massive attack on citizens that may come from unexpected actors at unexpected locations at an unexpected time. This has led us to ask the fundamental questions of what we are trying to protect and how to do so.

In reality, the specific measures taken against terrorism after 9.11, particularly by the United States, are counter-terrorism attacks against Osama bin Laden, and Al-Qaeda. To date, the main measures have been punitive. US allies supported US actions. Nicole Gnesotto observed from the European perspective that the September 11th attacks have reinforced a political security and military logic based on violence and the response to violence, one in which the role of states and national sovereignty is again become predominant.⁵ The attack was by a non-state actor and victimized citizens, but was perceived as against a state. States, thus, rose to punish the assumed suspects of the attack, in particular their leader and the group he leads.

At the same time many, though admitting the need to punish terrorists, have argued that counter-terrorism attacks are not the sole measure to effectively combat terrorism. William Christison, Former CIA Director, Office of Regional Political Analysis told the *Washington Post* that, “military action will not solve the problem of terrorism against the United States more than temporarily.” He argued that “however great the military success of the US, a couple of years hence new extremists just as clever as bin Laden and hating the US even more will almost certainly arise somewhere else in the world.”⁶ This sense of needing another path in addition to punishment or military response to terrorism has also been raised. There has been a call for preventing terrorism. The Japanese *Diplomatic Blue Book 2002* has stated that Japan has made efforts to enhance its international coalition to prevent terrorism.⁷ However, the mention has not yet gone to the realm of how to prevent. Efforts have stopped at the phase of calling for a long-term fundamental solution by working on the root causes of terrorism. This is not surprising. It is hard to identify underlying causes and to address them effectively. Terrorism is not possible to eliminate or prevent completely. However, there ought to be room to reduce the occurrence of terrorism.

This paper attempts to look into the underlying causes of terrorism, how to address the causes and finally to suggest possible collaboration or joint initiatives between Japan and Canada to reduce threats from terrorism.

Underlying Causes of Terrorism?

There is a striking convergence of view that we must understand and address the underlying causes of terrorism in order to come to grips with the threat coming from terrorism. The fourth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), for example, declared that the fight against terrorism requires a comprehensive approach by the international community and “should duly take into account the root causes of terrorism.”⁸ There is also a convergence

of view that the underlying causes are not simple but numerous and are combined in complex ways leading up to violent action. They may be linked with chronic conflicts as well. On the other hand there is a significant convergence of opinion that in counter-terrorism efforts underlying causes have not been strenuously pursued. Curiously in 9.11 and subsequent attacks, terrorists have not announced the specific reasons why they attacked or their demands even after successful attacks. The search for root causes was simply unsuccessful with the exception of Osama bin Laden's audio-video tapes.

This lack of communication on the part of the terrorists has made it ever more difficult to identify the underlying causes of their attacks. They do not even announce who carried out the attack. We have to use assumptions in identifying underlying causes of terrorism instead. Nonetheless, there ought to be underlying causes of terrorism, causes strong enough to enable terrorist group leaders to recruit people into their networks. They ought to have causes sufficient to motivate terrorists to give up their lives in the case of suicidal attacks, like in the case of 9.11. Why would privileged young men of Arab descent plot to kill themselves while murdering thousands of civilians?

Long before 9.11, Osama bin Laden responded to an interview by John Miller of *Esquire* in February 1999. He said in the interview that Americans accuse Palestinian people of being terrorists yet kill children in protecting Israel, and that he has to use similar means.⁹ After 9.11 Osama bin Laden also condemned American support for Israeli policy towards the Palestinians, as seen in his statement released on al-Jazeera TV on December 27, 2001. In the audiotape attributed to Osama bin Laden covered by the media on November 13, 2002, he reportedly condemned the United States for their policy vis-à-vis Israel and Palestine and said events such as 9.11, the operations on Germans in Tunisia, the explosion of the French tanker in Yemen, on the French in Karachi, the operations against US Marines in Failaka, Kuwait and on Australians and Britons in explosions in Bali and the hostage taking in Moscow were the response of Muslims to defend their religion. He warned that citizens of US allies would be targets.¹⁰ Steve Smith, however, asserts that Osama bin Laden is using the plight of Palestinians as an *ex post facto* justification for the attacks and his targets have been the conservative rulers of the Middle East including his home state, Saudi Arabia, and the United States for its support of the Saudi regime. Smith further argues that, "the reasons for the attacks were twofold; one was to show the world that the United States is vulnerable to attack, and the other was to produce a radicalization of Muslim opinion."¹¹

Osama bin Laden's tapes have corroborated some of the suggested underlying causes. Amongst the numerous causes suggested, as noted by Osama bin Laden himself, **American foreign policy**, in particular its policy on the Israel-Palestine issue, the continued bombings of and sanctions against Iraq, and the US military presence in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the US-led anti-terrorism campaign is said to have provoked more anti-Americanism in much of the Islamic world, as many Muslims see that campaign as being targeted at Islam.

On the other hand some argue that terrorists harbor a blind hatred of modernity and view the United States as a symbol of **modernization**, which is a source of their suffering.

This resentment against the United States is said to have driven young Arab men to commit atrocious crimes against innocent Americans.¹²

Poverty is often cited as a root cause of terrorism. However poverty is a most heavily contested potential cause. Many doubts have been aired as to whether poverty is truly a root cause of terrorism. It is often pointed out that Osama bin Laden is a multimillionaire and that the hijackers on 9.11 were not members of the dispossessed. They were middle class, and in some cases upper class. They were well educated, spoke English and came from Egypt and the wealthy Persian Gulf states. They had been sufficiently exposed to Western lifestyle to remain inconspicuous living in the United States. This is a puzzle because terrorists are recruited from the poor and deprived as well as from the wealthier and educated. As for the latter, they can only be explained as feeling a sense of responsibility for the sufferers.

Rather than poverty *per se*, the widening gap between the haves and have-nots partly due to **globalization** might have fueled a greater sense of inequality. Under the advent of globalization some benefited more than others, while some suffered more, not being able to reap its fruits. The latter have felt left out of globalization.

On the other hand, ironically, globalization has empowered terrorists with resources, communication and information. Terrorists now have a global reach.

Although poverty may not be the sole cause for terrorism, grievance based on poverty may have led some to be recruited into terrorist groups. In conjunction with poverty, lack of access to education has been suggested as a factor in making young people susceptible to being initiated into terrorist groups, as opportunities for low cost **education** have been offered by terrorist leaders through the mosques and madrassas. Efforts ought to be made to reduce this sense of inequality by providing more opportunities for education and by providing a decent standard of living through a new Marshall Plan.

Religion, religious extremism or fanaticism particularly **Islamic** has often been cited as one of the underlying causes. This has stemmed from Osama bin Laden's statements, including his latest audiotape, that "we pray to God to aid us that His religion might triumph and we pursue the *jihad* unto death so as to merit His mercy". In the aforementioned "Worldview Survey" 61% of Americans polled responded that Islamic fundamentalism is a critical threat to US vital interests, which was a 23% increase from the same survey in 1998.

While religious extremism has been identified as an important means for terrorist organizations to justify their violent actions and to motivate terrorists to conduct violent attacks, Islam has often been labeled as the religion of terrorists. Particularly, the notion of *jihad*, "holy war", has been cited as leading terrorists to take suicidal actions which insure that the actors go to heaven, making them eager to die in a blaze of destruction visited upon their enemy. Not limited to Islam, Aum Shinrikyo has been cited as another example where religious motivations were used to justify not only murder but also the

mass destruction ordered by its leader.

On the other hand, too much global focus on Islam as a cause of terrorism has invited resentment. Azyumardi Azra, Professor of Islamic history and civilization and rector of the State Islamic University in Jakarta, Indonesia criticized the western media for continuing to reiterate the idea that the Muslim world is in a state of perpetual chaos and corruption, unable to govern itself except through the use of force.¹³ Professor Mehmet Bayrakdar, Dean of the Department of Islamic Philosophy, Faculty of Religion, Ankara University in Turkey also said that it has become customary for the western media to label any violence or terror as “Islamic terrorism” regardless of whether its perpetrators are Muslim or not. This is but prejudice and Islamophobia. Mehmet Bayrakdar argues that the word Islam itself means peace and the word Muslim is he who practices peace by believing in as-Salam, the Being who is the source of peace and concord and who assures a peaceful existence to all beings.¹⁴ Bayrakdar explains that terrorists misuse Islamic concepts.

One should distinguish between extremists and moderates among Muslims and should refrain from naively labeling Islam a terrorist religion. The Japanese *Diplomatic Blue Book 2002* has also made clear that the fight against terrorists is not a fight against Islam.¹⁵

Moreover, it seems 9.11 has brought the infamous theory of **the clash of civilizations** back to public discourse, absent since 1996 when Huntington wrote the famous piece.¹⁶ The 9.11 incident, however, was not due to inter-civilization confrontation as argued by many. Yamazaki Masakazu, for example, argues that this is not a clash of civilizations because there is a variety of Islam in the world. NATO, which is deemed to be a part of Western civilization, has aided Muslims in Kosovo and has bombed the former Yugoslavia, which belongs to Christian culture.¹⁷

Failed or weak **governance** is another suggested root cause of terrorism. Incompetent and undemocratic governments do not always cause terrorism. Rather, weak governance can offer a hotbed for terrorists. When a sense of injustice and inequality, be it poverty, access to politics, resources or other grievances, cannot be resolved through proper channels of governance, it may spur people to more violent resolutions out of desperation, including terrorism.

Some even suggest the **environment** as a root cause of terrorism. Thomas Homer-Dixon, Director of the Centre for the Study of Peace and Conflict of the University of Toronto argued in his article to *The Globe and Mail* on September 23, 2001 that environmental stresses – especially shortages of cropland and fresh water – that have crippled farming in the countryside and forced immense numbers of people into squalid urban slums, where they are easy fodder for fanatics – as a source of violent terrorism.¹⁸

Miyasaka Naofumi argued in his article to *Gaiko Forum* that these underlying causes, often suggested as root causes of terrorism, are background to terrorist attacks and not the

underlying causes. In his view these causes can lead to riots, resistance, sabotage, civil war or negotiations and not necessarily to terrorism. They may trigger an attack of some sort, but that attack is not limited to terrorism.¹⁹

Although it is hard to identify the underlying causes of violent terrorism, violent actions ought to be a representation of desperation about some sort of grievances that have not been addressed and could not be resolved by other peaceful means. What we have witnessed since 9.11 are more organized and massive terrorists' attacks on citizens by acts of people sacrificing their own lives. This presupposes more organized principles than the emotions of hatred, jealousy, isolation and a sense of deprivation.

Looking at these commonly suggested underlying causes, one can extract a common thread of **a sense of injustice and inequality** of those who are not on the good side of poverty, governance, globalization, governance, conflicts etc. They must have reached a level of desperation that compelled them to believe that resorting to violence was the only way to resolution. Leaders of terrorist groups seem to have exploited this sense of injustice and inequality among people, especially young people, to recruit and to motivate them to conduct terrorist attacks. However, the leaders may have their own targets and goals to achieve. This may sound like the revolutionaries during the French Revolution who took up arms for their cause, but it is different due to the global scope and multitudes of underlying causes. In the French Revolution the group aimed at killing their king, but the assassination of American President George W. Bush would not solve their grievances and the other causes of terrorism in the 21st Century. We need to send a clear message to terrorists that killing citizens will not lead to solutions.

In order to reduce threats emanating from massive terrorism, we need to intervene into this sense of injustice and inequality before it translates into violent action. We need to address these causes in addition to measures of punishment and sanction against terrorists, which should send a message to terrorists and their leaders that their goals cannot be achieved by such violent conduct.

Addressing Underlying Causes Together

Terrorism is hard to prevent, not to mention eliminate. The best we might be able to do is reduce the threat emanating from terrorism.

Even though there are no easy answers, part of the response must be to try to address the sense of injustice and inequality. This entails reducing the envy and sense of both absolute and comparative political and economic disadvantage that are significant parts of the problem. We need to make a sustained effort to open a path for the sense of injustice to be addressed, rather than be left unattended. This will include measures to improve political and social conditions, reduce disparities of wealth, create more economic opportunity and education, and create more hope for young people.

The Dalai Lama in his statement on the 43rd Anniversary of the Tibetan National

Uprising Day pointed out that the present measures lack a long term and comprehensive approach to deal with the root causes of terrorism. He called for a well thought out, long-term strategy to promote globally a political culture of non-violence and dialogue. He said that, “the international community must assume a responsibility to give strong and effective support to non-violent movements committed to peaceful changes. Otherwise it will be seen as hypocrisy to condemn and combat those who have risen in anger and despair but to continue to ignore those who have consistently espoused restraint and dialogue as a constructive alternative to violence.”²⁰

While it is up to states to respond to the grievances of its citizens, it is incumbent upon us to offer a path for more peaceful solutions. Both Japan and Canada have upheld the notion of human security since the 1990s. Each has concentrated its efforts on comprehensive conflict prevention, which includes nurturing a culture of prevention and dialogue. Although the differences in our respective approaches to human security have been emphasized, both are keenly interested in translating the notion of human security into action. Both have come to advocate an application of the notion of human security, to security matters. As a part of our respective and joint efforts to unfold foreign policy from the perspective of human security, both ought to cooperate in addressing underlying causes, particularly reducing the sense of injustice and inequality.

The international community’s attention span is short and migrates like a traveling circus, from Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia, to Afghanistan. The United Nations has planned for an Afghanistan reconstruction assistance program of 1.8 billion dollars but has gathered only 800 million dollars. And yet the world is already forgetting Afghanistan. Nigel Fisher, Special Deputy Representative of the UN Secretary General points out that we forgot Afghanistan 10 years ago which led to 9.11 and that it is vitally important for us to live up to the pledges made in Tokyo in January 2002.²¹ A sense of injustice is spreading all over the globe from Palestine to Afghanistan to Africa. We cannot leave people feeling deprived and forgotten, to let others recruit them as future terrorists.

Japan and Canada do not have to travel far to find suggested causes and a possible sense of inequality and injustice. Religion, in particular Islam, has been cited as a potential underlying cause which may link to the sense of injustice and inequality, in East Asia, except Japan, there are sizable Islamic populations as shown in the table below. In addition there are some Muslims in China as well. These Muslims should not become extremists. We need to devise ways to prevent religion from being used to legitimize terrorists’ causes.

Table Muslim Population in Southeast Asia

Country	Total population (10,000)	Muslim population (10,000)	Ratio %
Indonesia	20442	17989	88
Malaysia	2271	1204	53
Philippines	7520	346	4.6
Thailand	6120	306	5
Myanmar	4736	170	3.6
Singapore	387	71	18.3
Cambodia	1143	49	4.3
Brunei	31	21	69
Vietnam	7806	5	0.1
Laos	497	1	0.2

(Source: Nakamura Mitsuo, Sharon Siddique, Omar Farouk, *Islam & Civil Society in Southeast Asia*, ISEAS, 2001, p.7)

Moreover KMM and Jammash Islamiah in Malaysia, Majelis Jujahideen in Indonesia, and Moro National Liberation Front are said to have certain connections with Al-Qaeda. These transnational networks of Islam need regional responses. Threats from these networks can be internal as well as external and must be addressed by transnational efforts.

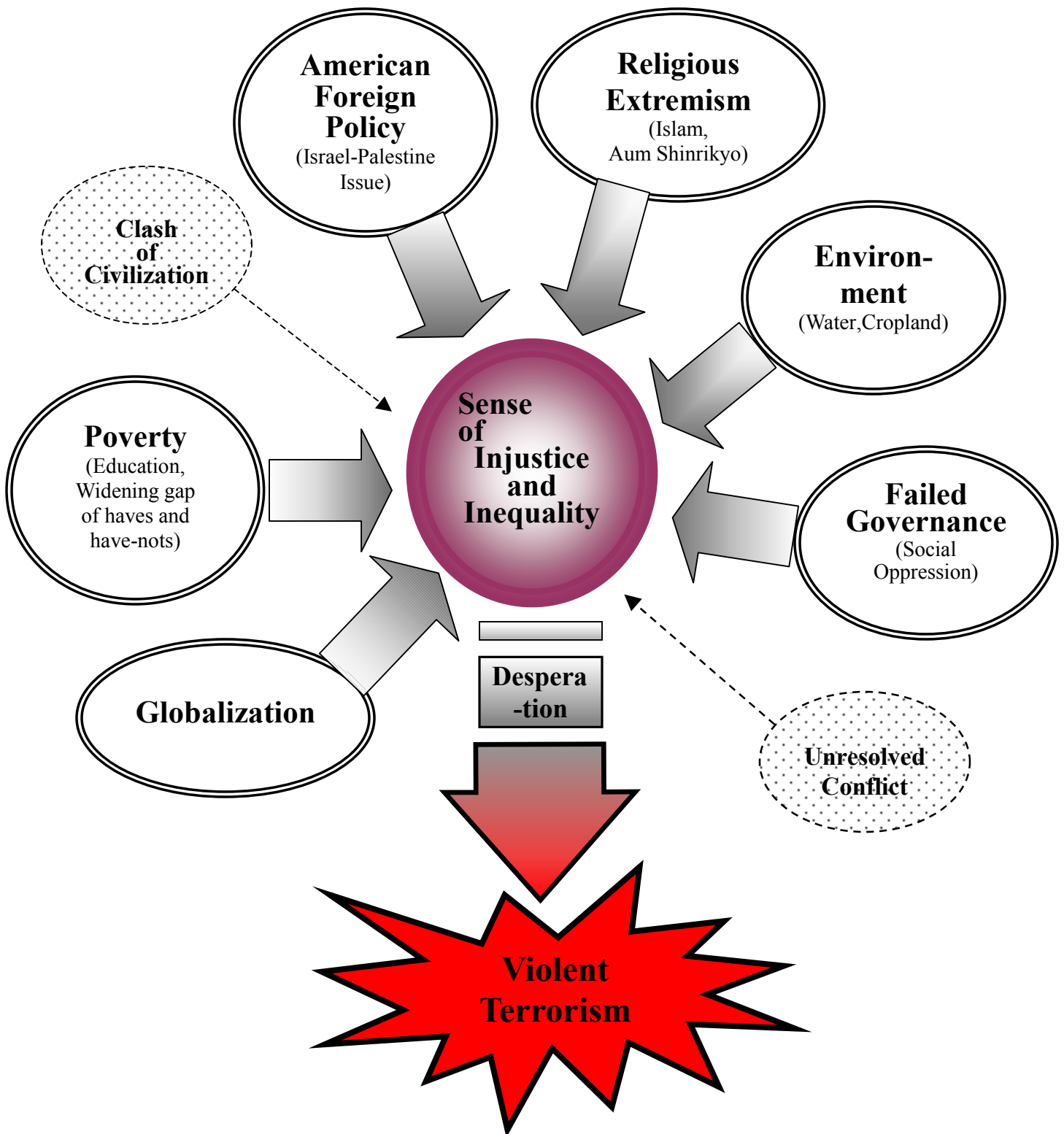
Although this is one illustration, because countries in the region share these threats, terrorism can bring us to act together. In fact, Asian regional institutions have already put terrorism on their agenda. As an illustration, the APEC Leaders meeting adopted a Statement on Counter-terrorism on October 21, 2001 in Shanghai, that states that leaders are determined to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation. It emphasized financial measures to prevent the flow of funds to terrorists.²² This initiative was further enhanced in a Statement on Fighting Terrorism and Promoting Growth adopted at Los Cabos, Mexico on October 26, 2002. Part of it's stated aim is to work jointly "to deny terrorists access to the financial system and use the money trail to locate and apprehend terrorists."²³

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has also taken up measures to combat terrorism from the finance side. In July 2002 the ARF pledged to strengthen measures to plug the financial pipeline used by terrorist organizations in the region.²⁴ Although terrorism was not included in the ARF concept paper and while the ARF stumbles with its phase II preventive diplomacy, terrorism can be an agendum that can bring participants together and provide renewed momentum to the Forum. Here the Japanese and Canadian governments may wish to take the joint initiative. ARF can go beyond the control of the financial path to terrorists and address underlying causes, by exploring ways to reduce the sources of the sense of injustice among potential terrorists.

Japan and Canada can act together to use their Official Development Assistance effectively in capacity building. Japan and Canada can also initiate a dialogue on the underlying causes of terrorism. We cannot afford the illusion that we can identify and remove the root causes of terrorism. That, however, does not mean that we should give up without trying. There should remain room for us to reduce the possible factors feeding into this sense of injustice that may lead to terrorists' violent actions.

Today it seems we are living in global anxiety if not insecurity, not knowing exactly where the next incident may take place. The latest audiotape, allegedly by Osama bin Laden, said that attacks will be aimed at US allies. Japan and Canada are allies of the United States. Our measures to combat terrorism must be a combination of counter-terrorism attacks, punishment, cutting the financial pipeline to terrorists and of addressing the underlying social, economic and cultural issues that generate grievance.

Underlying Causes of Terrorism



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- ² Michael Howard, "What's in a Name? How to Fight Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2002, p. 8.
- ³ Kitaoka Shinichi, "Douji Tahatsu Tero to Nihon Gaiko," *Kokusai Mondai*, March 2002, p. 23.
- ⁴ Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Worldviews 2002*, The report is available at <http://www.worldviews.org/index.html>
- ⁵ Nicole Gnesotto, "Terrorism and Enlargement: A Clash of Dynamics," *Institute for Security Studies Newsletter*, No.3/4, September 2002.
- ⁶ The text of the remarks of William Christison is available at <http://foi.Missouri.edu/terrorbkgd/rootcauses.html>
- ⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Gaiko Seisho 2002*, p.12.
- ⁸ "Identifying Root Causes of Terrorism: Our Efforts Paying Off," *New Straits Times*, September 24, 2002.
- ⁹ John Miller, "Saudi Born Militant Osama bin Laden al-Qaida," *Esquire*, February 1999, Volume 131, Issue 2.
- ¹⁰ "Text of the Tape Broadcast on al-Jazeera," *The Globe and Mail*, Wednesday, November 13, 2002.
- ¹¹ Steve Smith, "Why Was the Attack Ordered," in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne eds., *Unanswered Questions in Worlds in Collision*, Palgrave, 2002, p.54.
- ¹² Gwynne Dyer, "Islamic Fundamentalists Fear of Modernization is real motivation," *The Japan Times*, October 6, 2001.
- ¹³ Statement of Azyumardi Azra at a Conference on Dialogue of Civilization at United Nations University, September 20, 2002.
- ¹⁴ Mehmet Bayrakdar, "Islam as a Religion and World-view of Peace and Dialogue," Speech at a Conference on Dialogue of Civilization: Post 9.11 and Islam, held at United Nations University, September 20, 2002.
- ¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Gaiko Seisho 2002*, p.15.
- ¹⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilization?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.
- ¹⁷ Yamazaki Masakazu, "Bunmei Shakai no Chiteki Taihai wo Ureu," *Chuokoron*, November 2001, p. 37.
- ¹⁸ <http://www.wfs.org/mmdixon.htm>.
- ¹⁹ Miyasaka Naofumi, "Atarashii Total War no Jidai," in Tanaka Akihiko ed., *Atarashii Senso no Jidai no Anzenhoshu*, Toshi Shuppan, November 2002, pp. 146-147.
- ²⁰ Dalai Lama's Statement on 10 March 2002 on the 43rd Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day, An excerpt is available at <http://www.rainbowbody.net/Ongwhehonwhe/Dalailama.htm>
- ²¹ Cited in the article "Kokuren, Fukasuru Afugan," *Asahi Shinbun*, August 20, 2002
- ²² The text of the statement is available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/apec/2001/leader.html>
- ²³ APEC Leaders' Statement on Fighting Terrorism and Promoting Growth, Los Cabos, Mexico, October 2002. The text of the statement is available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economu/apec/2002/state_1.html
- ²⁴ "ASEAN Regional Forum Members Vow to Plug Terrorist Financing," *The Japan Times*, July 31, 2002.