

## **Understanding the Sources of Global Terrorism: Underlying and Proximate Causes**

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In the weeks and months following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, the attention of the West rightly turned to Afghanistan. The war on terror took the form of a traditional military campaign designed to destroy the Taliban regime, and root out and eliminate members of al-Qaeda and its leadership. More than a year later the Taliban regime has collapsed, al-Qaeda's bases and infrastructure in the country have been destroyed, its organization badly damaged. But most of al-Qaeda's top lieutenants, including Osama bin Laden, remain at large. Future attacks are likely. While the first battles have been won, the war on terror continues.

Attention has now turned toward how best to wage the war and see it through to an eventual conclusion. It is unlikely to end soon. Like the Cold War, the West is engaged in an ideological struggle that will be fought for decades. Yet, despite claims that a war on Iraq is a necessary part of the war on terror, the traditional military phase of this war is over. The war should be seen not as a military operation, but as a police and intelligence operation. The battles have now moved primarily to the streets, the mosques, the schools, and the palaces of the Muslim world.

Understanding the best strategies for waging this war requires understanding the sources of global terrorism. What issues and values motivate the leaders and followers of transnational terrorist groups? What factors encourage individuals to carry out acts of mass violence? What factors increase the likelihood that such acts will occur? These are the questions this paper addresses.

The paper is organized into three sections. It begins first by defining international terrorism. I argue that the term complicates our strategic thinking and planning rather than easing it. Instead we should think not in terms of broad categories, but in terms of specific groups and individuals that advocate and carry out specific types of transnational terrorist acts – namely mass-casualty attacks. True "global terrorism" is in fact quite rare. I then turn to a discussion of the causes of mass-casualty transnational terrorism. To fully understand how and why mass terror occurs, we must distinguish between its underlying and proximate causes – the catalysts that turn grievances into violent action. Section two focuses on the former – those issues and values that motivate specific groups to carry out mass violent terrorist acts. Section three addresses the possible sources of those motives. The fourth section discusses the proximate causes – namely a highly skilled and charismatic leader, access to resources, state sanctuary, and the example of terrorist activity elsewhere. I conclude with thoughts on the implications of this analysis for mitigating future acts of mass-casualty terrorism.

## Defining "International Terrorism"

International terrorism can be defined in terms of either the *goals* of terrorist actors or the *means* they employ. In terms of *goals*, it includes any terrorist group with transnational hegemonic political, ideological or religious aims. These groups use terror in the service of transnational revolutionary objectives. Their aims are "revisionist" in that they seek to shift the status quo distribution of power regionally or globally. In terms of *means*, it includes groups that target individuals or states beyond their own borders, in pursuit of local, regional, or international hegemonic goals. It also includes any group with substantial international ties, such as through financing, organization, training, and the provision of weapons and supplies.

However, in seeking to understand the sources of mass violent acts, such as those that occurred on September 11, 2001, it is not entirely useful to think in terms of the broad category of "international terrorism." This is true for two main reasons. First, it fails to differentiate among a wide range of groups, some of which are more threatening to the citizens and interests of Canada and its allies than others. The number of groups arrayed under the general banner of "international terrorism" is large and their goals, interests, motives and values are diverse. Much terrorism in the world today is international in means – groups raise money and weapons abroad, leaders are trained and educated abroad, etc. – but parochial in its goals. Not all international terrorists, therefore, pose an equally serious and direct threat to Canada and its allies.

Second, the term tells us nothing about the *limits* of terrorist tactics. Groups without any limits, that specifically seek to carry out large-scale, mass-casualty attacks, and who consider the use of even the most heinous weapons, pose a far greater threat than those that consciously seek to limit their actions to small scale symbolic acts of violence (however deplorable those acts may be). Further, those groups that engage in *suicidal* mass-casualty attacks are even more dangerous, as they are nearly impossible to deter.

Therefore, instead of focusing on the broad category of "international terrorism," I focus on those particular terrorist groups that combine transnational hegemonic goals, international means, and exhibit few limits on their actions. Any group that risks the lives of its own members, and even the lives of its own apparent constituencies, to kill large numbers of people abroad is dangerous. But when mass-casualty terrorism is teamed with international hegemonic terrorist ambitions and means, it poses the gravest possible threat. Such groups directly threaten the lives of Canadian citizens and their allies both at home and abroad, and pose a strategic threat to the balance of power, if not globally, than in key strategic regions of the world, especially the Middle East.

However such a deadly combination is actually quite rare. There are few truly "global" mass-casualty terrorists. Indeed the vast majority of terrorism in recent decades has been associated with intrastate secessionist struggles by ethnic minorities. Sometimes these secessionist struggles spill across state borders. Often they are international in character because they have vast networks of supporters around the world, often in diaspora communities, who raise funds and provide willing recruits. The Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka are a case in point.

Today only a handful of groups fit the profile of the global, mass-casualty terrorist. They are almost exclusively extremist religious groups. The majority of those are militant Islamic fundamentalists, many of which are linked to the al-Qaeda network. Religious terrorist groups are especially deadly and difficult to deter. Because they see their actions as carrying out the will of God, they have less inhibitions against large-scale attacks, and will be more susceptible to the idea of giving their own lives for the cause.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the growing lethality of terrorist attacks beginning in the 1990s (despite a corresponding decrease in the actual number of terrorist incidents) can be explained in large part by the rapid rise in religious-based international terrorist organizations during that period. Today, more than a third of all active international terrorist groups are religiously motivated – the majority espousing Islamist beliefs – compared to the 1970s, for example, when all active international terrorist groups had secular goals and beliefs – the majority professing some variant of Marxism.<sup>2</sup> It is the motives and values of these groups that are the primary focus of the following sections.

### **Motivations of Global, Mass-Casualty Terrorists**

What motivates individuals and groups to carry out large-scale terrorist attacks against innocent civilians beyond their own borders? In the most general sense they are motivated by feelings of intense hatred, rage against perceived injustices, and insecurity due to a perceived threat to the group's survival. Specifically, three main values and beliefs motivate those who engage in global mass-casualty terrorism: religious fanaticism; virulent ethnic chauvinism/anti-Semitism; and radical anti-Americanism/anti-Westernism. The combination of these beliefs are shared by Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups such as those in the al-Qaeda network.

***Religious Fanaticism.*** The religious beliefs of militant Islamic terrorists are a profound motivating force for their terrorist activities, but it is mistaken to claim that Islam itself is to blame. For the most part radical fundamentalists tend to be autodidacts whose interpretations of the Koran are largely inconsistent with traditional Islamic teachings. It is their own perverted Islamic beliefs that motivate their terrorist activity. Many have stressed a clear distinction between radical, militant Islamic fundamentalism, or Islamism, and the form of Islam practiced by most of the world's one billion Muslims. Islamism is a hegemonic, rejectionist political ideology that is violently opposed to secular and non-Islamic regimes in the Muslim world. It calls for the establishment Islamic regimes under Shari'a law, and rejects all forms of Western culture in the Muslim world. In its most extreme form it calls for the waging of a holy war, or *jihad*, against non-believers or those who do not practice "true" Islam. The ultimate aim is to establish a new Muslim Caliphate – an Islamic empire in the Muslim world – and eventually

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Wilkinson, "Why Modern Terrorism? Differentiating Types and Distinguishing Ideological Motivations," in The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls, ed. Charles W. Kegley, Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 115.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce and Donna Hoffman, "Chronology of International Terrorism, 1996," Terrorism and Political Violence 10, no. 3 (1998), as cited in Wilkinson, "Why Modern Terrorism?," 115.

global domination by Islam.<sup>3</sup>

***Ethnic Chauvinism/Anti-Semitism.*** These groups are also motivated by virulent ethnic chauvinism, particularly rabid anti-Semitism. Islamist groups, for example, ascribe to the worst Christian anti-Semitic stereotypes, alleging Jewish domination of national governments, the United Nations, international business and media, all as part of a massive conspiracy to destroy Islam. Hatred of Jews is made even more intolerable by the existence of Israel in the Arab world. The destruction of the state of Israel is therefore a central goal of global Islamic terrorists.

***Anti-Americanism/Anti-Westernism.*** Finally, global Islamic terrorists are driven by virulent anti-Americanism and hostility toward the West. America and the West are the objects of hatred for both political and cultural reasons. The United States is reviled for being the chief benefactor of Israel, and for supporting many secular, autocratic Arab regimes. The pervasive influence of Western culture in the Muslim world is also considered anathema. For these groups, the West, and particularly the United States, is seen as the source of their societies' failings and for their position in the world. Today Muslim states are among the poorest and most corrupt. Whereas once the Islamic world was the center of human civilization, it has now been overshadowed by the West. Support for Israel and autocratic secular regimes are seen as part of a larger conspiracy of the West to subjugate the Islamic people.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, two important questions remain. First, what are the sources of these motivations? Why do hate-filled, hegemonic, rejectionist ideologies such as militant Islam gain popular currency? Second, what are the proximate causes of terrorist violence? Even though Islamism advocates violence against the West and other non-true believers, how are these ideas translated into mass casualty violence? Even if these ideas gain popular currency, their mere existence does not make terrorist violence possible. What factors, then, make mass terrorist violence more likely?

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Daniel Pipes, "Is Islam a Threat?" in Militant Islam Reaches America (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 3-14; Michael Scott Doran, "Somebody Else's Civil War: Ideology, Rage, and Assault on America," in How Did This Happen? Terrorism and The New War, eds. James F. Hoge, Jr. and Gideon Rose (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), 31-52.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Bernard Lewis, "Did You Say 'American Imperialism'? Power, Weakness, and Choices in the Middle East," National Review, December 17, 2001; and idem, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," The Atlantic Monthly 266, no. 3 (September 1990): 47-60.

## Sources of Global Mass-Casualty Terrorism

Do objective structural conditions exist that encourage religious fanaticism, ethnic chauvinism and virulent anti-Westernism? There is no agreed upon answer to this question. Despite a range of proposed hypotheses, its sources are likely complex and multi-dimensional. Those pointed to most often, however, include American global power and "imperialism," poverty, and repressive autocratic rule. Since September 11, each of these has been offered as the driving cause of mass terror. But such explanations are simplistic, empirically questionable, or just plain wrong. In part this is due to the failure of analysts to distinguish between the conditions that motivate terrorist elites, their active followers, and passive supporters. Some of these factors are best at explaining the *passive support* for groups that espouse violent global political agendas and terror. None are convincing as explanations for the motivations of terrorist themselves, and especially their leaders.

To ultimately mitigate mass terrorist violence we must distinguish between these groups. Terrorism is by and large an elite phenomena. It is an act that is carried out by a small number of devoted fanatics, often in the name of a larger constituency, many of whom may not even approve of such actions. It is vital to understand what motivates those particular individuals if we hope to prevent them from carrying out mass terrorist acts. But it is equally important to understand what motivates their passive support among their constituencies. This is true for two reasons. First, the public is a source of recruitment for terrorist cells. Though there will always be at least some willing recruits to fill the ranks, limiting that pool is one way to frustrate the efforts of terrorists. Second, sympathy for the cause may encourage populations to turn a blind eye to terrorist activities, thus increasing their organizational capacity and ability to evade law enforcement.

***American Global Power and Imperialism.*** Many have pointed to U.S. foreign policy as the cause of "Muslim rage" and thus the root of terrorist violence. We must distinguish, however, between hostility at specific U.S. policies, and a more generic hatred of the United States for being both a Western power and the preeminent political-military power in the world today. Again, the distinction between motives of elites and passive supporters is critical. Terrorist elites are motivated far more by the very idea of American global power than by specific U.S. policies per se. They point to U.S. actions in the Middle East – the support for corrupt Arab regimes, support for Israel, the stationing of U.S. military peacekeepers in Lebanon in the 1980s, the Gulf War in 1991 and the stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and the support for sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s – as part of a larger historical campaign by the West against Islam. The grievance of radical militant Islamists is not so much U.S. policies, but U.S. strength and Muslim weakness.

On the other hand, particular U.S. policies do in fact motivate passive support. If the U.S. withdrew from the region, if an agreeable settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian issue were reached, if corrupt Arab dictatorships liberalized and allowed greater popular participation, much of the grievances that give rise to passive support for Islamist leaders would likely evaporate.

**Poverty and Lack of Education.** The most commonly offered source of global terrorism is poverty. Many argue that socio-economic dislocation, including lack of access to education and economic advancement, drives terrorists to kill. This is a view that is totally inconsistent with the empirical evidence. Poverty cannot explain the motives of terrorist elites, their followers, or their passive supporters. Fifteen out of 19 of the al-Qaeda terrorists who carried out the 9/11 attacks came from one of the Muslim world's richest states, Saudi Arabia. All were western-educated. The vast majority of Arabs who fought with the Afghan *mujahadeen* were well-educated, and their leaders came from the Sunni aristocracy. Most notably, Bin Laden himself belongs to the richest non-royal family in Saudi Arabia.<sup>5</sup>

Studies have found that Palestinian suicide bombers are universally drawn from the well-educated middle-classes. They almost all hold paying jobs. At least two Palestinian suicide-bombers have been sons of millionaires. Indeed, most are driven by a sense of historical grievance borne of acute political awareness and historical knowledge (albeit a skewed knowledge, discussed below). These are factors more strongly associated with economically well-off, well-educated individuals.<sup>6</sup> Indeed economic and educational opportunities have risen substantially in the Palestinian territories at the same time that terrorist violence has increased. Studies of participation in Hezbollah in Lebanon, for example, have similarly found no correlation between involvement in terrorist acts and poverty or lack of educational opportunity.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the opposite is just as likely to be true: the Islamists' message has gained such wide currency precisely because of the rise of literacy and access to education in the Muslim world.

However, if poverty were eliminated tomorrow, would terrorism cease? The answer is clearly no. Most terrorism in the world today is driven by ethnic conflict and nationalism, manifested in campaigns of secession. The terrorism of greatest concern – militant Islamic terrorism – is not motivated by a desire to eliminate poverty, or to allow universal access to education and development, but to reorder societies, and the world, along Islamist lines. Islamists themselves never talk about economic prosperity as an end in itself, but rather as a means to acquire power to wage their *jihad* against the West. And as study after study has confirmed, poverty and economic dislocation provide little incentive to engage in terrorist acts or to passively support them. Indeed, recent independent surveys of Palestinians have shown that support for armed attacks against Israeli targets is especially strong among university students, merchants and professionals, whereas support is much lower among the unemployed – the exact opposite of what the poverty argument predicts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Militant Islam: The Difficult Future of Holy Struggle," The Economist, February 2, 2002: 44.

<sup>6</sup> Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers: Talking to the "Human Bombs," The New Yorker, November 19, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?" The New Republic, June 24, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Krueger and Maleckova, "Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?"

**Authoritarianism.** Another popular argument is that repressive, corrupt authoritarian regimes that suppress popular political participation are a driving force of terrorism. Many conclude from this that the antidote to terrorism is greater political participation, and liberal democracy.<sup>9</sup> More will be said about this in the concluding section below, but it is an erroneous conclusion that rests on an incorrect understanding of the grievances of global terrorist groups. Radical Islamists, for example, frequently rail against the corrupt autocratic regimes in the Arab world. But their grievance is not that they are autocratic, but rather that they are secular. These groups are not opposed to autocratic rule and certainly do not call for greater democracy, pluralism and freedom in their societies. They oppose the ruling autocratic leaders because they are not "true" Muslims. They hate the United States because it supports those regimes. Further, Islamists rail against these autocratic regimes not because they are repressive, but because they often repress Islamist groups. One only need look at those regimes where Islamists have taken power – Iran, Afghanistan under the Taliban, and Sudan – to see that they are no less autocratic, repressive, and corrupt than those they criticize.

However, corrupt autocratic regimes may encourage passive support for global terrorist activities. Many groups in these societies have no rights, no ability to participate in government and influence policy, no means of peacefully improving society. Many of these regimes have not provided the social goods that increasingly modernized, educated societies demand. Though there is little support for the claim that poverty itself drives terrorism, it is likely that perceptions of great disparities in wealth, especially in countries awash in oil money, breed resentment that increases sympathy for the terrorist cause.

Yet, while corrupt autocratic regimes exist all over the world, only a small fraction – mainly those in the Muslim countries – are breeding grounds for global terrorists and their passive supporters. The key difference in these societies is that ruling regimes – even those friendly to Western states – encourage anti-Western, anti-American, anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist scapegoating in an effort to deflect attention away from their own society's ills, and the regime's own culpability. Autocratic regimes encourage internal dissidents and the press – which is heavily influenced and in some cases directly controlled by these regimes – to focus their rage on the United States and Israel as a way to vent their frustrations. It is this phenomenon that has clearly contributed to the rise in anti-American and anti-Western hatred throughout the Arab world.<sup>10</sup>

Perversely, the United States is complicit in this anti-American scapegoating. Middle East analyst Kenneth Pollack describes this dilemma: "We allow the moderate Arab states to deflect

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Thomas L. Friedman, Longitudes and Attitudes (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> See Kenneth M. Pollack, "Anti-Americanism and The Roots of Middle Eastern Terrorism," Council on Foreign Relations Issue Brief (October 2001); Barry Rubin, "The Real Roots of Arab Anti-Americanism," Foreign Affairs 81, no. 6 (November/December 2002): 73-85.

domestic criticism on to us and so breed anti-Americanism because, they tell us, this makes it easier for them to rule which ensures that we get their support on regional issues; however, when there is a crisis, the moderate Arab states are then loathe to support us because they are afraid to go against the widespread anti-Americanism which they themselves stoked."<sup>11</sup>

Further, repression has probably helped spur an increase in at least passive support for global terrorism by forcing Islamic extremists into exile, thereby spreading their ideas throughout the Muslim world. More importantly, repression of Islamic extremists has likely helped turn local struggles into global ones. Many global Islamic terrorist groups today began with much more parochial aims, fighting civil wars to establish Islamist regimes in their home countries. But as repression of their movements increased and their revolutionary aims became increasingly frustrated, they looked for other targets. Gradually, they turned to the West, which was reviled for ostensibly propping up the corrupt secular regimes that they were battling, and as open societies that are especially vulnerable to terrorist attack. A case in point is the predominance of Egyptian Islamists among bin Laden's key al-Qaeda lieutenants, such as Egyptian Islamic Jihad founder Ayman al-Zawahiri, who have been fighting a losing battle against the Mubarek regime.

### **Proximate Causes of Global Mass-Casualty Terrorism**

These factors along, however, are insufficient to explain mass terrorist attacks. Even if we identify the sources of "Muslim rage," that alone is insufficient to lead to the kind of terror witnessed on September 11, 2001. That requires identifying proximate causes – those factors that help translate frustration, anger and resentment into violent action. There are at least four such causes, three organizational, and one psychological: a skilled, charismatic leader; access to resources; state support; and terrorist activity elsewhere.

***Skilled, Charismatic Leaders.*** Islamism differs very little from other transnational revolutionary movements in history. The common feature of all such movements is a powerful, charismatic and skillful leader. The great transnational revolutionary movements of the past were all led by such leaders: Lenin, Hitler, Mao, Castro, Nasser. Though al-Qaeda is a diffuse, non-hierarchical organization of loosely connected terrorist organizations and cells, the fact remains that the leadership and charisma of Osama Bin Laden is largely responsible for its successes.<sup>12</sup>

One of the features of the so-called "New Terrorism" is terrorist attacks perpetrated by individuals or independent Islamic groups who are only loosely connected to or controlled by an established group. Yet, even those groups are at least inspired by a particular leader or spiritual mentor. Those who bombed the World Trade Center in February 1993, for example, were encouraged and inspired by their mentor Sheikh Omar Abdal Rahman, but were not controlled by any formal organization or state sponsor.

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<sup>11</sup> Pollack, "Anti-Americanism."

<sup>12</sup> See Mark N. Katz, "Osama bin Laden as Transnational Revolutionary Leader," Current History (February 2002): 81-85.



***Access to Resources.*** Terrorism is a relatively cheap form of warfare. This is part of its appeal. Conventional explosives, which are the weapons of choice of most terrorists, are relatively easy to acquire and manufacture. Even the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack was relatively inexpensive – perhaps U.S.\$250,000 (with an estimated financial impact of approximately \$300 billion). Nonetheless, transnational terrorist groups cannot function without ready access to financial and other material resources. Al-Qaeda had a distinct advantage in that it benefited from the vast personal wealth of Osama Bin Laden with which to train an army and mobilize his troops.

***State Sanctuary.*** Interstate, transnational terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, require a home base, a state that is either willing to tolerate their presence on its territory, or one that is not sufficiently in control of its own territory so that terrorist groups can operate there freely. Al-Qaeda found a welcome home in Sudan, and later Afghanistan under the Taliban. Yet, since the war in Afghanistan, the number of states willing to suffer a similar fate for harboring al-Qaeda and similar groups has shrunk. Thus, attention has turned to so-called "failed states," such as Somalia, which are weak and anarchic, not under the control of a central government. Terrorist groups can take advantage of such states, not only to establish a home base in an area under the control of sympathetic groups, but also to more easily conduct illicit economic activities relatively unimpeded.

***Terrorist Activity Elsewhere.*** The final proximate cause is the "demonstration effect." Terrorism often begets terrorism. Acts of terrorism elsewhere are often a great inspiration to other potential terrorists, whether successful or not. Successful terrorist acts inspire others to adopt these tactics in the belief that they too will be successful; failed attacks inspire others to adopt such tactics in the belief that they can overcome the barriers that prevented success in other cases. Failed attacks may also provide important intelligence, serving as a probe of how the target might respond in the future. It is likely, for example, that the way in which the U.S. responded to terrorist acts prior to 9/11 may have emboldened bin Laden. After Hezbollah attacks on the U.S. embassy and Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983, the U.S. withdrew. The 1993 World Trade Center bombing revealed U.S. vulnerability. The attack on American troops in Mogadishu in October 1993, led directly to the U.S. withdrawal from Somalia. The bombings of the U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998 were met by relatively modest cruise missile attacks. Bin Laden himself has said that such events inspired him: he looked at the response to those attacks and assumed that the US was vulnerable, weak and easily defeated. Seen in this light, the attack on Afghanistan, even though most of the leadership of al-Qaeda slipped away, was absolutely essential in sending a message to other potential terrorist groups.

## **Implications**

With some exceptions, most of the permissive conditions that facilitate large-scale terrorist attacks can be readily manipulated. Charismatic leaders can be targeted, resources seized, potential state sponsors aggressively deterred. While these actions alone cannot entirely eliminate terrorist activity, they can greatly frustrate such efforts. But what about the underlying sources of mass-terrorist motives? Again, we must distinguish between elites, their active

followers, and passive supporters. It is unlikely that any action short of giving in completely to their demands would change the minds of the few committed fanatics who carry out such acts. But there are important implications from this analysis for affecting those fanatics' passive supporters.

Global terrorism would not be possible without the intense rage and resentment of a relatively small number of individuals and a large number of passive supporters. This rage is real, but its roots are open to question. Anti-Americanism and ethnic chauvinism, especially anti-Semitism, are widely held beliefs in the Muslim world. But the reasons cited for those beliefs are often perverse, conspiratorial and dishonest. There is a widespread tendency to blame the West, U.S. foreign policy, and Israel for all the ills suffered by Muslim societies. The corruption, socio-economic inequality, and repression of many Arab regimes are seen as the result of Western or Zionist duplicity. Indeed, some of the worst atrocities of Muslims in recent memory have been perpetrated by Muslims themselves – the Syrian attack on the city of Hama in 1982, which killed 10-25,000 Muslims, the mass murder of Kurds and Shi'a by the Baath regime in Iraq, the slaughter and mutilation of as many as 100,000 Algerians by Islamic terrorist groups and the Algerian Army. The al-Qaeda terrorist attacks against the U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998, and even the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks in 2001, led to the deaths of hundreds of Muslims. Yet, all are blamed in one way or another on the West or Israel. There remains wide skepticism in the Muslim world today that Islamic extremists carried out the 9/11 attacks. Whether these views are the result of deliberate manipulation by Islamists or autocratic regimes, or whether publics are willing to accept such views because of deeper cultural preconceptions, is open to debate. But mass perceptions are key to the passive support for Islamic terrorists.

How then can such misperceptions be affected? Some have argued that the solution lies in greater socio-economic and democratic development in the Arab and Muslim world. However, we should be cautious of such prescriptions. First, as shown above, the increase in terrorism has taken place at the same time that socio-economic development has increased in the Muslim world. In some countries, such as Pakistan, this is not necessarily the case. There the lack of affordable or free public education has filled the Deobandi *madrassas* where children receive a strong dose of rote religious training, Islamist indoctrination, and free room and board. The *madrassas* served as the breeding ground of the Taliban and continue to supply willing recruits for the *jihad*. If free state education were more readily available in Pakistan, parents would likely send their children there. But would that necessarily increase the quality of their education? It is unlikely. In much of the Arab world access to education is not the problem, but rather the quality and character of that education. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the public school curriculum is dominated by religious teachings. Distorted interpretations of history that vilify and scapegoat the West and the Jews, are pervasive.

Some have argued, however, that liberal democratic regimes that do not stifle free expression, repress dissent, or manipulate the educational curriculum, would solve this problem. Perhaps. But the transition to democracy is fraught with dangers that could just as likely increase the power of Islamism, as decrease it. Democratizing regimes will provide fertile environments for Islamists to flourish. This is true for a number of reasons. First, they offer greater organizational

opportunities than in repressive authoritarian regimes. Extremist groups are often adept at using mass media and new democratic freedoms to spread their message of hate and intolerance. Second, they tend to harden grievances. Moderation is the enemy of extremism. Democracy is the ultimate expression of political moderation. When a regime democratizes it threatens extremist groups, who often respond by fomenting violent conflict. Third, democratization generally weakens societies in the short term. Economic instability, political disorder, corruption, will continue or get worse. This will increase sympathy for extremist groups. In a democratic state, free elections will bring such extremists to power who will then simply carry out their non-democratic Islamizing agendas.<sup>13</sup>

There is little reason to believe, therefore, that opening up these societies to mass participation will, at least in the short term, curtail the activities of radical extremists. As noted above, the main problem in these regimes is their complicity in encouraging the spread of anti-American and anti-Semitic messages in order to divert attention away from their own failings. As long as such ideas – which are central motivating beliefs of Islamic terrorists – remain legitimate topics in public discourse, greater democratic openness will not solve the problem.

There are some actions that could help to greatly diminish Islamic terrorists passive support in the Muslim world. First is a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue through the creation of a Palestinian state. This is perhaps the single greatest grievance in the Muslim world. Second, is a resolution of the Iraq issue. The economic sanctions against Iraq are widely unpopular, despite the fact Saddam Hussein is entirely responsible for their existence, and has purposefully manipulated them to cause the greatest possible harm to his own people. Nonetheless, the end of sanctions would go a long way toward dampening the resentment of the United States in the region.

Of course, neither of these issues is amenable to easy solution, nor, as some might argue, is the United States entirely able to bring about the resolution of these issues unilaterally. More importantly, resolving these issues would hardly mollify the radical Islamists. Even a complete withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East would not curtail further violence. Only when the entire region is under the control of Islamist regimes will terror attacks cease. As long as Israel exists, Canada, the United States and Israel's allies in the West will remain legitimate terrorist targets. Indeed some have argued that, like other transnational revolutionary ideologies, Islamism will lose its appeal only after it takes root throughout the Muslim world, runs its experiment, and fails. It is often only massive failure after many years that ultimately discredits an ideology among its adherents.<sup>14</sup>

In short, global terrorism cannot be eliminated entirely, it can only be managed. This means being sensitive to the motives of terrorists, but recognizing that their grievances are often

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<sup>13</sup> See Jack Snyder, From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Katz, "Osama bin Laden."

the result of a perverse worldview and distorted self-image and image of others, and that their demands cannot reasonably be met. We cannot change the minds of these extremists. Instead we should work to disrupt their access to technology and finances that keep them in business, while seeking to diminish their mass passive support.