

Is Development an Effective Way to Fight Terrorism?

Lloyd J. Dumas

Recently columnist Thomas Friedman and economist Alan B. Krueger, both writing in the *New York Times*, have argued that development is not an effective tool for fighting terrorism. Many terrorists, the argument goes, are not poor—certainly not desperately poor—and many people living in poverty do not become involved in terrorism. But other analysts, such as Richard Sokolsky and Joseph McMillan, research fellows at the Institute for National Strategic Studies of

To productively address the issue of the possible relation between terrorism and the need for development, one must understand more clearly the nature of terrorism.

the National Defense University, have argued that development is crucial to countering terrorism. They contend that poverty and the frustration it breeds are key elements in creating the conditions that foster and support terrorism worldwide.

To productively address the issue of the possible relation between terrorism and the need for development, one must understand more clearly the nature of terrorism. One must also distinguish terrorism from both the classic military actions of rebels and ordinary criminal violence. One must also understand the values, conditions, and motivations that lead people to engage in appallingly destructive acts of terrorism.

The Nature of Terrorism

Not every violent, destructive, or antisocial act is terrorism. Terrorism is defined by its tactics and strategy: it is violence or the threat of violence carried out with the express purpose of creating fear and alarm. An armed gang of bank robbers that shoot bank guards commit a violent crime, not an act of terrorism. The robbers' intent in attacking the guards is to prevent the guards from interfering with the theft, not to frighten

the wider population. But when a gang randomly plants bombs on city buses, it is not trying to stop the passengers from interfering with its activities; it is trying to frighten people. This is a terrorist gang because the purpose of its acts is to terrorize. Unlike the bank robbers, this gang intends its acts to have effects that, in space and time, reach far beyond the immediate damage they have inflicted.

Unlike other criminals, further, terrorists usually try to draw attention to themselves, often claiming "credit" for their acts. In many ways, terrorism is a perverse form of theater in which terrorists play to an audience whose actions—and opinions—they hope to influence. When terrorists kidnap journalists or tourists, for instance, they play to an audience of government officials who possess the power to grant such typical demands as the release of the terrorists' imprisoned comrades. But even in these cases, the terrorists are playing to the public at the same time, with a view toward creating enough public pressure to compel those in power to do what the terrorists want done.

It is the nature of terrorism to encourage public vulnerability, insecurity, and helplessness. Commonly,

In many ways, terrorism is a perverse form of theater in which terrorists play to an audience whose actions—and opinions—they hope to influence.

choosing victims more or less at random is the best way to accomplish this goal. Randomness works—if there seems no clear pattern regarding which particular bus is blown up, airliner hijacked, or building bombed, then there exist no obvious or certain ways for a bystander to avoid becoming a victim, no clear strategy to guard against danger. As a consequence, fear and anxiety grow—and remain a part of life of the average member of the public.

**Civil Society, Democracy,
and Civic Renewal**

Robert K. Fullinwider, editor

Civic society is receiving renewed attention from academics, politicians, journalists, community leaders, and participants in the voluntary sector. *Civil Society, Democracy, and Civic Renewal* brings together several of America's leading scholars—of history, sociology, political science, and philosophy—to explore the meaning of civil society, its positive and negative effects, its relation to government, and its contribution to democracy.

The chapters range widely, taking up the connection between social trust and civic renewal, the role of citizen councils in environmental decision making, the growth of self-help groups and their impact on community, historical patterns of civic activity by women and African Americans, and the place of expertise in public deliberation on scientific and medical issues.

Civil Society, Democracy, and Civic Renewal is a project of the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy and the National Commission on Civic Renewal. It was written and edited with the support of the Public Policy Program of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

430 pages
\$69.00 (cloth)
\$26.95 (paper)

Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
<http://rowmanlittlefield.com>
Tel.: 800.462.6420
FAX: 800.338.4550
For examination copies, call
800.273.5720

Acts intended to frighten the public, committed against more-or-less randomly chosen victims, who themselves are powerless to meet the attackers' demands, define terrorism and set it apart from other forms of violence. By contrast, bombing the barracks of an occupying military force is not an act of terrorism, but a violent and murderous act of war. Its victims are not randomly chosen innocent bystanders, but those who are directly involved in carrying out policies and activities the attackers oppose. Similarly, the act of a

habitual sex offender who kidnaps, rapes, and murders a more-or-less randomly chosen victim is a vicious and brutal crime, but it also is not terrorism. Though predatory crimes often instill fear in the public, such crimes are neither committed for that purpose nor intended to influence public opinion or behavior. Suicide bombing an urban marketplace to precipitate a change in government policy is an act of terrorism because, although its more-or-less randomly chosen victims cannot directly change government behavior, the indiscriminate slaughter caused by suicide bombing is intended to shock and frighten people into demanding changes in government policies sought by the terrorists. So long as the public believes that it remains in danger of further random attack until those policies change, it will insist all the more urgently on government action.

Note that this conceptual definition of terrorism as a tactic—committing acts intended to instill public fear, against more-or-less randomly chosen victims who themselves are powerless to meet their attackers' demands—has nothing to do with the ultimate goals of those who choose this tactic. Regardless whether a group is trying to overthrow a democratic government and establish a dictatorship, create a homeland for a disenfranchised people, trigger a race war, or get more food distributed to the malnourished—if it uses terrorist means, it is a terrorist group.

Because terrorism is a tactic and not an end in itself, as many motivations and goals exist as there are people who might resort to terrorism. At one end of the spectrum are those who are deeply disturbed, mentally and emotionally. The economic and political conditions of such deranged individuals are wholly

*The perpetrators of the September 11 attacks
were . . . not themselves either economically
disadvantaged or politically oppressed. Most
were of the middle class, and they were
reasonably well educated.*

irrelevant to their desire to commit mayhem. At the other extreme are those motivated by a desire to achieve specific and relatively limited political objectives—such as freeing Northern Ireland from British control, or ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. These individuals have chosen terrorism on the basis of a rational, though horrific, calculation (which may or may not be correct) that terrorism will publicize their cause and build enough pressure to help them accomplish their goals.

In arguing against the efficacy of development in fighting terrorism, Alan Kreuger contends that good

empirical evidence exists to show that the commission of hate crimes is unrelated to either the education level or economic condition of the perpetrators of those crimes. Since hate crimes are a "close cousin" to terrorism, he argues, education level and economic conditions are irrelevant to the making of a terrorist. It may well be true that the commission of hate crimes bears no significant relation to socioeconomic status, since these crimes tend to be driven by pure bigotry, which is not the private domain of any particular socioeconomic group. But hate crimes are not "close cousins" of terrorism. They are not even second cousins twice removed. No doubt hatred fills the hearts of at least some terrorists, but terrorism is an entirely different phenomenon.

The Terrorist Perspective

All but the most insane, most isolated terrorists (such as Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber) to some extent depend on and try to build support among a broader public, at least for their cause if not for their tactics. Most terrorists lack the benefit of a wealthy patron like Osama bin Laden, or the active support of a state. But even those who do enjoy some form of high-level patronage must still succeed at a variety of practical, and usually expensive tasks. These include recruiting new members, training them, finding methods that enable them to travel, planning and coordinating activities and logistics, and storing matériel and equipment—all without detection. Terrorists are much more likely to successfully accomplish these practical tasks if they can count on a base of support among a wider public.

Although a terrorist group could rely on deranged or financially desperate individuals to meet its recruitment needs, such people are dangerous to the group's discipline, effectiveness, and stability. The group is better served by members possessing financial means and skills, and mental stability. Among other things, a core membership of people who seem more solidly based allows the group to more easily recruit others who themselves have some financial means and are relatively stable psychologically. But the problem then becomes how to motivate such recruits to take extreme—even terminal—risks.

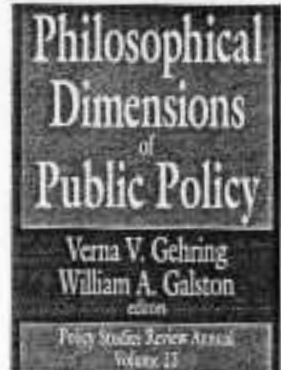
Among the most successful recruitment appeals is the call to the service of some group or force greater than the individuals themselves. This appeal to heroic participation in a greater cause encourages recruits to feel that by engaging in terrorism, the recruit becomes the avenger of some great wrong, the voice of the voiceless, a soldier for the weak and oppressed. Experience has shown that the right kind of appeal to heroic participation in a "great cause" can make recruits not just ready but eager to perpetrate extreme

Philosophical Dimensions of Public Policy

Policy Studies Review Annual, Volume 13

Verna V. Gehring and William A. Galston, editors

Philosophical Dimensions of Public Policy presents thirty-four articles written by research scholars in numerous fields—philosophy, political theory, medicine, law, biology, economics, ecology and sociology—treating a broad range of topics in practical philosophy. The Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy has been home for these ideas, pioneering a distinctive method of conducting inquiry into the moral dimensions of public life, and contributing to public discussion and deliberation.



Readers will find empirical data and philosophical arguments with the intention of informing public policy and public deliberation. *Philosophical Dimensions of Public Policy* is certain to be an essential research tool for scholars as well as graduate and undergraduate students.

0-7658-0100-0 (cloth) 2002 600 pp. \$89.95/£75.50



Rutgers—The State University
of New Jersey
Department AD2002 VGEH
35 Berrue Circle
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8042

Visit Our Website
For Online Specials*
www.transactionpub.com

*Individual credit card orders only.

In the U.K. and Europe call:
Transaction Publishers (UK)
3 Henrietta Street
Covent Garden
London WC2E 8LLJ
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7 240 0856
or fax: +44 (0) 20 7 379 0609

In Australia:
Footprint Books Pty Ltd.
Unit 4 / 92A Mona Vale Rd.
Mona Vale, NSW 2103
Sydney, NSW 2105
Australia
Tel: 61 02 9997 3973
Fax: 61 02 9997 3185
In India:
Viva Books Private Ltd.
4262/3 Ansari Rd.
New Delhi, 110 002
India

Order from your bookstore
or direct from the publisher.

Toll free (US only) 1-888-999-6778 or fax 732-748-9801

acts of violence against innocent people who have never directly done them any harm.

Those who consider themselves (or their close friends and families) victims of economic and political oppression and marginalization are easiest to recruit to “fight back” against their perceived victimizers. Retaliation can take the form of either direct engagement in terrorism or support of its activities. A wider public that becomes convinced it is part of the oppressed group may condone or support terrorism. For example, it seems not only that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorists were less disadvantaged than many other Catholics in Northern Ireland, but also that many of the IRA’s financial supporters in the US were also far from destitute. But both the terrorists and their supporters considered themselves fighters against the forces responsible for the economic and political marginalization of “their people.”

Similarly, the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks were certainly not themselves either economically disadvantaged or politically oppressed. Most were of the middle class, and they were reasonably well educated. At the same time, they saw themselves as striking a blow for “their oppressed people,” their “Muslim brothers” who were forced to bear the insult of “foreign infidels” (American military forces) occupying their holiest of lands of Saudi Arabia and enjoying the support of the powerful Saudi government. The September 11 attackers might also have seen themselves as striking a blow against America as the strong supporter of Israel, “fighting back” on behalf of their “Muslim brothers” in Palestine, who are indisputably in dire straits.

Terrorism, which by definition is always directed against innocent, uninvolved civilians, is never justifiable. Nevertheless, understanding terrorist motivations and worldview does not imply sympathy with either their means or their goals. Instead it is important because it helps to explain why terrorists do what they do. Their attention to and interest in maintaining wider public support, for example, are not just incidental but are critical to both solving their practical problems and encouraging added public pressure to achieve their goals.

Terrorism and Development

The more that inclusive economic and political development increase the economic well-being and political status of the wider group of which terrorists and their supporters feel they are a part, the more difficult it becomes for terrorists to recruit operatives and to find others who will support the terrorists’ cause. It is in this sense, then, that economic and political development will in the long run help dry up the pool of potential terrorists, as well as the wider public support on which they depend.

To believe that one’s people are not respected and that one’s views and needs are not taken seriously by the rest of the world are powerful motivations toward violence. But these motivations can be short-circuited by opening political avenues for peaceful dialogue to air grievances and to present views and goals. One possibility is giving terrorists a seat at the political table—but not necessarily a seat at the head of the table. Within its own political system, Israel for instance has from time to time brought together politicians advocating vastly disparate views into “national unity” governments. But not every participant in these government coalitions has been influential in a wide range of key policies.

Perhaps a better example is a scene I recall from a 1980s public television documentary about Costa Rica. The documentary included an in-depth look at Costa Rican political attitudes. At one point the North American interviewer, shocked to learn that the communists held about four percent of the seats in the national legislature, said something like, “You’ve got COMMUNISTS in the legislature!” To which the Costa Rican official he was interviewing said, in effect: “Yes, we do. We decided we’d rather have them in the legislature shouting at us than in the hills shooting at us.”

The best way to deal with terrorism that arises from individual mental illness or group psychosis is through first-rate intelligence and police work, not political accommodation or economic development. But terrorism that arises from political and economic marginalization can be more effectively short-circuited by giving voice to a wide array of groups with genuine political agendas (not doomsday religious cults or psychopaths). Civil participation dissolves the frustration and marginalization that encourages terrorism or supports it. Political development, which provides avenues for the peaceful participation of groups representing widely diverse interests, is an integral part of an effective counter-terrorist strategy.

One important question to ask is why disenfranchised groups turn to terrorism rather than to more traditional forms of civil rebellion or to guerrilla warfare. Of course, some groups do choose to become rebels or guerillas. Successful rebellion depends in part on the ability to raise large enough forces for direct confrontation with the government. If a disenfranchised group can raise significant forces—and especially if the government is relatively weak—it may tend to form guerrilla groups. If it cannot—and especially if the governmental opposition is likely to be strong—the disenfranchised group might choose terrorism. The group might also turn to terrorism if it viewed its “real” enemy as a foreign government or corporate cabal that is either far beyond its borders, too powerful to confront directly, or both.

Maximizing the Counter-Terrorist Effects of Development

Some approaches to development will be more effective than others in fighting terrorism. I have argued that, regardless of the socioeconomic status of either the terrorists themselves or their financial supporters, the crux of the problem lies in the economic and political marginalization, frustration, and humiliation of the group to which the terrorists and their supporters feel connected. If so, then the approach to development likely to prove most effective against terrorism is one that both reaches out directly to the most marginalized, disaffected, and disadvantaged of those people, and also allows individuals a sense of empowerment, self-worth, dignity, and respect. The most effective program will also be one that simultaneously addresses the challenges of both economic and political development.

On the economic side, I am a strong advocate of microlending. Putting a little capital—and the responsibility for repayment of that capital—in many different impoverished hands helps overcome the barriers created by lack of access to the means of self-investment, as well as the lack of self-confidence and hope. It is also possible, even necessary, to seamlessly incorporate an educational element into microlending programs. One of the most interesting and encouraging

The approach to development likely to prove most effective against terrorism is one that both reaches out directly to the most marginalized, disaffected, and disadvantaged . . . and also allows individuals a sense of empowerment, self-worth, dignity, and respect.

examples of the ability of microlending to bring real economic improvement and social empowerment to the poor is the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh.

Founded in 1976 by economist Muhammad Yunus, the Grameen Bank has enabled millions of poor Bangladeshis to start or upgrade their own small businesses. The Grameen Bank makes very small loans—often less than a few hundred dollars—to five-person borrower groups. Most of these loans were made to women, a particularly disadvantaged, economically (and politically) marginalized part of that nation's population. This approach has been impressive in its outreach ability. As impressive is the astonishing loan repayment rate of over 90 percent, achieved by the design of culturally sensitive loan programs that consider the needs of its borrowers. The success of the Grameen approach makes it clear that any microlending program must rely on knowledge of the cultural

environment in order to design procedures that assure responsible use of funds and their timely repayment.

On the political side, democratization must extend beyond the mere formalities of holding elections. It must guarantee the right to organize political parties that offer meaningful alternatives. The process of democratization also must protect (and, in some circumstances, establish) the freedom of speech and of the press, and it must allow avenues for peaceful political participation. Greater opportunity for political expression also requires the protection of those whose views lie outside the political mainstream, and the protection of ethnic minorities. Greater opportunity for peaceful participation in political and economic life benefits those who would otherwise be disenfranchised—and also the wider society, which can choose from among a wider pool of ideas and talents of the population.

International organizations as large as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund can best assist by not becoming directly involved in microlending. Such organizations should encourage the establishment and funding of a variety of microlending institutions in developing countries. International organizations can also help assure that both transparency and the inclusion of corrective feedback systems are part of the design and implementation of programs.

In both the economic and political arenas, the creation of institutions that encourage, support, and facilitate the development of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can be vital in achievement of the kinds of deep and wide outreach that thwart the allure of terrorism. Care must be taken to assure that these organizations are genuine real grassroots groups and not "Astroturf" NGOs—those that look like grassroots organizations from a distance, but actually represent

Putting a little capital . . . in many different impoverished hands helps overcome the barriers created by lack of access to the means of self-investment, as well as the lack of self-confidence and hope.

the interests of influential business or governing elites in the country. If counter-terrorism is to succeed, the voiceless must be given voice. The genuine grassroots NGO will invigorate active participation in political and economic life. Large, government-based organizations dealing with international development (such as the World Bank or the US Agency for International Development) should not directly involve themselves in the creation of NGOs. NGOs that are born of the efforts of local activists are far more effective at repre-

senting local interests and creating a real sense of empowerment. The involvement of international organizations could prove counterproductive if, for instance, their enactment or management of programs is based on a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of local interest. International organizations contribute best when they help fund and encourage the creation of those institutions that provide the substrate on which genuine grassroots NGOs grow and flourish.

Conclusion

Because terrorism is such a violent tactic, because it inflicts so much pain on the innocent, it fills us with anger and the urge to strike back even more violently against those whom we judge have encouraged—let alone committed—such despicable acts. Strong emotional reactions to terrorism are easy enough to understand. But a response based on emotion leads only to more pain, more destruction, more taking of innocent lives. This kind of response is not only profoundly immoral, it is profoundly ineffective.

Anyone who needs proof of the futility of this kind of response as a counter-terrorist strategy should consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For decades, Israel has doggedly followed a policy of responding to any act of terrorism with violent military retaliation. Many have died as a result; yet not only has this policy failed to stop the terrorism, but there exists today more terrorism directed against Israel than ever before. What has this vicious cycle of violence accomplished? Neither side has achieved its objectives. The only result one sees with this policy is the creation of a situation in which Israelis live in fear and Palestinians live in misery—clearly an intolerable life for anyone.

There exist far more effective responses to terrorism and—even more important—more effective efforts to prevent terrorism. In the short run, high-quality intelligence gathering and police work are critical. But in the long run, encouraging economic and political

development is the single most effective counter-terrorist approach. Only carefully crafted development programs can fully and directly address terrorism's root causes: the marginalization, frustration, and humiliation that breeds not just terrorism, but also other forms of violence and inhumanity that characterize deprived populations. In the long run, if they follow the right sorts of policies, the institutions of international development will prove to be a far more potent counter-terrorist force in the world than military forces could ever hope to be.

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon. Like other forms of violence, there is no single reason why people engage in acts of terrorism, and no simple solution to the problems it poses. But if we wish to move beyond vengeance and seek a solution, we must try to understand and effectively address the conditions that give rise to terrorism and help it grow. In our search for a solution, there is no doubt that economic and political development play a critical role. They are not the whole answer, but they are an important part of it.

Lloyd J. Dumas
Professor of Economics and Political Economy
School of Social Sciences
University of Texas (Dallas)
ljdumas@utdallas.edu

Sources: Thomas Friedman and Alan B. Kreuger expressed their reservations about development as effective in combating terrorism in the "Economic Scene" column of the *New York Times* (December 13, 2001); Richard Sokolsky and Joseph McMillan, "Foreign Aid in Our Own Defense," *New York Times* (February 12, 2002); more information on the Grameen Bank can be found in: Muhammad Yunus with Alan Jolis, *Banker to the Poor: Micro-lending and the Battle Against World Poverty* (Public Affairs, 1999); further thoughts on the nature of terrorism and the threat it poses can be found in: Lloyd J. Dumas: *Lethal Arrogance: Human Fallibility and Dangerous Technologies* (St. Martin's Press/Palgrave, 1999).