Imperialism in the New Century

L D Howe

Serco Assurance*, Culham Science Centre, Abingdon
Oxon, OX14 3ED, UK

February 1999

Executive Summary

This paper is intended to draw attention to the underlying driving force behind protest terror. It is an attempt to understand what gives a terrorist organisation its claim to validity. It is also an attempt to understand the causes of human suffering and the resulting sympathy for those who behave in a violent manner in the name of those who suffer. It proposes that the violent suppression of terrorism has always failed and that, in the end, the only long-term solution is to address the causes that give rise to the terror.

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1   Introduction

The horror of the events of the 11th September 2001 has focussed minds on terrorism, or at least the current understanding of the word. It is often thought the terrorism is a recent phenomenon perpetrated by groups of disaffected individuals and targeted against society. Actually, terrorism has been around for many centuries. The word comes from the Latin verb to frighten and the primary dictionary definition probably dates from the French revolution period of the Reign of Terror. Terror means "a time of, or government by, terrorism", where terrorism is interpreted as an organised system of intimidation, especially for political ends. Terror has often been used as a political weapon by governments around the world and there are still states in which it might reasonably be considered to exist. Terror depends on two pillars, fear and frustration. In the case of state terror, the supporting pillar is fear of being overcome by contrary ideas or popular uprising. In the case of terror by protest groups, it is borne out of frustration and an inability make others listen. In neither case can terror be justified. Common humanitarian grounds are a sufficient repudiation of any terror-based activity.

The resort to state terror is usually accompanied by a need to repress legitimate ideals and expectations in order to cling to power. It is generally the response of a regime with extreme beliefs or one that, once in power, cannot accept the loss of power. This paper will not concern itself further with state terror. Terror by protest groups, however dreadful, is often underpinned by genuine grievance. That is not to say that the perpetrators themselves necessarily have such a grievance. Indeed they are often no more than thugs who would carry out terrorist acts equally fervour either on behalf of a state terror regime or simply to further their own egos. However, the existence of protest terror groups usually indicates the presence of an underlying cause or grievance. In order to eradicate terror of this nature, in the end, the only permanent cure is to remove the cause of the grievance. Of course, some grievances may be imagined or unjustified. Nevertheless, it is essential to try to gain an insight into the workings of the minds of those who carry out such atrocities. As Harper Lee said in To Kill a Mocking Bird "Before you criticise someone, you have to get inside their skin, kick it around a little and find out what it feels like". The remainder of this paper aims to get inside the skin of those whose grievances led to the awful events of September 11th 2001.

2   The distribution of wealth

Fifteen per cent of the world's population, the so-called developed nations, control ninety nine per cent of the wealth. The rest of the world falls into the classification of "under-developed" or "the third world". This is not a new state of affairs. It has gone on for centuries, and was probably true even in Roman times. However, more recently, European nations conquered lands around the world using their technological superiority to subdue the local populations. These conquests reached their height in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries. The situation became known as colonialism or imperialism. By the second half of the twentieth century, the formal colonies and empires had mainly been dismantled and independence "granted" to the former territories, which became independent states. But there remains a school of thought in many of these lands that they are still subjected to "western imperialism". One needs to consider the similarities and differences between colonial times

and the present in order to understand why much of the third world regards itself as still being the victim of imperialism.

There were several motivations behind the conquest of what were to become colonial lands. These include the desire discover the world around them, to trade with or plunder from the inhabitants of the lands, to gain political power and to establish a strategic military presence. Once ensconced as the imperial power, it became all to easily for merchants and business owners to begin the task of exploiting the natural potential of those lands. The exploitation of labour began to increase, at first to maintain the lifestyle of the occupying powers and then, later, to carry out tasks more cheaply than was possible either by their own labours or with the labour force "back home". This domination of much of the world by a few nations and, in particular, by a wealthy minority within those nations, led to a situation of great injustice and even inhumanity throughout the world. Not only did it cause there to be a great divide between the rich and poor areas of the world, but also it increased the inequalities between rich and poor within Europe. As the twentieth century wore on, with two world wars, attitudes within Europe changed and inequalities were reduced, at least for the majority of people. However, the countries that had been former colonies saw little economic change with the change in political power.

Today, many in the third world see themselves as the victims of economic imperialism. Strangely, although the European countries, particularly those that formerly possessed colonies, take some of the blame, the majority of the accusations are directed at the USA, which has never had any colonies. Indeed, it was formerly a colony of the United Kingdom. So what has changed? In a word, the catalyst that led to the formation of the new imperialism is oil. Or more correctly, it is oil-based technology. Without oil-based technology there would be no motorised transport, no aviation, no modern engineering, no semiconductor industry, no modern IT systems, no modern plastics, etc. So obviously, the owners of oil production suddenly became extremely important and powerful. However, to exploit the reserves, the best available technology and financial resources were needed. This means that oil exploitation became the domain of what we now call the developed world. But only one developed country had large reserves of oil of its own – the USA. Thus during the first half of the twentieth century the USA rose to the position of super power, dominating trade, finance and the global economy. Many people throughout the world now see the USA, rightly or wrongly, as the cause of their poverty and exploitation. Thus, the exploitation of colonial imperialism is perceived around the globe to have been replaced by economic imperialism.

3 The effects of economic imperialism

Those who see themselves as victims of economic imperialism naturally look to the developed world with a certain amount of envy and resentment. The developed world has the technology and resources to exploit the reserves of the third world and convert them into products that produce a lifestyle far above the reach of those whose reserves are exploited. They perceive the culture of the developed world as one of selfishness and unconcern for those parts of the world that are less well off. They also think of those nations with military and economic power as able to take what they want when they want and engineer the overthrow of all who stand in their way. When people in the developed world ask, "Why do

they hate us?" they fail to understand that it is not as individuals they are despised. It is because they are part of a system that is seen to be callous towards those who are less well off. It is believed that they take no action to stand up for what is right. What is even more significant, they often consider that the ills inflicted upon them by their own political systems are underwritten by the developed world and the USA in particular.

One might ask how this affects protest terror. The answer is fairly clear. The discontent felt by a significant number amongst the eighty-five per cent of the population who make up the less well off nations may lead to a certain amount of resentment and even jealousy. It may also lead to a desire to punish those who exploit them. It certainly leads to an urge to take control of their own resources and extract a more equitable return from them. These are not always practical options. However, they are fertile ground for the seeds of revenge. Thus, while the gross inequalities of the world persist, there will always be those who will have a cause to fight. Those who fight the cause are not always those who suffer from the maladies that spawn it. However, while the cause persists, there will inevitably be terror.

Another question that arises is how can the supporters of protest against economic imperialism justify or even accept a catastrophic death toll such as that which occurred on September 11th 2001? The reasons for such acceptance lie in the perceived relative safety and comfort enjoyed by those in the developed world over and above that which exists elsewhere. As a result of economic exploitation, it could be argued that tens of thousands die every day of every year. The die through poverty, unsafe working conditions, persecution or state sponsored terror supported by some or all of the developed nations. They have seen the old world suffer in world wars, where thousands of civilians have been killed and injured in conflict. They have also seen the people of the USA insulated against such actions for more than a century. If this logic is accepted, it is not difficult to see why there is support for a major attack on the USA, rather than other countries. However, any country in the developed world must be considered as a target by anyone adopting this line of reasoning.

4　The fight against terror

It has always been a first reaction of oppressors to strike at terror with violence. This is, in effect, counter terror. The lessons of the colonial powers such as the UK are still with many alive today. Ireland, Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus are examples where terror was the embodiment of protest over inequality and liberty. The USA in Vietnam and the former USSR in Afghanistan and the National Party in South Africa are even more recent reminders of the use and attempted repression of protest terror. Even as this is written, a similar situation exists in Israel. It is ironic to think that the state of Israel was established to overcome repression and the denial of basic human rights and the descendants of those who emerged from such conditions now use the same tactics that were used against them. They must blind to the fact that the defiance of their ancestors will be mirrored in the actions of those who now see themselves as repressed. The concept of treating some members of the human race as sub-human, classified by an artificial grouping, will always lead to injustice and inequality [1]. There is nothing like despair to drive people to violence.

What is the lesson of past protest terror campaigns? It is two-fold. Firstly, a violent reaction will bring no more than a temporary reprieve. Even if every terrorist is captured and

eliminated, more will spring up in their wake while the oppression and inequality continues to exist. Secondly, the only long-term solution is to remove the grievance. Of course that does not mean throwing away everything that has been gained by society. What it does mean, however is that the aggrieved majority must begin to see progress towards the removal of the grievance. This means a change of policy, a change of heart and a change in the perceived culture. Although terror will always exists as long as there are thugs in the world, the removal of severe grievances will reduce the incidence and severity of protest terror. If the grievances are removed, protest terror can never be more than a collection of small, isolated incidents. It only re-emerges as a serious problem when there is a cause to unite the protestors.

When a terrorist network is created, usually by organic growth, there has to be some underlying cause that allows it to gain momentum and continue in the face of adversity. As can be seen in Northern Ireland, there can often be several terrorist organisations each of whom oppose the others. Often these organisations split and regroup. Even if an organisation is completely eradicated, another will emerge to replace it as long as the underlying grievances remain. Therefore we must resign ourselves to the fact that the eradication of a particular terror organisation is almost certainly a futile gesture that will always fail to achieve the goal of eradicating terrorism.

5   Conclusions

We have seen that protest terror exists as the embodiment of grievances. The world is currently divided into those few who own almost every thing and enjoy a relatively high standard of living and the many who own little and have almost no reward for their loyalty and labour. If there is no visible progress towards equality for all human beings everywhere, there will always be those prepared to take the war to those who will apparently care little for the plight of the many. Any attempt to stamp out terror by violent means is certain to fail unless the cause that the terrorists claim to embrace is removed is addressed by removing the grievance.

6   References

[1]L D Howe *Racialism in Society* http://www.innovationgame.com/general (2001)