In the Name of Terror
by Marco Mezzera
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One of the most tangible and determinant consequences of the September 11 events has been the overbearing entrance of the concepts of terror and terrorism into the common language. Treated by most as pure and self-explaining words, these terms carry, on the contrary, a huge cultural and political baggage that Western elites have been very fast in monopolizing. All of a sudden, right in the middle of a crisis of legitimacy of most of the global economic and political institutions, the suicidal attacks that rocked American society, turned into a kind of "invisible hand" held out to help those same elites out of troubles.

Terrorism as a manifestation of political struggle has not been completely unknown to Western societies, as in the case of Germany and Italy. However, the degree of presence of this concept in people's everyday life and the assurgency of the universality of its meaning in people's representation after September 11, has become something totally inexperienced by the vast majorities of their populaces. This brief observation is crucial to realize that what happened after that date was in fact tantamount to a massive exercise of cultural determination by political elites in the West. Not that the process of creating entities or concepts to be utilized for political purposes was something new in the hegemonic history of the West. Rather, as masterly explained by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, the domination of the cultural discourse by the West has always gone hand in hand with its aim of political and economic control of the "other".

In specific terms, it is the image of Islam, or the Muslim world, which has undergone an extensive period of elaboration and forging, whereby all sorts of irrational pictures have been attributed to it, not least the fear that its disciples are trying to bring back to life a centuries-old political project of taking over the "civilized" world. Because of the creation of such a phobia, the identification of its sources almost exclusively in the Muslim world, and the subsequent attempt to order it according to intelligible categories, Western societies seem the plausible repositories of the responsibility to control and dominate this deviating phenomenon, even by the "legitimate" use of force when required. A complex machine combining corporate actors, foundations, developments agencies, academic institutions and the military establishment sets them in motion in order to bring the destabilizing agents under control and reinstall a global environment conducive to their version of growth and development. Those elements that do not fall in line or, even worse, go against the dominant dictates are easily labeled as terrorists.

At the end, what is being feared is not so much the violence utilized by many of the so-called terrorist movements, as the potential disruptiveness that their message carries against the

current global equilibrium. Unfortunately for their enemies, those movements have quickly learned how to turn some of the aspects linked to technological progress to their advantage, and have started to spread their ideology outside the reclusive areas where they hade been confined to.

The Need and Advantages of Classification

It is essential at this point to dwell and reflect upon the true origin of the concept of terrorism. In other words, where does it come from, and who is defining it?

The need for classification has been a constant factor in human history. By classifying nature, and consequently men too, into types or cultural generalizations, the observer provides himself with a powerful tool of interpretation -- a designation -- which encompasses all the essential marks of the chosen type or category. The objects of observation are categorized according to their essential features, or their particular character in the case of human beings, and, mainly ignoring the dangers of generalization, are put in their respective boxes.

Furthermore and pivotal to the understanding of the specific issue of terrorism we are trying to deal with, classification facilitates the understanding and absorption of deviating actors (i.e. terrorists). Once those "atypical" types are brought "under control" by designating and indicating their correct place in the order of human society, people alias observers feel more secure and reassured that they now know how to deal (emotionally) with their presence. The possible political consequences and objectives of such classifications are of no concern to the average observer, to whom the order of things is what really matters. Everything has to fall into the right place and according to the right reason. Once the intellectual order has been restored, one is prepared to act upon it and to accept whatever consequences the categorization implies for the various types. What needs to be challenged, therefore, is the cultural origin of the process of classification. Who is determining the types/categories, and ordering objects into them?

The apparent frenzy that followed the September 11 events revealed in reality a well-orchestrated effort by the US authorities to launch their version of a global counterattack directed towards various strands of dissenting voices and opinions. The US did not waste time and, as Edward Said would say, placed themselves "in the privileged center" of observation and of cultural definition and construction. Supported by their Western key allies, they started defining the boundaries of the concept of terrorism and defined their own criteria as to decide whom to include and whom to exclude from that category. Since then, the "others" have become what they say they are. Their definition of the concept and construction of the type, also through the valuable services of global media networks, have become the dominant references of the discourse on political violence. In this way, they have given themselves free hand and almost unrestricted power in creating categories and in filling them. In this regard, and with specific reference to the currently very "trendy" strand of Islamic terrorism, it is worth mentioning that out of the 28 groups that are part of the "List of Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations", released in October 2001 [39 were defined in December 2001: Designation of 39 "Terrorist Organizations" Under the "PATRIOT USA Act" , Federal Register, 12/7/01 -- ratitor] by the Office of the Coordinator for

Counterterrorism of the US Department of State, more than half of them are constituted by Islamic groups.

As to the exact definition of the concept of terrorism itself, quite some confusion reigned at the beginning of the debate, although the broad parameters were clearly set, with the acceptance of the principle that terrorist actors could only be found outside and in opposition to governments. State-terrorism, in other words, was not contemplated as an existing object, let alone a category. Just to give some illustrative examples, it is enlightening to consider the definition of terrorism that Colin Powell gave to *BBC World* shortly after September 11. On that occasion, he defined it as "any action intended or carried out against a 'democratically' elected government". This clearly state-centered definition denies the possibility that terrorist actions against civilian population can be attributed to national governments and instead it leaves considerable space for any kind of state-led repressive action in the name of a concept -- democracy -- that too often has just been the facade for dictatorial regimes operating in virtue of the support of Western powers.

The definition of terrorist activity given in the US Immigration and Nationality Act only confirms that bias towards the legitimacy of state's violence vis-à-vis that of non-state actors. Terrorist activity is there defined as "any activity which is unlawful under the laws of the place where it is committed and which involves" a long array of violent and illegal acts. Nor does it help the cause of clarity that many of the definitions of terrorism are rife with emotional or polemical components, perhaps not completely unintentionally. A classic example of this widespread attitude among officials is offered by the speech given on October 25, 1984, by George Schultz, then Secretary of State of the US, to the New York Park Avenue Synagogue. In that speech, the term terrorism was repeatedly mentioned in terms of its stereotyped contraposition to Western values. Two of the definitions called terrorism "a threat to Western civilization" and "a menace to Western values". More recent attempts by Western leaders to deal with the "other" -- the Islamic world -- have not revealed much more intellectual acumen, as witnessed by Berlusconi's reference, during a speech in Berlin on September 26, 2001, to a "superior" western civilization, vis-à-vis a Muslim world "stuck in the middle ages".

Snowball Effect

The problem with the well-orchestrated international anti-terrorism propaganda is that it encourages other political elites and leaders to follow in line when they also understand the potential benefits they can obtain domestically by supporting the West-lead discourse. The terrorist category becomes a generic container in which to throw all the undesirable domestic or international actors, who constitute a threat not only to "stability", but also to their base of power and legitimacy.

A clear example of this sort of run of events is given by the unfolding of a South East Asian version of the global anti-terrorism campaign. During the last week of August 2001, the heads of state of the Philippines and of Indonesia embarked on an intensive tour of the ASEAN region. Besides focusing on the usual issues of economic cooperation and trade integration, on separate occasions the discussions among the various leaders concentrated on the need to control and fight the upcoming threat of regional terrorism. By ironic

coincidence, the various concerns primarily regarded Islamic terrorism, which was said to receive stimulating inputs from outsiders such as Osama bin Laden and his Al Quaeda network. Suddenly, it appeared as if the main threat to the stability of many of the countries in the region would come from the spreading disease of Islamic extremism. It was quite evident, however, that in cases such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, such a discourse, constructed around the elusive entity of Islamic subversive groups, could easily serve more pragmatic and domestic political purposes and agendas. In other words, by creating images of shifty public enemies, their powerful impact on the collective imagination would have strongly contributed to the legitimacy of repressive measures needed by the political leaders to control an otherwise quite unstable political situation at home.

Riding this trendy wave of counter terrorism, regional leaders such as Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Indonesian President Megawati and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad were very quick in issuing successive statements attesting the existence of widespread and well-functioning cooperation networks between many of the independence and Islamic movements in the region. For instance, President Arroyo declared that the Abu Sayyaf Group had established good linkages with the Acehnese GAM movement for the smuggling of weapons. In the following talks with her Indonesian counterpart, they therefore agreed to form a committee tasked with the activation of a 1997 bilateral defense and security accord to address arms smuggling. Megawati, in her turn, lamented the infiltration of Malaysian Muslim militants in her country with the clear objective of causing political destabilization. Those mysterious external elements were blamed, among others, for the series of bombings in the capital around the end of 2000. Of course, Mahathir was more than happy to heed those complaints and immediately closed in on the culprits.

At the beginning of August, the Malaysian police resorted to the wide powers conferred to them by that country's Internal Security Act (ISA) and arrested 10 members of a (militant) group called the Kumpulan Mujahiddeen Malaysia (KMM). The group was said to have links to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and to have sent representatives to Ambon, Indonesia, to fight on the side of the Muslims. The fact that six of the detainees were also members of PAS was utilized as evidence against the biggest opposition party, in an attempt to unveil its hidden and subversive political agenda. Since then, the political fortunes of the governing coalition and of its main party (UMNO), which had been sinking along a steady line, reverted and instead, it was the opposition Barisan Alternative (BA) which had to endure a strong internal crisis that left it without the Democratic Action Party (DAP), one of its leading members since its formation in 1999. The crisis of the opposition coalition had already started in the previous months, mainly triggered by PAS' positioning along what was perceived by the majority of the non-Muslim electorate, and also by its political partners, as quite orthodox lines. Especially in Terengganu, the latest state that had come under its control, PAS had been in fact calling for some time for a stricter implementation of social practices more in line with the core principles of Islamic teaching, thereby trying to put curbs, for example, on alcohol consumption and on gambling. This propensity towards an Islamic legal system and, above all, PAS' repeated calls for a not clearly defined establishment of an Islamic state added to the overall confusion and eventually caused the internal fracture in the Alternative Front.

ASEAN unity against terrorism was further enhanced by the leaders' declaration calling for

the establishment of a regional anti-terrorist front, which was issued at the annual meeting of Southeast Asian leaders in Brunei on November 5-6, 2001.

The Power of Images

The main disturbing aspect of the current debate and war on terrorism is that the concept has undoubtedly become synonymous with Islamic terrorism, therefore opening the way to a dangerous discourse calling the ghosts of civilizational confrontation into play. That is by no means, though, a new trend. It is just the continuation and reaffirmation of a political process that since the end of the cold war and the demise of the Soviet Union has seen the term 'terrorism' increasingly associated with Muslims and Islam.

Various reports and publications coming out of the US State or Defense Departments during the last decade of the twentieth century increasingly signaled an intensive degree of activity towards the identification and definition of new security threats. It is in this period that a concept such as that of "asymmetric threats", or non-state actors, emerged in the geopolitical debate and had fingers pointing in the direction of states that were perceived on the brink of failure and disintegration, such as Pakistan and Indonesia, from where those threats were more likely to come. Islamic extremism and militancy was the dominant "translation" of such quite cryptic concepts. That, together with the raising threat of China and the need to contain it, represent nowadays the new challenges (and opportunities) envisioned by the US government for their military machine.

It is also interesting to note that the same reports often conceded that non-state actors identified as terrorists represented the other (unwanted) facet of the process of globalization. The vast technological progresses achieved and made available on a global scale through this process presented a dangerous side whereby they could turn against their "masters". Or, as one of those reports (Asia 2025) put it, "their [of terrorist groups] access to sophisticated weapons and military technologies will grow at the same time the ability of governments in many Asia states to control non-state actors diminishes".

The use of such puzzling terminology could and can not conceal the reality of things, which sees US and Western strategic and economic interests at the basis of the portrayal of certain Muslim states and groups as 'terrorist'. A couple of historical examples can help clarifying this statement. Strong anti-Islamic images were created by the US administration in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution that, by overthrowing the pro-America regime of Reza Pahlavi, threatened the US access and control of the Gulf oil. The same is also true in the case of the removal from power of another monarch of an oil-rich country that was on very friendly terms with Washington; that of the Libyan King, Kamal Idris.

According to political analyst Chandra Muzaffar the pattern was and is clear: those who submit to US interests, those who are subservient to Western dominance, will not be branded as 'terrorists' even if they systematically terrorize their own populace, as in the case of Egypt and Indonesia. On the other hand, if a country seeks to be independent of Western control, especially if its independence is postulated upon an Islamic worldview, it runs the danger of being stamped as a terrorist state or as a sponsor of terrorism, as Sudan has been

recently experiencing.

"Portraying Muslim groups as 'terrorist'", he continues, "serves yet another purpose. It helps to conceal and camouflage the terrorism of the powerful in the West". If one attempts to critically look at the use of force implemented by the US internationally since the end of the Second World War, one can only grow pale at the extent and systemic nature of the use of violence by this country. If one does not fall in the trap of the acceptance of double standards in judging the use of political violence, then the terror nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the military intervention in Vietnam and Laos; the invasion of Lebanon in 1958; the retaliation against Libya in 1986; the war against Iraq in 1991; the bombardments of Yugoslavia in 1999; and other bloody activities in Granada; Panama; Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador, should all be included in the category of terrorism, as they were unquestionably directed against civilians and without a plausible moral or legal basis. The justification by the US of this kind of military intervention as "deterrence by example" can only reinforce the awareness of the hypocrisy of the political discourse being used.

Such discourse is based on the principle of validation of violence by the strong, while the violence of the weak is criminalized and demonized. In addition, and as mentioned above, what should also be taken into consideration is the practice by various US agencies to indulge in frequent mingling and support of reactionary actors within a country with the aim of overthrowing legitimately elected governments, or as in the case of the Afghan Taliban, to instigate and support armed 'terrorist' groups in the name of Cold War principles and geopolitics.

The desire for control of natural resources has created a new strand of colonialism in the aftermath of World War II, whereby the West, mainly represented by its most hegemonic power (the US), has often embraced and embodied sheer practices of state terrorism. However, because of the West's control of the broad discourse on political violence, colonialism and neo-colonialism have seldom been recognized as terrorism. The West has been cunningly able to utilize its power on communication technologies and media to clothe its hegemonic version of terrorism in a moral garb. Powerful images are time and again created to convey the feeling to its own citizenry that the 'sporadic and unavoidable' acts of war that it has to undertake, are justified and even required by its mission to defend a whole set of universal values, above which towers the concept of (Western) democracy. In ways very resembling of action-movies screenplay writing exercises, names such as "Enduring Freedom", "Restore Hope", etc., are relentlessly coined.

Economic Domination

Finally, one should not forget the economic components inherently part of the ongoing hunt for terrorists. By declaring the dismantling of the financial activities and sources of individuals and groups related to terrorist networks as one of the major targets in the war against terrorism, Western governments can now dictate the rules of the game in an even more hegemonic way than before September 11. Not surprisingly, those rules, to be truly effective, have to strictly follow the version of national economic management as endorsed by the West. In other words, the neo-liberal economic fundamentals become the basic principles according to which every national economy that aims at a sound and

terrorism-free functioning should operate.

Besides the need to dismantle those systems that allegedly have offered shelter and incomes to terrorist networks, the dominant economic paradigm is now being brought in through the back door under the disguise of the rationale to fight poverty and underdevelopment. The same key institutions of capitalist globalization that were going through a crisis of legitimacy previous to September 11, are now back in the saddle and are closely assisting the US administration in its choice of strategic partners and cooperation tactics. Everything, needless to say, should take place according to a strict economic liberalization agenda, if we really want to get rid of the breeding grounds for world terrorism and at the same time revive a dangerously slowing global economy.

One basic and indispensable ingredient of the global integration project is the participation of all the markets. While till September 11 it was plausible to accept the existence of recalcitrant entities, often pushed at the extreme sidelines of the world economy and defined as "rogue states", after that date the inherent contamination dangers of such deviating behaviours suddenly caught the attention of various Western policy makers. In particular, the whole reality of an Islamic community struggling to define itself, and doing that mainly by contraposition to Western secular values, posed a concrete threat to the foundations of the capitalist system. The threat was perceived not so much in terms of its absolute economic value, which is still quite limited if we compare the share of the global economy taken by Muslim countries, as with regard to the potential negative impact that the ideology behind many of the Islamic "fundamental" movements could have on the dominating "philosophy" of consumerism.

With the exception of a few "extreme" states, such as the Taliban controlled Afghanistan and Iran, most of the Islamic world has been in fact hooked for decades into the market system and it is evident that any change to that situation would not be welcomed by the defining agents of such a system. In many non-Western societies, modernization and progress have become synonymous of the market system and whole generations of citizens have been educated with its standardizing and competition-inspired principles. Secularization is seen as an attached condition, also in light of the evident difficulties that Islam has been facing in coming to terms with modernization. But again, because of the suggestive nature of these arguments, it is necessary to question the whole conceptual framework on which notions as that of modernization are based. Modernization according to whom? And is there only one version (market oriented) of modernization?