



REPORT

International Terrorism: Causes and Strategic Implications

*Laurence Thieux**

SUMMARY

This report, by Laurence Thieux, discusses international terrorism in respect to its causes and strategic implications. Because terrorism has evolved and grown substantially in recent years, the actions taken against terrorism have been forced to evolve as well. Currently, the 'global war on terror' has been used to justify new forms of intervention, as security regulations are imposed upon the citizens, overshadowing other considerations due to the conception of terrorism as an imminent and serious threat to international security. In order to effectively fight against terrorism, action must be taken by the international community stemming from a common cause with its roots in discourse and understanding of the complex issues involved. The objective of this document is to present the principle political, cultural, and ideological challenges that present different approaches to international terrorism.

The article begins by discussing the plurality and diversity inherent in terrorist organization and structure. This can only be done by understanding the local context from which the plural international character of terrorism arises. Al-Qaeda, for example, is not considered an organization in and of itself, but is now regarded as a common ideology with the capacity to connect various self-organized groups together. Terrorism differs in capacity, and it must not be forgotten that terrorism is not the only threat to international stability and security (as AIDS, poverty, and crime are still large threats). In order to distinguish between types of terrorism, however, a consensus by the international community must be made as to its definition. Thus far, no such agreement has been made, thus making it extremely difficult to settle upon the legal actions that should be taken in response to it.

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The report then moves to the debate on the causes of terrorism. Following the identification of terrorism as a global threat, various groups have done analyses of terrorist acts and organization, each of whom has their own theories in respect to the causes of terrorism. Some have attempted to explain the actions by justifying it through cultural, religious, or ideological means. Each of these aspects alone, however, are not adequate to explain the phenomenon. Rather, local ideologies, cultures, and traditions must also be taken into account if we wish to gain an understanding of the changing context of terrorism in today's society.

The debate on how the perception of terrorism affects various parts of society follows, with specific facts on the effect to immigrant and impoverished populations. Although there is no determinant link between poverty and terrorism, studies have shown that social inequalities and injustices, lack of development, and various other socioeconomic opportunity factors do, in fact, play a role in creating an environment favorable to the emergence of terrorist groups. The role of education is also important in determining whether or not a place is conducive to terrorism, and thus the need to augment educative programs is emphasized.

The fight against terrorism has had a negative impact on other European agendas, as the preoccupation with security is on the forefront of all programs offering support. It has thus also had a large affect on fragile states and other ongoing conflicts, playing a role in the structure and strategy of foreign affairs coordination and organization. Often, the want to reestablish order and structure comes at a high cost: the loss of individual liberties.

The report also discusses the asymmetrical nature of power, presenting the argument that the lack of democracy and civil liberties is a principle cause of terrorism. The differences between the types of government, level of development, and ideological views all contribute to the clash that society is witnessing today. With the rise of terrorism as a global threat, the 'war on terror' has become more than just a fight against terrorist groups. Rather, it has also become a central Western strategic rhetoric, used to justify new means of intervention and foreign policy.

The article goes on to discuss the differences between the European reactions to global terrorism to that of the United States. Their responses to this world threat are very distinct, both in their internal dealings as well as in their exterior strategies. The author does not espouse one reaction above another, but instead makes it known that the different political, social, and historical backgrounds of each country have contributed to its respective response.

The report ends with the warning that terrorism should not be oversimplified. It must not be categorized as a new threat, or of one stemming from a certain geographical or socio-economical area. Instead, the diverse contexts of causes, responses, and histories must be taken into account if the international community wants to reach a general understanding of the phenomenon itself. It is only by the understanding each of these various measures that a consensus can be reached on how to judicially, politically, and socially deal with terrorism and anti-terrorism alike.