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SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 TERRORIST ATTACKS ON THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: ISSUES AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

Following the devastating terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001 in which major structures were destroyed, there was a worldwide condemnation of terrorism, especially because the attack spared few nations in their casualty roll. The attacks as unprecedented and most devastating in the history of international terrorism remain inexplicable and grossly misunderstood. It is reasonable to ask why any group of people would be so inhumane as to inflict such unpardonable crime and pain on the citizens of another country. This paper seeks to identify those underlying causes that led to such catastrophic destruction of great magnitude. It seeks to examine those ideological differences between Islamic fundamentalism and American democratic ethos with particular reference to America's support for Israel in the middle East crisis. The paper is of the view that explanations for the continuous terrorist attacks on the United States of America are to be found in the unfavourable policies of the US in the Arab world. Put simply, America's support for Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis is a major reason that has instigated Islamic hostility towards the United States of America.

Introduction

On the 11th of September, 2001, the world experienced one of the most devastating and unprecedented attacks in the history of humanity. In the attack the Twin Towers comprising 108-storey building of the US World Trade Centre (WTC) in Manhattan, New York accommodating about 500 international companies, government agencies and international trade organisations, and the Pentagon in Washington were struck by two out of the four hijacked passenger airliners flying from Boston, New York and Washington D.C. with 266 passengers on board in what appeared to be a carefully coordinated murderous attacks aimed at reducing those edifices to rubbles. Arising from the act, the WTC Twin Towers, which are among the highest profile buildings in the world collapsed on themselves. Two out of the four buildings located alongside the Rector Street Subway Station and the walkway at West Street also collapsed. The third airline crashed into the Pentagon while the fourth which probably, was targeted at the White House in

Washington crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. All the passengers in the four hijacked airlines lost their lives. The attacks which is seen in most international circles as the worst in recent times witnessed the death of 2,600 people while over 4,000 sustained injuries from 21 countries (*The Guardian*, 17 September, 2007). Although previous cases of terrorism had been terrible and horrendous, the latest attacks on the United States caused them to pale into insignificance. The attack was variously described as "the most wicked and vicious act ever undertaken by fundamentalists of any faith", "atrocities of a monumental and spectacular scale", "unconscionable suicide attacks", among others (Eminue, 2005).

Prior to this time, the world had witnessed incidents of terrorist attacks notable among them were the 1968 hostage taking of twenty-one Israeli passengers and eleven crews by the Palestinians for five weeks in Algiers; the 1972 attack on Israeli athletes by the Black September Organization (BSO) during the Munich Olympic Games; the 1983 suicide bombing of a US base in Beirut, Lebanon which killed 241 US marines; the 1986 bombing of the La belle discotheque in Berlin, West Germany in which about 15 American soldiers died; the March 1992 car bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in which 29 people were killed and 242 injured; the 1993 WTC bombing which killed 6 and injured some 1,000 (rather than the 250,000 fatalities envisaged by the bomber, Ramzi Yousef); the 1995 Tokyo, Japan subway deadly sarin gas attack which killed 168 and injured over 500; the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in which 19 were killed and scores wounded; the 1998 bombing of the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in which 250 were killed and over 5,500 were injured, and still in the same year, in November, the Columbia oil pipeline bomb attack which killed 209 and injured over 130; the September 1999 Moscow explosions in apartment buildings which killed 212 and injured more than 300, and the November 2,000 suicide bombing of the American warship USS Cole, which killed 17 American Servicemen (Dershowitz, 2002:37). The September 11 terrorist attacks on America remains the most current and most unprecedented cool-blooded murder of innocent persons in a magnitude that is unimaginable.

Other incidents of terrorism after the September 11, 2001 were the series of explosions that ripped through the transport system in London in July, 2005 – three in underground train coaches and one in an above-ground double decker bus. This came shortly after the G8 Summit in Scotland, United Kingdom had announced its choice of London as the venue of the 2012 Olympic Games. As a result of the explosions, 57 people were confirmed dead while between 700 and 1,000 others were injured (*The Guardian* 8, 2005:1). An organisation that called itself the Secret Organisation of Al Qaeda in Europe immediately posted a statement on the internet claiming responsibility for the bombings and warning the governments of Denmark and Italy and "all Crusader Governments" that they will receive similar punishments if they did not withdraw their troops from Iraq and Afghanistan (*The Guardian* 29 July, 2005:10). That was not the first time an organisation claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack. For example, in the 90s, series of terrorist attacks were reported ranging from the blast that leveled the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires killing 29 others, and

especially that of May 17, 1992, a terrorist group named Hezebollah claimed responsibility.   Apart from the 2005 London Train blast, the Secret Organisation of the Al Qaeda also claimed responsibility for the explosions that hit commuter trains in Madrid, Spain in March 2004, killing 191 people. Four other suspected Islamic extremists/bombers whose explosives failed to detonate fully on three London subway trains and a double-decker bus on 21 July, 2005 were arrested for interrogation. Another three bomb blasts in the Sharm El-Sheik Sinai Peninsular holiday resort in Egypt had killed 88 people and wounded many others (The *Guardian*, 29 July, 2005: 10, 31 July 2005:8). The attack on Madrid, Spain went a long way to confirm the earlier released message of threat warning Spain and Italy of the dangers ahead. Arising from the bomb blasts in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt was being punished for being an ally of the US. It was specifically punished for training Iraqi army and police for the 2003 US-led war on Iraq, among others.

Conceptualizing Terrorism

Terrorism is highly contested and controversial in its definition. This is as a result of the fact that no commonly accepted definition exists on the subject matter. Scholars are not agreed on what it really means and there is yet to be a common consensus on what terrorism is. Some of the contested' definitions of terrorism include the following: Stehl in (Obingene, 2001:149) defines it as the "use of violence for political purpose". This definition likens terrorism to unconventional political violence staged with the intent of reaching a wide audience through manifest acts that violate accepted social mores. Asogwa and Omemma identify terrorism with individuals or groups attempting to destabilize or overthrow an existing political order. More to this, the cynical cliché that "one state's terrorist is another state's freedom fighters" underscores the absence of a universally acceptable definition even among United Nations member-states for many years. The US has repeatedly labeled Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda as terrorism masterminds while many people in Pakistan, Afghanistan and other parts of the Middle East consider them as defenders against the "great Satan", protectors of Islam and a shield between them and the horrors of Western civilization. In the same vein, many people in Iraq and the Middle East think of coalition troops as terrorists against their fatherland and consider Iraqi resistance (especially in the area of suicide bombing) as the fight for freedom against their political detractors. In the same vein, Israeli troops and civilians consider Palestinian fighters to be terrorists while the Palestinians see Hamas as an organisation to get back their land and their freedom (Jon Bischke, 2003:1).

The Terrorism Research Centre in the US defines terrorism variously as "the use or threatened use of force designed to bring about political change" (Laqueur, 1978), the illegitimate use of force to achieve a political objective when innocent people are targeted", the premeditated, deliberate, systematic murder, mayhem and threatening of the innocent to create fear in order to gain political or tactical advantage, usually to influence an audience".

Other definitions include the US Vice President's Task Force of 1986 which defines terrorism as the unlawful use or threat of violence against persons or property to further political or social objectives intended to intimidate or coerce a government, individuals or groups, or to modify their behaviour or politics" among others. A careful analysis of all the definitions above identify terrorism as "extreme, deviant, political behaviour" or as "illegitimate means of attempting to effect political change by the indiscriminate use of violence" (Loughlin in Eminue, 2005). Writing in the *Journal of Africa*, Eminue noted that a proper analysis of terrorism should focus on the types, forms, frequency, persistence, intensity, targets and goals of terrorism and the response of Government and the international community to terrorist activities. Thornton (in Eckstein, 1964:73) differentiated between state and non-state ("agitational") terrorism (where state-terrorism is usually associated with Governments of a fascist, dictatorial, totalitarian, military, post-revolutionary character or is practiced by state intelligence organisations such as American CIA, Britian's MI5, Israeli MOSSAD etc. to perpetuate acts of violence externally or repression internally, and where non-state terrorism refers to terrorism as practiced by non-state actors such as individuals and groups outside government circles. Similarly, Wilkinson (1981) identifies three main kinds of terrorism, namely: revolutionary, sub-revolutionary and repressive terrorism. At the international level, the war is prosecuted with much larger lethal weapons that are more devastating. Because of the magnitude of destruction that follows terrorists attack and the counter attack by anti-terrorist coalition, it becomes necessary for the twenty-first century to go into research to proffer a more humane approach to tackling the scourge of terrorism.

Factors that Motivate Terrorism

Public opinion polls taken in the Islamic world in recent years provide considerably insight into the roots of Islamic hostility toward the United States. This insight indicate that for the most part, this hostility has less to do with cultural or religious differences than with US policies in the Arab World. Henry Munson (2006) writing in the Annual Editions, World Politics noted that in February and March 2003, Zogby International conducted a survey on behalf of Professor Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland involving 2,620 men and women in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morrocco and Saudi Arabia. Most of those surveyed had "unfavourable attitudes" toward the United States and said that their hostility to the United States was based primarily on US policy rather than their values.

The issue that arouses the most hostility in the Middle East toward the United States is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and what Muslims perceive as US responsibility for the suffering of the Palestinians. This goes to say that if the United States is serious to win the so-called 'war on terror', then resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be among its top priorities in the Middle East. Eradicating, or at least curbing, Palestinian terrorism entails reducing the humiliation, despair, and rage that drive many Palestinians to support militant Islamic groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

On the other hand, the US views terrorism as hatred for Western civilization. What has remained inexplicable since the September 11 attack has been why some people should want to inflict injuries on others or why any group of people would be so inhumane, suicidal and maniacal as to inflict devastating injuries of cataclysmic proportions on the US. President George W. Bush in his September 20, 2001 address to congress, has asked, "Americans are asking 'why do they hate us?'" They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other" (*The Guardian* (London), 29 September, 2001). But if American freedom and democracy were to be the issues at stake prompting the attacks, Arundhati Roy wonders why the World Trade Centre (WTC) and the Pentagon – the symbols of American's economic and military dominance – were targeted rather than the statute of liberty. To this school of thought, explanations for the attacks are to be found in the ideological distance between Islamic fundamentalism and the US, the Middle East crisis; perceived America's imperialism, colonialism and Neocolonialism and in the effects of American Capitalism (Eminue in Journal of Africa, 2005:115)

Notwithstanding, a potent rationalization or explanation for the September 11 attacks could be found in the opposing worldview as espoused by the West on the one hand and by Islamic fundamentalism especially its variant known as "Revolutionary Islam" as in Iran, and Armed Insurrectionary Islam as in Afghanistan (under the Pashton-dominated Taliban), on the other hand (Al-Azm in Ozdalga and Persson, 1997:19). As could be seen, the Arab world is the cultural centre of the world of Islam, and Islam is a unique religion among the world's great historical religions for reason of its imperviousness to secularization or for remaining "secularization resistant" and not accepting republicanism i.e., the adoption of western-style practices. As Al-Azm (1997) puts it.

> *Truly, radical Muslim fundamentalists or radical*
> *insurrectionary Islamists complain so much about*
> *the...privatisation, personification and even*
> *individualization (of Islam) to the point of allowing*
> *its basic tenets to turn into optional beliefs, rituals*
> *and acts of worship.*

One area of disagreement between the US and the West, on the one hand, and the Islamic states, on the other, is the incompatibility of political Islam with democratic civil society. This could be illustrated with evidence drawn from the pre-September 11, 2001 Afghanistan under the Taliban. The Talibans ran a brutal, repressive and hypocritical regime in Afghanistan that had an appalling record of flagrant abuse of the fundamental Human Rights. Under the regime women were restricted to their homes, forbidden to go to school/or to work, etc. Furthermore, women were compelled to wear an all-enveloping burga that would completely cover them head to toe and women who wished to go out were mandatorily to be accompanied by a male blood relation (Butterworth;1992). America considered such treatment as they existed in Afghanistan as Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan. To them (i.e. the US and the West), Democracy is the Answer. To the exponents of Political

Islam, "Islam is the Solution". This is the battle line of the present-day Islamic Militancy (Quth, 1989:5).

Consequences

Many of the blunders made in the course of the terrorist attacks are well known. The early ones have had diffuse, profound and lasting consequences. For example, the Bush administration was never willing to commit anything like the forces necessary to ensure order in postwar Iraq. From the beginning, military experts warned Washington that the task would require, as Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki told congress in February 2003, "hundreds of thousands" of troops. For the United States to deploy forces in Iraq at the same ratio to population as NATO had in Bosnia would have required half a million troops. Yet the coalition force level never reached even a third of that figure (Larry Diamond in *Annual Editions World Politics* 05/06, p. 182).

The war against terrorism raises such vital questions as; What are the implications of the war on international law? Is the war just or unjust: for one, America's single handed reprisal attack and counter response to the September 11 terrorist attacks runs counter to the provision of International Law. Former UN Secretary General Koffi Annan had declared the war on Iraq "not in conformity with the Charter. It is illegal. The adoption of unilateralist approach by the US to prosecute the war against Iraq is at variance with the UN multilateral network" (*The Sensor*, January 23, 2008, p.11). From all indications, the war was of the US strategic national interest in Afghanistan and Iraq in particular and the Middle East in general. As put by Robert Fisk:

> *The war against Iraq is not about chemical warheads, terrorism or human rights. It is about oil.*

This assertion is further corroborated by the former American Secretary of state, James Baker who told *NEW YORK TIMES* that "we are talking about oil. Oil is vital to American interest" (Eminue in *Journal of Africa* in a new world order August, 2005).

In international law, a state has the right to manufacture, produce, store and stockpile weapons. No state has the right to disarm another. Therefore, the US claim that they were acting to disarm Iraq has no place in international law. The other issue is that of 'Armed Attack'. The employment of military force against the Taliban regime and members of the Al Qaeda terrorist network was not authorised by the Security Council, therefore, it is not a measure in collective security. Thus, since the actions of the United States lacked a formal anchorage in the context of collective security, they must rather be conceived as measures of self-defence carried out under the framework of Article 51 of the UN Charter (*The Calabar Law Journal*, 2002-2003, p. 11).

Again, the tough actions taken by the Bush administration in the Aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks contradict the lukewarmness and insensitivity, which characterized its action in the period immediately preceding the attacks. In specific terms, the United States Government has

been blamed for not being tough enough in dealing with suspected cases of terrorism before the September 11 attacks. For one reason, the attacks symbolised a failure of American intelligence capability as it obviously failed to penetrate the tightly-knit terrorists cells and never even anticipated attacks of such degree of devastation. Contrary to expectations, the hijackers of the planes used in the attacks had earlier undergone basic training as pilots in the US and Germany. The FBI had intimated the White House of imminent terrorist attacks, warning against Middle East persons being allowed to train as pilots in flying schools in US, without any White House reaction (Eminue, *Journal of Africa*, 2005, p. 128).

Analysts are beginning to see the Afghanistan and Iraq wars as strategies adopted by the United States in her quest to build an empire. It is difficult to establish the causal link between September 11 attack on the United States, her (United State's) search for Osama bin Laden, the key suspect, and the invasion of sovereign states of Afghanistan, and Iraq than the much talked about empire building project. There is also no necessary link in the claim of the evil axis and the sacking by military might of Saddam Hussein, former Iraqi helmsman other than the empire building project and the need to eliminate every perceived imaginary or real obstacle to the realization of American's objective. As a result of this singular action of America, any nation that has the military might can wedge a war on its citizens or even others provided that it can justify such action using the guise of crushing terrorists.

Conclusion

International terrorism has been identified as one of the greatest and deadliest scourges of the 21st century, especially since after the September, 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the US. The attacks represented a major shift in the choice of terrorist targets and signified the first major post-cold war terrorist action. Again, not only did the attacks give rise to multinational coalition force which acted promptly in reprisal against Afghanistan but also led to the globalization of counter-terrorism measures and policies against terrorist networks.

This article is of the view that explanation for the attacks are to be found in the unfavourable policies of the US in the Arab world. America's support for Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a major reason that has instigated Islamic hostility toward the United States. Thus, humiliation, despair, and rage drive many Palestinian and many people in the Arab world to support militant Islamic groups like Hammas, and Islamic Jihad. Similarly, America's War Against Terrorism is seen as a hidden Agenda, which speaks of the post-cold war world as an age of Euro-American Tyranny, pointing out that in the name of fighting global terrorism, the US is basically interested in using the opportunity to establish a permanent presence in the area. (*Znet* 16 October, 2001). This goes further to confirm the statement of Edwards S. Herman and David Peterson (*Znet*, 18 October, 2001:1) when they said,

> *... from the 1950's the United States itself has been*
> *heavily engaged in terrorism, and has sponsored,*
> *underwritten and protected other terrorist states*
> *and individual terrorists. Infact, ... now sole*
> *superpower, the United States has also been the*
> *world's greatest terrorist and sponsor of terror.*

Thus, the notion of America as a super terrorist state with anti-terrorist agenda is considered by many as a sick joke.

Furthermore, the international community should be determined more than ever in the fight against terrorism. The legal and non-aggressive modes of countering terrorism should be the exclusive preserve of the United Nations and the International court of Justice and not to be left in the hands of individual states who might use it to secure their selfish interests at the detriment of collective security. Additionally, efforts should be geared towards the development of sophisticated fine-grain computers and terrorism database which will help in no little way in launching intelligence war against international terrorism. This will complement the efforts of the numerous Terrorism Research centres and enhance international intelligence to counter terrorism.

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