



The New War Against Terror

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[The Talk \(audio\)](#)

Everyone knows it's the TV people who run the world [crowd laughter]. I just got orders that I'm supposed to be here, not there. Well the last talk I gave at this forum was on a light pleasant topic. It was about how humans are an endangered species and given the nature of their institutions they are likely to destroy themselves in a fairly short time. So this time there is a little relief and we have a pleasant topic instead, the new war on terror. Unfortunately, the world keeps coming up with things that make it more and more horrible as we proceed.

Assume Two Conditions for this Talk

I'm going to assume two conditions for this talk.

- The first one is just what I assume to be recognition of fact. That is that the events of September 11 were a horrendous atrocity probably the most devastating instant human toll of any crime in history, outside of war.
- The second assumption has to do with the goals. I'm assuming that our goal is that we are interested in reducing the likelihood of such crimes whether they are against us or against someone else.

If you don't accept those two assumptions, then what I say will not be addressed to you. If we do accept them, then a number of questions arise, closely related ones, which merit a good deal of thought.

The 5 Questions

One question, and by far the most important one is what is happening right now? Implicit in that is what can we do about it? The second has to do with the very common assumption that what happened on September 11 is a historic event, one which will change history. I tend to agree with that. I think it's

true. It was a historic event and the question we should be asking is exactly why? The third question has to do with the title, The War Against Terrorism. Exactly what is it? And there is a related question, namely what is terrorism? The fourth question which is narrower but important has to do with the origins of the crimes of September 11th. And the fifth question that I want to talk a little about is what policy options there are in fighting this war against terrorism and dealing with the situations that led to it.

I'll say a few things about each. Glad to go beyond in discussion and don't hesitate to bring up other questions. These are ones that come to my mind as prominent but you may easily and plausibly have other choices.

1. What's Happening Right Now? Starvation of Three to Four Million People

Well let's start with right now. I'll talk about the situation in Afghanistan. I'll just keep to uncontroversial sources like the New York Times [crowd laughter]. According to the New York Times there are seven to eight million people in Afghanistan on the verge of starvation. That was true actually before September 11th. They were surviving on international aid. On September 16th, the Times reported, I'm quoting it, that the United States demanded from Pakistan the elimination of truck convoys that provide much of the food and other supplies to Afghanistan's civilian population. As far as I could determine there was no reaction in the United States or for that matter in Europe. I was on national radio all over Europe the next day. There was no reaction in the United States or in Europe to my knowledge to the demand to impose massive starvation on millions of people. The threat of military strikes right after September.....around that time forced the removal of international aid workers that crippled the assistance programs. Actually, I am quoting again from the New York Times. Refugees reaching Pakistan after arduous journeys from AF are describing scenes of desperation and fear at home as the threat of American led military attacks turns their long running misery into a potential catastrophe. The country was on a lifeline and we just cut the line. Quoting an evacuated aid worker, in the New York Times Magazine.

The World Food Program, the UN program, which is the main one by far, were able to resume after three weeks in early October, they began to resume at a lower level, resume food shipments. They don't have international aid workers within, so the distribution system is hampered. That was suspended as soon as the bombing began. They then resumed but at a lower pace while aid agencies leveled scathing condemnations of US airdrops, condemning them as propaganda tools which are probably doing more harm than good. That happens to be quoting the London Financial Times but it is easy to continue. After the first week of bombing, the New York Times reported on a back page inside a column on something else, that by the arithmetic of the United Nations there will soon be seven and a half million Afghans in acute need of even a loaf of bread and there are only a few weeks left before the harsh winter will make deliveries to many areas totally impossible, continuing to quote, but with bombs falling the delivery rate is down to half of what is needed.

Casual comment. Which tells us that Western civilization is anticipating the slaughter of, well do the arithmetic, three to four million people or something like that. On the same day, the leader of Western civilization dismissed with contempt, once again, offers of negotiation for delivery of the alleged target, Osama bin Laden, and a request for some evidence to substantiate the demand for total capitulation. It was dismissed. On the same day the Special Rapporteur of the UN in charge of food pleaded with the United States to stop the bombing to try to save millions of victims. As far as I'm aware that was unreported. That was Monday. Yesterday the major aid agencies OXFAM and Christian Aid and others joined in that plea. You can't find a report in the New York Times. There was a line in the Boston Globe, hidden in a story about another topic, Kashmir.

Silent Genocide

Well we could easily go on....but all of that....first of all indicates to us what's happening. Looks like what's happening is some sort of silent genocide. It also gives a good deal of insight into the elite culture, the culture that we are part of. It indicates that whatever, what will happen we don't know, but plans are being made and programs implemented on the assumption that they may lead to the death of several million people in the next few months....very casually with no comment, no particular thought about it, that's just kind of normal, here and in a good part of Europe. Not in the rest of the world. In fact not even in much of Europe. So if you read the Irish press or the press in Scotland...that close, reactions are very different. Well that's what's happening now. What's happening now is very much under our control. We can do a lot to affect what's happening. And that's roughly it.

2. Why was it a Historic Event? National Territory Attacked

Alright let's turn to the slightly more abstract question, forgetting for the moment that we are in the midst of apparently trying to murder three or four million people, not Taliban of course, their victims. Let's go back...turn to the question of the historic event that took place on September 11th. As I said, I think that's correct. It was a historic event. Not unfortunately because of its scale, unpleasant to think about, but in terms of the scale it's not that unusual. I did say it's the worst...probably the worst instant human toll of any crime. And that may be true. But there are terrorist crimes with effects a bit more drawn out that are more extreme, unfortunately. Nevertheless, it's a historic event because there was a change. The change was the direction in which the guns were pointed. That's new. Radically new. So, take US history.

The last time that the national territory of the United States was under attack, or for that matter, even threatened was when the British burned down Washington in 1814. There have been many...it was common to bring up Pearl Harbor but that's not a good analogy. The Japanese, what ever you think about it, the Japanese bombed military bases in two US colonies not the national territory; colonies which had been taken from their inhabitants in not a

very pretty way. This is the national territory that's been attacked on a large scale, you can find a few fringe examples but this is unique.

During these close to two hundred years, we, the United States expelled or mostly exterminated the indigenous population, that's many millions of people, conquered half of Mexico, carried out depredations all over the region, Caribbean and Central America, sometimes beyond, conquered Hawaii and the Philippines, killing several hundred thousand Filipinos in the process. Since the Second World War, it has extended its reach around the world in ways I don't have to describe. But it was always killing someone else, the fighting was somewhere else, it was others who were getting slaughtered. Not here. Not the national territory.

Europe

In the case of Europe, the change is even more dramatic because its history is even more horrendous than ours. We are an offshoot of Europe, basically. For hundreds of years, Europe has been casually slaughtering people all over the world. That's how they conquered the world, not by handing out candy to babies. During this period, Europe did suffer murderous wars, but that was European killers murdering one another. The main sport of Europe for hundreds of years was slaughtering one another. The only reason that it came to an end in 1945, was...it had nothing to do with Democracy or not making war with each other and other fashionable notions. It had to do with the fact that everyone understood that the next time they play the game it was going to be the end for the world. Because the Europeans, including us, had developed such massive weapons of destruction that that game just have to be over. And it goes back hundreds of years. In the 17th century, about probably forty percent of the entire population of Germany was wiped out in one war.

But during this whole bloody murderous period, it was Europeans slaughtering each other, and Europeans slaughtering people elsewhere. The Congo didn't attack Belgium, India didn't attack England, Algeria didn't attack France. It's uniform. There are again small exceptions, but pretty small in scale, certainly invisible in the scale of what Europe and us were doing to the rest of the world. This is the first change. The first time that the guns have been pointed the other way. And in my opinion that's probably why you see such different reactions on the two sides of the Irish Sea which I have noticed, incidentally, in many interviews on both sides, national radio on both sides. The world looks very different depending on whether you are holding the lash or whether you are being whipped by it for hundreds of years, very different. So I think the shock and surprise in Europe and its offshoots, like here, is very understandable. It is a historic event but regrettably not in scale, in something else and a reason why the rest of the world...most of the rest of the world looks at it quite differently. Not lacking sympathy for the victims of the atrocity or being horrified by them, that's almost uniform, but viewing it from a different perspective. Something we might want to understand.

3. What is the War Against Terrorism?

Well, let's go to the third question, 'What is the war against terrorism?' and a side question, 'What's terrorism?'. The war against terrorism has been described in high places as a struggle against a plague, a cancer which is spread by barbarians, by "depraved opponents of civilization itself." That's a feeling that I share. The words I'm quoting, however, happen to be from twenty years ago. Those are...that's President Reagan and his Secretary of State. The Reagan administration came into office twenty years ago declaring that the war against international terrorism would be the core of our foreign policy....describing it in terms of the kind I just mentioned and others. And it was the core of our foreign policy. The Reagan administration responded to this plague spread by depraved opponents of civilization itself by creating an extraordinary international terrorist network, totally unprecedented in scale, which carried out massive atrocities all over the world, primarily....well, partly nearby, but not only there. I won't run through the record, you're all educated people, so I'm sure you learned about it in High School. [crowd laughter]

Reagan-US War Against Nicaragua

But I'll just mention one case which is totally uncontroversial, so we might as well not argue about it, by no means the most extreme but uncontroversial. It's uncontroversial because of the judgments of the highest international authorities the International Court of Justice, the World Court, and the UN Security Council. So this one is uncontroversial, at least among people who have some minimal concern for international law, human rights, justice and other things like that. And now I'll leave you an exercise. You can estimate the size of that category by simply asking how often this uncontroversial case has been mentioned in the commentary of the last month. And it's a particularly relevant one, not only because it is uncontroversial, but because it does offer a precedent as to how a law abiding state would respond to...did respond in fact to international terrorism, which is uncontroversial. And was even more extreme than the events of September 11th. I'm talking about the Reagan-US war against Nicaragua which left tens of thousands of people dead, the country ruined, perhaps beyond recovery.

Nicaragua's Response

Nicaragua did respond. They didn't respond by setting off bombs in Washington. They responded by taking it to the World Court, presenting a case, they had no problem putting together evidence. The World Court accepted their case, ruled in their favor, ordered the...condemned what they called the "unlawful use of force," which is another word for international terrorism, by the United States, ordered the United States to terminate the crime and to pay massive reparations. The United States, of course, dismissed the court judgment with total contempt and announced that it would not accept the jurisdiction of the court henceforth. Then Nicaragua then went to the UN Security Council which considered a resolution calling on all states to observe international law. No one was mentioned but everyone understood. The United States vetoed the resolution. It now stands as the only state on record which

has both been condemned by the World Court for international terrorism and has vetoed a Security Council resolution calling on states to observe international law. Nicaragua then went to the General Assembly where there is technically no veto but a negative US vote amounts to a veto. It passed a similar resolution with only the United States, Israel, and El Salvador opposed. The following year again, this time the United States could only rally Israel to the cause, so two votes opposed to observing international law. At that point, Nicaragua couldn't do anything lawful. It tried all the measures. They don't work in a world that is ruled by force.

This case is uncontroversial but it's by no means the most extreme. We gain a lot of insight into our own culture and society and what's happening now by asking 'how much we know about all this? How much we talk about it? How much you learn about it in school? How much it's all over the front pages?' And this is only the beginning. The United States responded to the World Court and the Security Council by immediately escalating the war very quickly, that was a bipartisan decision incidentally. The terms of the war were also changed. For the first time there were official orders given...official orders to the terrorist army to attack what are called "soft targets," meaning undefended civilian targets, and to keep away from the Nicaraguan army. They were able to do that because the United States had total control of the air over Nicaragua and the mercenary army was supplied with advanced communication equipment, it wasn't a guerrilla army in the normal sense and could get instructions about the disposition of the Nicaraguan army forces so they could attack agricultural collectives, health clinics, and so on...soft targets with impunity. Those were the official orders.

What was the Reaction Here?

What was the reaction? It was known. There was a reaction to it. The policy was regarded as sensible by left liberal opinion. So Michael Kinsley who represents the left in mainstream discussion, wrote an article in which he said that we shouldn't be too quick to criticize this policy as Human Rights Watch had just done. He said a "sensible policy" must "meet the test of cost benefit analysis" -- that is, I'm quoting now, that is the analysis of "the amount of blood and misery that will be poured in, and the likelihood that democracy will emerge at the other end." Democracy as the US understands the term, which is graphically illustrated in the surrounding countries. Notice that it is axiomatic that the United States, US elites, have the right to conduct the analysis and to pursue the project if it passes their tests. And it did pass their tests. It worked. When Nicaragua finally succumbed to superpower assault, commentators openly and cheerfully lauded the success of the methods that were adopted and described them accurately. So I'll quote Time Magazine just to pick one. They lauded the success of the methods adopted: "to wreck the economy and prosecute a long and deadly proxy war until the exhausted natives overthrow the unwanted government themselves," with a cost to us that is "minimal," and leaving the victims "with wrecked bridges, sabotaged power stations, and ruined farms," and thus providing the US candidate with a "winning issue": "end-

ing the impoverishment of the people of Nicaragua.” The New York Times had a headline saying “Americans United in Joy” at this outcome.

Terrorism Works – Terrorism is not the Weapon of the Weak

That is the culture in which we live and it reveals several facts. One is the fact that terrorism works. It doesn't fail. It works. Violence usually works. That's world history. Secondly, it's a very serious analytic error to say, as is commonly done, that terrorism is the weapon of the weak. Like other means of violence, it's primarily a weapon of the strong, overwhelmingly, in fact. It is held to be a weapon of the weak because the strong also control the doctrinal systems and their terror doesn't count as terror. Now that's close to universal. I can't think of a historical exception, even the worst mass murderers view the world that way. So pick the Nazis. They weren't carrying out terror in occupied Europe. They were protecting the local population from the terrorisms of the partisans. And like other resistance movements, there was terrorism. The Nazis were carrying out counter terror. Furthermore, the United States essentially agreed with that. After the war, the US army did extensive studies of Nazi counter terror operations in Europe. First I should say that the US picked them up and began carrying them out itself, often against the same targets, the former resistance. But the military also studied the Nazi methods published interesting studies, sometimes critical of them because they were inefficiently carried out, so a critical analysis, you didn't do this right, you did that right, but those methods with the advice of Wehrmacht officers who were brought over here became the manuals of counter insurgency, of counter terror, of low intensity conflict, as it is called, and are the manuals, and are the procedures that are being used. So it's not just that the Nazis did it. It's that it was regarded as the right thing to do by the leaders of western civilization, that is us, who then proceeded to do it themselves. Terrorism is not the weapon of the weak. It is the weapon of those who are against 'us' whoever 'us' happens to be. And if you can find a historical exception to that, I'd be interested in seeing it.

Nature of our Culture – How We Regard Terrorism

Well, an interesting indication of the nature of our culture, our high culture, is the way in which all of this is regarded. One way it's regarded is just suppressing it. So almost nobody has ever heard of it. And the power of American propaganda and doctrine is so strong that even among the victims it's barely known. I mean, when you talk about this to people in Argentina, you have to remind them. Oh, yeah, that happened, we forgot about it. It's deeply suppressed. The sheer consequences of the monopoly of violence can be very powerful in ideological and other terms.

The Idea that Nicaragua Might Have The Right To Defend Itself

Well, one illuminating aspect of our own attitude toward terrorism is the reaction to the idea that Nicaragua might have the right to defend itself. Actually I went through this in some detail with database searches and that sort of thing. The idea that Nicaragua might have the right to defend itself was considered

outrageous. There is virtually nothing in mainstream commentary indicating that Nicaragua might have that right. And that fact was exploited by the Reagan administration and its propaganda in an interesting way. Those of you who were around in that time will remember that they periodically floated rumors that the Nicaraguans were getting MIG jets, jets from Russia. At that point the hawks and the doves split. The hawks said, 'ok, let's bomb 'em.' The doves said, 'wait a minute, let's see if the rumors are true. And if the rumors are true, then let's bomb them. Because they are a threat to the United States.' Why, incidentally were they getting MIGs. Well they tried to get jet planes from European countries but the United States put pressure on its allies so that it wouldn't send them means of defense because they wanted them to turn to the Russians. That's good for propaganda purposes. Then they become a threat to us. Remember, they were just two days march from Harlingen, Texas. We actually declared a national emergency in 1985 to protect the country from the threat of Nicaragua. And it stayed in force. So it was much better for them to get arms from the Russians. Why would they want jet planes? Well, for the reasons I already mentioned. The United States had total control over their airspace, was over flying it and using that to provide instructions to the terrorist army to enable them to attack soft targets without running into the army that might defend them. Everyone knew that that was the reason. They are not going to use their jet planes for anything else. But the idea that Nicaragua should be permitted to defend its airspace against a superpower attack that is directing terrorist forces to attack undefended civilian targets, that was considered in the United States as outrageous and uniformly so. Exceptions are so slight, you know I can practically list them. I don't suggest that you take my word for this. Have a look. That includes our own senators, incidentally.

Honduras – The Appointment of John Negroponte as Ambassador to the United Nations

Another illustration of how we regard terrorism is happening right now. The US has just appointed an ambassador to the United Nations to lead the war against terrorism a couple weeks ago. Who is he? Well, his name is John Negroponte. He was the US ambassador in the fiefdom, which is what it is, of Honduras in the early 1980's. There was a little fuss made about the fact that he must have been aware, as he certainly was, of the large-scale murders and other atrocities that were being carried out by the security forces in Honduras that we were supporting. But that's a small part of it. As proconsul of Honduras, as he was called there, he was the local supervisor for the terrorist war based in Honduras, for which his government was condemned by the world court and then the Security Council in a vetoed resolution. And he was just appointed as the UN Ambassador to lead the war against terror. Another small experiment you can do is check and see what the reaction was to this. Well, I will tell you what you are going to find, but find it for yourself. Now that tells us a lot about the war against terrorism and a lot about ourselves.

After the United States took over the country again under the conditions that were so graphically described by the press, the country was pretty much de-

stroyed in the 1980's, but it has totally collapsed since in every respect just about. Economically it has declined sharply since the US take over, democratically and in every other respect. It's now the second poorest country in the Hemisphere. I should say....I'm not going to talk about it, but I mentioned that I picked up Nicaragua because it is an uncontroversial case. If you look at the other states in the region, the state terror was far more extreme and it again traces back to Washington and that's by no means all.

US & UK Backed South African Attacks

It was happening elsewhere in the world too, take say Africa. During the Reagan years alone, South African attacks, backed by the United States and Britain, US/UK-backed South African attacks against the neighboring countries killed about a million and a half people and left sixty billion dollars in damage and countries destroyed. And if we go around the world, we can add more examples.

Now that was the first war against terror of which I've given a small sample. Are we supposed to pay attention to that? Or kind of think that that might be relevant? After all it's not exactly ancient history. Well, evidently not as you can tell by looking at the current discussion of the war on terror which has been the leading topic for the last month.

Haiti, Guatemala, and Nicaragua

I mentioned that Nicaragua has now become the second poorest country in the hemisphere. What's the poorest country? Well that's of course Haiti which also happens to be the victim of most US intervention in the 20th century by a long shot. We left it totally devastated. It's the poorest country. Nicaragua is second ranked in degree of US intervention in the 20th century. It is the second poorest. Actually, it is vying with Guatemala. They interchange every year or two as to who's the second poorest. And they also vie as to who is the leading target of US military intervention. We're supposed to think that all of this is some sort of accident. That is has nothing to do with anything that happened in history. Maybe.

Colombia and Turkey

The worst human rights violator in the 1990's is Colombia, by a long shot. It's also the, by far, the leading recipient of US military aid in the 1990's maintaining the terror and human rights violations. In 1999, Colombia replaced Turkey as the leading recipient of US arms worldwide, that is excluding Israel and Egypt which are a separate category. And that tells us a lot more about the war on terror right now, in fact.

Why was Turkey getting such a huge flow of US arms? Well if you take a look at the flow of US arms to Turkey, Turkey always got a lot of US arms. It's strategically placed, a member of NATO, and so on. But the arms flow to Turkey went up very sharply in 1984. It didn't have anything to do with the cold war. I mean Russian was collapsing. And it stayed high from 1984 to 1999 when it

reduced and it was replaced in the lead by Colombia. What happened from 1984 to 1999? Well, in 1984, [Turkey] launched a major terrorist war against Kurds in southeastern Turkey. And that's when US aid went up, military aid. And this was not pistols. This was jet planes, tanks, military training, and so on. And it stayed high as the atrocities escalated through the 1990's. Aid followed it. The peak year was 1997. In 1997, US military aid to Turkey was more than in the entire period 1950 to 1983, that is the cold war period, which is an indication of how much the cold war has affected policy. And the results were awesome. This led to two to three million refugees. Some of the worst ethnic cleansing of the late 1990's. Tens of thousands of people killed, 3500 towns and villages destroyed, way more than Kosovo, even under NATO bombs. And the United States was providing eighty percent of the arms, increasing as the atrocities increased, peaking in 1997. It declined in 1999 because, once again, terror worked as it usually does when carried out by its major agents, mainly the powerful. So by 1999, Turkish terror, called of course counter-terror, but as I said, that's universal, it worked. Therefore Turkey was replaced by Colombia which had not yet succeeded in its terrorist war. And therefore had to move into first place as recipient of US arms.

Self Congratulation on the Part of Western Intellectuals

Well, what makes this all particularly striking is that all of this was taking place right in the midst of a huge flood of self-congratulation on the part of Western intellectuals which probably has no counterpart in history. I mean you all remember it. It was just a couple years ago. Massive self-adulation about how for the first time in history we are so magnificent; that we are standing up for principles and values; dedicated to ending inhumanity everywhere in the new era of this-and-that, and so-on-and-so-forth. And we certainly can't tolerate atrocities right near the borders of NATO. That was repeated over and over. Only within the borders of NATO where we can not only can tolerate much worse atrocities but contribute to them. Another insight into Western civilization and our own, is how often was this brought up? Try to look. I won't repeat it. But it's instructive. It's a pretty impressive feat for a propaganda system to carry this off in a free society. It's pretty amazing. I don't think you could do this in a totalitarian state.

Turkey is Very Grateful

And Turkey is very grateful. Just a few days ago, Prime Minister Ecevit announced that Turkey would join the coalition against terror, very enthusiastically, even more so than others. In fact, he said they would contribute troops which others have not willing to do. And he explained why. He said, We owe a debt of gratitude to the United States because the United States was the only country that was willing to contribute so massively to our own, in his words "counter-terrorist" war, that is to our own massive ethnic cleansing and atrocities and terror. Other countries helped a little, but they stayed back. The United States, on the other hand, contributed enthusiastically and decisively and was able to do so because of the silence, servility might be the right word, of the educated classes who could easily find out about it. It's a free country

after all. You can read human rights reports. You can read all sorts of stuff. But we chose to contribute to the atrocities and Turkey is very happy, they owe us a debt of gratitude for that and therefore will contribute troops just as during the war in Serbia. Turkey was very much praised for using its F-16's which we supplied it to bomb Serbia exactly as it had been doing with the same planes against its own population up until the time when it finally succeeded in crushing internal terror as they called it. And as usual, as always, resistance does include terror. Its true of the American Revolution. That's true of every case I know. Just as its true that those who have a monopoly of violence talk about themselves as carrying out counter terror.

The Coalition – Including Algeria, Russia, China, Indonesia

Now that's pretty impressive and that has to do with the coalition that is now being organized to fight the war against terror. And it's very interesting to see how that coalition is being described. So have a look at this morning's Christian Science Monitor. That's a good newspaper. One of the best international newspapers, with real coverage of the world. The lead story, the front-page story, is about how the United States, you know people used to dislike the United States but now they are beginning to respect it, and they are very happy about the way that the US is leading the war against terror. And the prime example, well in fact the only serious example, the others are a joke, is Algeria. Turns out that Algeria is very enthusiastic about the US war against terror. The person who wrote the article is an expert on Africa. He must know that Algeria is one of the most vicious terrorist states in the world and has been carrying out horrendous terror against its own population in the past couple of years, in fact. For a while, this was under wraps. But it was finally exposed in France by defectors from the Algerian army. It's all over the place there and in England and so on. But here, we're very proud because one of the worst terrorist states in the world is now enthusiastically welcoming the US war on terror and in fact is cheering on the United States to lead the war. That shows how popular we are getting.

And if you look at the coalition that is being formed against terror it tells you a lot more. A leading member of the coalition is Russia which is delighted to have the United States support its murderous terrorist war in Chechnya instead of occasionally criticizing it in the background. China is joining enthusiastically. It's delighted to have support for the atrocities it's carrying out in western China against, what it called, Muslim secessionists. Turkey, as I mentioned, is very happy with the war against terror. They are experts. Algeria, Indonesia delighted to have even more US support for atrocities it is carrying out in Aceh and elsewhere. Now we can run through the list, the list of the states that have joined the coalition against terror is quite impressive. They have a characteristic in common. They are certainly among the leading terrorist states in the world. And they happen to be led by the world champion.

What is Terrorism?

Well that brings us back to the question, what is terrorism? I have been assuming we understand it. Well, what is it? Well, there happen to be some

easy answers to this. There is an official definition. You can find it in the US code or in US army manuals. A brief statement of it taken from a US army manual, is fair enough, is that terror is the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to attain political or religious ideological goals through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear. That's terrorism. That's a fair enough definition. I think it is reasonable to accept that. The problem is that it can't be accepted because if you accept that, all the wrong consequences follow. For example, all the consequences I have just been reviewing. Now there is a major effort right now at the UN to try to develop a comprehensive treaty on terrorism. When Kofi Annan got the Nobel Prize the other day, you will notice he was reported as saying that we should stop wasting time on this and really get down to it.

But there's a problem. If you use the official definition of terrorism in the comprehensive treaty you are going to get completely the wrong results. So that can't be done. In fact, it is even worse than that. If you take a look at the definition of Low Intensity Warfare which is official US policy you find that it is a very close paraphrase of what I just read. In fact, Low Intensity Conflict is just another name for terrorism. That's why all countries, as far as I know, call whatever horrendous acts they are carrying out, counter terrorism. We happen to call it Counter Insurgency or Low Intensity Conflict. So that's a serious problem. You can't use the actual definitions. You've got to carefully find a definition that doesn't have all the wrong consequences.

Why did the United States and Israel Vote Against a Major Resolution Condemning Terrorism?

There are some other problems. Some of them came up in December 1987, at the peak of the first war on terrorism, that's when the furore over the plague was peaking. The United Nations General Assembly passed a very strong resolution against terrorism, condemning the plague in the strongest terms, calling on every state to fight against it in every possible way. It passed unanimously. One country, Honduras abstained. Two votes against; the usual two, United States and Israel. Why should the United States and Israel vote against a major resolution condemning terrorism in the strongest terms, in fact pretty much the terms that the Reagan administration was using? Well, there is a reason. There is one paragraph in that long resolution which says that nothing in this resolution infringes on the rights of people struggling against racist and colonialist regimes or foreign military occupation to continue with their resistance with the assistance of others, other states, states outside in their just cause. Well, the United States and Israel can't accept that. The main reason that they couldn't at the time was because of South Africa. South Africa was an ally, officially called an ally. There was a terrorist force in South Africa. It was called the African National Congress. They were a terrorist force officially. South Africa in contrast was an ally and we certainly couldn't support actions by a terrorist group struggling against a racist regime. That would be impossible.

And of course there is another one. Namely the Israeli occupied territories, now going into its thirty-fifth year. Supported primarily by the United States in blocking a diplomatic settlement for thirty years now, still is. And you can't have that. There is another one at the time. Israel was occupying Southern Lebanon and was being combated by what the US calls a terrorist force, Hezbollah, which in fact succeeded in driving Israel out of Lebanon. And we can't allow anyone to struggle against a military occupation when it is one that we support so therefore the US and Israel had to vote against the major UN resolution on terrorism. And I mentioned before that a US vote against...is essentially a veto. Which is only half the story. It also vetoes it from history. So none of this was every reported and none of it appeared in the annals of terrorism. If you look at the scholarly work on terrorism and so on, nothing that I just mentioned appears. The reason is that it has got the wrong people holding the guns. You have to carefully hone the definitions and the scholarship and so on so that you come out with the right conclusions; otherwise it is not respectable scholarship and honorable journalism. Well, these are some of problems that are hampering the effort to develop a comprehensive treaty against terrorism. Maybe we should have an academic conference or something to try to see if we can figure out a way of defining terrorism so that it comes out with just the right answers, not the wrong answers. That won't be easy.

4. What are the Origins of the September 11 Crime?

Well, let's drop that and turn to the fourth question, What are the origins of the September 11 crimes? Here we have to make a distinction between two categories which shouldn't be run together. One is the actual agents of the crime, the other is kind of a reservoir of at least sympathy, sometimes support that they appeal to even among people who very much oppose the criminals and the actions. And those are two different things.

Category One: The Likely Perpetrators

Well, with regard to the perpetrators, in a certain sense we are not really clear. The United States either is unable or unwilling to provide any evidence, any meaningful evidence. There was a sort of a play a week or two ago when Tony Blair was set up to try to present it. I don't exactly know what the purpose of this was. Maybe so that the US could look as though it's holding back on some secret evidence that it can't reveal or that Tony Blair could strike proper Churchillian poses or something or other. Whatever the PR [public relations] reasons were, he gave a presentation which was in serious circles considered so absurd that it was barely even mentioned. So the Wall Street Journal, for example, one of the more serious papers had a small story on page twelve, I think, in which they pointed out that there was not much evidence and then they quoted some high US official as saying that it didn't matter whether there was any evidence because they were going to do it anyway. So why bother with the evidence? The more ideological press, like the New York Times and others, they had big front-page headlines. But the Wall Street Journal reaction was reasonable and if you look at the so-called evidence you can see why. But let's assume that it's true. It is astonishing to me how weak the evidence was. I sort of thought you could do better than that without any

intelligence service [audience laughter]. In fact, remember this was after weeks of the most intensive investigation in history of all the intelligence services of the western world working overtime trying to put something together. And it was a prima facie, it was a very strong case even before you had anything. And it ended up about where it started, with a prima facie case. So let's assume that it is true. So let's assume that, it looked obvious the first day, still does, that the actual perpetrators come from the radical Islamic, here called, fundamentalist networks of which the bin Laden network is undoubtedly a significant part. Whether they were involved or not nobody knows. It doesn't really matter much.

Where did they come from?

That's the background, those networks. Well, where do they come from? We know all about that. Nobody knows about that better than the CIA because it helped organize them and it nurtured them for a long time. They were brought together in the 1980's actually by the CIA and its associates elsewhere: Pakistan, Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, China was involved, they may have been involved a little bit earlier, maybe by 1978. The idea was to try to harass the Russians, the common enemy. According to President Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the US got involved in mid 1979. Do you remember, just to put the dates right, that Russia invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. Ok. According to Brzezinski, the US support for the mojaheddin fighting against the government began 6 months earlier. He is very proud of that. He says we drew the Russians into, in his words, an Afghan trap, by supporting the mojaheddin, getting them to invade, getting them into the trap. Now then we could develop this terrific mercenary army. Not a small one, maybe one hundred thousand men or so bringing together the best killers they could find, who were radical Islamist fanatics from around North Africa, Saudi Arabia....anywhere they could find them. They were often called the Afghans but many of them, like bin Laden, were not Afghans. They were brought by the CIA and its friends from elsewhere. Whether Brzezinski is telling the truth or not, I don't know. He may have been bragging, he is apparently very proud of it, knowing the consequences incidentally. But maybe it's true. We'll know someday if the documents are ever released. Anyway, that's his perception. By January 1980 it is not even in doubt that the US was organizing the Afghans and this massive military force to try to cause the Russians maximal trouble. It was a legitimate thing for the Afghans to fight the Russian invasion. But the US intervention was not helping the Afghans. In fact, it helped destroy the country and much more. The Afghans, so called, had their own...it did force the Russians to withdraw, finally. Although many analysts believe that it probably delayed their withdrawal because they were trying to get out of it. Anyway, whatever, they did withdraw.

Meanwhile, the terrorist forces that the CIA was organizing, arming, and training were pursuing their own agenda, right away. It was no secret. One of the first acts was in 1981 when they assassinated the President of Egypt, who was one of the most enthusiastic of their creators. In 1983, one suicide bomber, who may or may not have been connected, it's pretty shadowy, no-

body knows. But one suicide bomber drove the US army-military out of Lebanon. And it continued. They have their own agenda. The US was happy to mobilize them to fight its cause but meanwhile they are doing their own thing. They were clear very about it. After 1989, when the Russians had withdrawn, they simply turned elsewhere. Since then they have been fighting in Chechnya, Western China, Bosnia, Kashmir, South East Asia, North Africa, all over the place.

The Are Telling Us What They Think

They are telling us just what they think. The United States wants to silence the one free television channel in the Arab world because it's broadcasting a whole range of things from Powell over to Osama bin Laden. So the US is now joining the repressive regimes of the Arab world that try to shut it up. But if you listen to it, if you listen to what bin Laden says, it's worth it. There is plenty of interviews. And there are plenty of interviews by leading Western reporters, if you don't want to listen to his own voice, Robert Fisk and others. And what he has been saying is pretty consistent for a long time. He's not the only one but maybe he is the most eloquent. It's not only consistent over a long time, it is consistent with their actions. So there is every reason to take it seriously. Their prime enemy is what they call the corrupt and oppressive authoritarian brutal regimes of the Arab world and when they say that they get quite a resonance in the region. They also want to defend and they want to replace them by properly Islamist governments. That's where they lose the people of the region. But up till then, they are with them. From their point of view, even Saudi Arabia, the most extreme fundamentalist state in the world, I suppose, short of the Taliban, which is an offshoot, even that's not Islamist enough for them. Ok, at that point, they get very little support, but up until that point they get plenty of support. Also they want to defend Muslims elsewhere. They hate the Russians like poison, but as soon as the Russians pulled out of Afghanistan, they stopped carrying out terrorist acts in Russia as they had been doing with CIA backing before that within Russia, not just in Afghanistan. They did move over to Chechnya. But there they are defending Muslims against a Russian invasion. Same with all the other places I mentioned. From their point of view, they are defending the Muslims against the infidels. And they are very clear about it and that is what they have been doing.

Why did they turn against the United States?

Now why did they turn against the United States? Well that had to do with what they call the US invasion of Saudi Arabia. In 1990, the US established permanent military bases in Saudi Arabia which from their point of view is comparable to a Russian invasion of Afghanistan except that Saudi Arabia is way more important. That's the home of the holiest sites of Islam. And that is when their activities turned against the United States. If you recall, in 1993 they tried to blow up the World Trade Center. Got part of the way, but not the whole way and that was only part of it. The plans were to blow up the UN building, the Holland and Lincoln tunnels, the FBI building. I think there were others on the list. Well, they sort of got part way, but not all the way. One person who is jailed for that, finally, among the people who were jailed, was a

Egyptian cleric who had been brought into the United States over the objections of the Immigration Service, thanks to the intervention of the CIA which wanted to help out their friend. A couple years later he was blowing up the World Trade Center. And this has been going on all over. I'm not going to run through the list but it's, if you want to understand it, it's consistent. It's a consistent picture. It's described in words. It's revealed in practice for twenty years. There is no reason not to take it seriously. That's the first category, the likely perpetrators.

Category Two: What about the reservoir of support?

What about the reservoir of support? Well, it's not hard to find out what that is. One of the good things that has happened since September 11 is that some of the press and some of the discussion has begun to open up to some of these things. The best one to my knowledge is the Wall Street Journal which right away began to run, within a couple of days, serious reports, searching serious reports, on the reasons why the people of the region, even though they hate bin Laden and despise everything he is doing, nevertheless support him in many ways and even regard him as the conscience of Islam, as one said. Now the Wall Street Journal and others, they are not surveying public opinion. They are surveying the opinion of their friends: bankers, professionals, international lawyers, businessmen tied to the United States, people who they interview in MacDonald's restaurant, which is an elegant restaurant there, wearing fancy American clothes. That's the people they are interviewing because they want to find out what their attitudes are. And their attitudes are very explicit and very clear and in many ways consonant with the message of bin Laden and others. They are very angry at the United States because of its support of authoritarian and brutal regimes; its intervention to block any move towards democracy; its intervention to stop economic development; its policies of devastating the civilian societies of Iraq while strengthening Saddam Hussein; and they remember, even if we prefer not to, that the United States and Britain supported Saddam Hussein right through his worst atrocities, including the gassing of the Kurds, bin Laden brings that up constantly, and they know it even if we don't want to. And of course their support for the Israeli military occupation which is harsh and brutal. It is now in its thirty-fifth year. The US has been providing the overwhelming economic, military, and diplomatic support for it, and still does. And they know that and they don't like it. Especially when that is paired with US policy towards Iraq, towards the Iraqi civilian society which is getting destroyed. Ok, those are the reasons roughly. And when bin Laden gives those reasons, people recognize it and support it.

Now that's not the way people here like to think about it, at least educated liberal opinion. They like the following line which has been all over the press, mostly from left liberals, incidentally. I have not done a real study but I think right wing opinion has generally been more honest. But if you look at say at the New York Times at the first op-ed they ran by Ronald Steel, serious left liberal intellectual. He asks Why do they hate us? This is the same day, I think, that the Wall Street Journal was running the survey on why they hate

us. So he says “They hate us because we champion a new world order of capitalism, individualism, secularism, and democracy that should be the norm everywhere.” That’s why they hate us. The same day the Wall Street Journal is surveying the opinions of bankers, professionals, international lawyers and saying ‘look, we hate you because you are blocking democracy, you are preventing economic development, you are supporting brutal regimes, terrorist regimes and you are doing these horrible things in the region.’ A couple days later, Anthony Lewis, way out on the left, explained that the terrorist seek only “apocalyptic nihilism,” nothing more and nothing we do matters. The only consequence of our actions, he says, that could be harmful is that it makes it harder for Arabs to join in the coalition’s anti-terrorism effort. But beyond that, everything we do is irrelevant.

Well, you know, that’s got the advantage of being sort of comforting. It makes you feel good about yourself, and how wonderful you are. It enables us to evade the consequences of our actions. It has a couple of defects. One is it is at total variance with everything we know. And another defect is that it is a perfect way to ensure that you escalate the cycle of violence. If you want to live with your head buried in the sand and pretend they hate us because they’re opposed to globalization, that’s why they killed Sadat twenty years ago, and fought the Russians, tried to blow up the World Trade Center in 1993. And these are all people who are in the midst of ... corporate globalization but if you want to believe that, yeah...comforting. And it is a great way to make sure that violence escalates. That’s tribal violence. You did something to me, I’ll do something worse to you. I don’t care what the reasons are. We just keep going that way. And that’s a way to do it. Pretty much straight, left-liberal opinion.

5. What are the Policy Options?

What are the policy options? Well, there are a number. A narrow policy option from the beginning was to follow the advice of really far out radicals like the Pope [audience laughter]. The Vatican immediately said look it’s a horrible terrorist crime. In the case of crime, you try to find the perpetrators, you bring them to justice, you try them. You don’t kill innocent civilians. Like if somebody robs my house and I think the guy who did it is probably in the neighborhood across the street, I don’t go out with an assault rifle and kill everyone in that neighborhood. That’s not the way you deal with crime, whether it’s a small crime like this one or really massive one like the US terrorist war against Nicaragua, even worse ones and others in between. And there are plenty of precedents for that. In fact, I mentioned a precedent, Nicaragua, a lawful, a law abiding state, that’s why presumably we had to destroy it, which followed the right principles. Now of course, it didn’t get anywhere because it was running up against a power that wouldn’t allow lawful procedures to be followed. But if the United States tried to pursue them, nobody would stop them. In fact, everyone would applaud. And there are plenty of other precedents.

IRA Bombs in London

When the IRA set off bombs in London, which is pretty serious business, Britain could have, apart from the fact that it was unfeasible, let's put that aside, one possible response would have been to destroy Boston which is the source of most of the financing. And of course to wipe out West Belfast. Well, you know, quite apart from the feasibility, it would have been criminal idiocy. The way to deal with it was pretty much what they did. You know, find the perpetrators; bring them to trial; and look for the reasons. Because these things don't come out of nowhere. They come from something. Whether it is a crime in the streets or a monstrous terrorist crime or anything else. There's reasons. And usually if you look at the reasons, some of them are legitimate and ought to be addressed, independently of the crime, they ought to be addressed because they are legitimate. And that's the way to deal with it. There are many such examples.

But there are problems with that. One problem is that the United States does not recognize the jurisdiction of international institutions. So it can't go to them. It has rejected the jurisdiction of the World Court. It has refused to ratify the International Criminal Court. It is powerful enough to set up a new court if it wants so that wouldn't stop anything. But there is a problem with any kind of a court, mainly you need evidence. You go to any kind of court, you need some kind of evidence. Not Tony Blair talking about it on television. And that's very hard. It may be impossible to find.

Leaderless Resistance

You know, it could be that the people who did it, killed themselves. Nobody knows this better than the CIA. These are decentralized, nonhierarchical networks. They follow a principle that is called Leaderless Resistance. That's the principle that has been developed by the Christian Right terrorists in the United States. It's called Leaderless Resistance. You have small groups that do things. They don't talk to anybody else. There is a kind of general background of assumptions and then you do it. Actually people in the anti war movement are very familiar with it. We used to call it affinity groups. If you assume correctly that whatever group you are in is being penetrated by the FBI, when something serious is happening, you don't do it in a meeting. You do it with some people you know and trust, an affinity group and then it doesn't get penetrated. That's one of the reasons why the FBI has never been able to figure out what's going on in any of the popular movements. And other intelligence agencies are the same. They can't. That's leaderless resistance or affinity groups, and decentralized networks are extremely hard to penetrate. And it's quite possible that they just don't know. When Osama bin Laden claims he wasn't involved, that's entirely possible. In fact, it's pretty hard to imagine how a guy in a cave in Afghanistan, who doesn't even have a radio or a telephone could have planned a highly sophisticated operation like that. Chances are it's part of the background. You know, like other leaderless resistance terrorist groups. Which means it's going to be extremely difficult to find evidence.

Establishing Credibility

And the US doesn't want to present evidence because it wants to be able to do it, to act without evidence. That's a crucial part of the reaction. You will notice that the US did not ask for Security Council authorization which they probably could have gotten this time, not for pretty reasons, but because the other permanent members of the Security Council are also terrorist states. They are happy to join a coalition against what they call terror, namely in support of their own terror. Like Russia wasn't going to veto, they love it. So the US probably could have gotten Security Council authorization but it didn't want it. And it didn't want it because it follows a long-standing principle which is not George Bush, it was explicit in the Clinton administration, articulated and goes back much further and that is that we have the right to act unilaterally. We don't want international authorization because we act unilaterally and therefore we don't want it. We don't care about evidence. We don't care about negotiation. We don't care about treaties. We are the strongest guy around; the toughest thug on the block. We do what we want. Authorization is a bad thing and therefore must be avoided. There is even a name for it in the technical literature. It's called establishing credibility. You have to establish credibility. That's an important factor in many policies. It was the official reason given for the war in the Balkans and the most plausible reason.

You want to know what credibility means, ask your favorite Mafia Don. He'll explain to you what credibility means. And it's the same in international affairs, except it's talked about in universities using big words, and that sort of thing. But it's basically the same principle. And it makes sense. And it usually works. The main historian who has written about this in the last couple years is Charles Tilly with a book called *Coercion, Capital, and European States*. He points out that violence has been the leading principle of Europe for hundreds of years and the reason is because it works. You know, it's very reasonable. It almost always works. When you have an overwhelming predominance of violence and a culture of violence behind it. So therefore it makes sense to follow it. Well, those are all problems in pursuing lawful paths. And if you did try to follow them you'd really open some very dangerous doors. Like the US is demanding that the Taliban hand over Osama bin Laden. And they are responding in a way which is regarded as totally absurd and outlandish in the west, namely they are saying, Ok, but first give us some evidence. In the west, that is considered ludicrous. It's a sign of their criminality. How can they ask for evidence? I mean if somebody asked us to hand someone over, we'd do it tomorrow. We wouldn't ask for any evidence. [crowd laughter].

Haiti

In fact it is easy to prove that. We don't have to make up cases. So for example, for the last several years, Haiti has been requesting the United States to extradite Emmanuel Constant. He is a major killer. He is one of the leading figures in the slaughter of maybe four thousand or five thousand people in the years in the mid 1990's, under the military junta, which incidentally was being, not so tacitly, supported by the Bush and the Clinton administrations contrary to illusions. Anyway he is a leading killer. They have plenty of evidence. No

problem about evidence. He has already been brought to trial and sentenced in Haiti and they are asking the United States to turn him over. Well, I mean do your own research. See how much discussion there has been of that. Actually Haiti renewed the request a couple of weeks ago. It wasn't even mentioned. Why should we turn over a convicted killer who was largely responsible for killing four thousand or five thousand people a couple of years ago. In fact, if we do turn him over, who knows what he would say. Maybe he'll say that he was being funded and helped by the CIA, which is probably true. We don't want to open that door. And he is not he only one.

Costa Rica

I mean, for the last about fifteen years, Costa Rica which is the democratic prize, has been trying to get the United States to hand over a John Hull, a US land owner in Costa Rica, who they charge with terrorist crimes. He was using his land, they claim with good evidence as a base for the US war against Nicaragua, which is not a controversial conclusion, remember. There is the World Court and Security Council behind it. So they have been trying to get the United States to hand him over. Hear about that one? No.

They did actually confiscate the land of another American landholder, John Hamilton. Paid compensation, offered compensation. The US refused. Turned his land over into a national park because his land was also being used as a base for the US attack against Nicaragua. Costa Rica was punished for that one. They were punished by withholding aid. We don't accept that kind of insubordination from allies. And we can go on. If you open the door to questions about extradition it leads in very unpleasant directions. So that can't be done.

Reactions in Afghanistan

Well, what about the reactions in Afghanistan. The initial proposal, the initial rhetoric was for a massive assault which would kill many people visibly and also an attack on other countries in the region. Well the Bush administration wisely backed off from that. They were being told by every foreign leader, NATO, everyone else, every specialist, I suppose, their own intelligence agencies that that would be the stupidest thing they could possibly do. It would simply be like opening recruiting offices for bin Laden all over the region. That's exactly what he wants. And it would be extremely harmful to their own interests. So they backed off that one. And they are turning to what I described earlier which is a kind of silent genocide. It's a.... well, I already said what I think about it. I don't think anything more has to be said. You can figure it out if you do the arithmetic.

A sensible proposal which is kind of on the verge of being considered, but it has been sensible all along, and it is being raised, called for by expatriate Afghans and allegedly tribal leaders internally, is for a UN initiative, which would keep the Russians and Americans out of it, totally. These are the two countries that have practically wiped the country out in the last twenty years. They should be out of it. They should provide massive reparations. But that's their

only role. A UN initiative to bring together elements within Afghanistan that would try to construct something from the wreckage. It's conceivable that that could work, with plenty of support and no interference. If the US insists on running it, we might as well quit. We have a historical record on that one.

You will notice that the name of this operation....remember that at first it was going to be a Crusade but they backed off that because PR (public relations) agents told them that that wouldn't work [audience laughter]. And then it was going to be Infinite Justice, but the PR agents said, wait a minute, you are sounding like you are divinity. So that wouldn't work. And then it was changed to enduring freedom. We know what that means. But nobody has yet pointed out, fortunately, that there is an ambiguity there. To endure means to suffer. [audience laughter]. And there are plenty of people around the world who have endured what we call freedom. Again, fortunately we have a very well-behaved educated class so nobody has yet pointed out this ambiguity. But if it's done there will be another problem to deal with. But if we can back off enough so that some more or less independent agency, maybe the UN, maybe credible NGO's (non governmental organizations) can take the lead in trying to reconstruct something from the wreckage, with plenty of assistance and we owe it to them. Then maybe something would come out. Beyond that, there are other problems.

An Easy Way To Reduce The Level Of Terror

We certainly want to reduce the level of terror, certainly not escalate it. There is one easy way to do that and therefore it is never discussed. Namely stop participating in it. That would automatically reduce the level of terror enormously. But that you can't discuss. Well we ought to make it possible to discuss it. So that's one easy way to reduce the level of terror.

Beyond that, we should rethink the kinds of policies, and Afghanistan is not the only one, in which we organize and train terrorist armies. That has effects. We're seeing some of these effects now. September 11th is one. Rethink it.

Rethink the policies that are creating a reservoir of support. Exactly what the bankers, lawyers and so on are saying in places like Saudi Arabia. On the streets it's much more bitter, as you can imagine. That's possible. You know, those policies aren't graven in stone.

And further more there are opportunities. It's hard to find many rays of light in the last couple of weeks but one of them is that there is an increased openness. Lots of issues are open for discussion, even in elite circles, certainly among the general public, that were not a couple of weeks ago. That's dramatically the case. I mean, if a newspaper like USA Today can run a very good article, a serious article, on life in the Gaza Strip...there has been a change. The things I mentioned in the Wall Street Journal...that's change. And among the general public, I think there is much more openness and willingness to think about things that were under the rug and so on. These are opportunities and they should be used, at least by people who accept the goal of trying to reduce the level of violence and terror, including potential threats

that are extremely severe and could make even September 11th pale into insignificance. Thanks.