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Countering Terrorism

A New Challenge to our National Conscience

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“Terror is not a new weapon. Throughout history it has been used by those who could not prevail either by persuasion or example....”

—John Fitzgerald Kennedy

When this year began, more than four million people were involved in more than 30 separate armed conflicts around the globe. Many of those conflicts could be classified as wars, rebellions, or civil uprisings—using our more traditional definitions of armed conflict. But various other conflicts also have occurred, including uncounted numbers of single incidents in countries generally considered to be at peace. These events and incidents, often the most heinous crimes against humanity, were properly classified as terrorism.

Only a short time ago, we again were reminded of the deadly nature of international terrorism when a bomb-laden truck exploded in front of the U.S. Embassy Annex in northeast Beirut. We also were reminded that this nation, as leader of the Western world, will frequently not only be the target for terrorist actions, but also cannot afford to, as President Reagan has explained, “crawl in a hole some place and stop performing” in our key leadership role.

This is a time of “violent peace.” Although we are at war with no nation, there are groups of people who have proven themselves ready to strike at us, and at other free nations, with deadly

accuracy and murderous intent. Because of terrorism’s unpredictability, its latent threat worldwide, and its anonymity, it is the most common yet insidious and difficult threat we face today. As President Kennedy stated in the quotation introducing these comments, terrorism is not a new weapon; however, the threat it poses to our security is growing:

- In 1983, more than 500 attacks were carried out by international terrorists. Of these attacks, more than 200 were against the United States.
- Last year, more Americans were killed or injured by international terrorists than in any other year since we began keeping records. Although the total number of recorded incidents has not varied significantly for the past few years, the proportion of terrorist events with multiple fatalities is much greater today.
- While only 20% of terrorist attacks involved human targets ten years ago, now more than 50% are targeted to kill people.

As we have seen, terrorism is not confined to one geographic area. Today, many people around the world live in fear of sudden acts of ruthless and unprovoked violence perpetrated by terrorists. FBI Director William Webster recently noted that *domestic* terrorist actions have not increased, and in fact have decreased.

This, however, does not free us from the responsibility of learning about how to deal with *non-domestic* terrorism, because this nation’s

challenge is equally focused in other areas of the world as a matter of national policy. One need only think of the recent destruction of our Embassy Annex and last year's tragedy at the Marine barracks in Beirut; about the bombing of our Embassy Annex in Kuwait; the bombing at Harrods in London; the murder of four members of South Korea's Cabinet in Rangoon; the murder of a British policewoman outside the Libyan "People's Bureau"; and the recent attempt to assassinate British Prime Minister Thatcher, to get an idea of the scope of the challenge we face today.

Facing the Challenge

I believe the specter of terrorism, and the policies for responding to such a threat, have new and profound moral implications for government policy-makers, for professional military personnel, and for all of our citizens. My intent in addressing this subject is to express my personal convictions about the morality of national self-defense and the need for this nation to be prepared to defend itself against any and all threats in this age of terrorism.

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While national maritime strategy in large-scale conflict is our Navy's *raison d'être*, I believe *all* military people should constantly be sifting out for themselves the moral implications of their military actions, including those that may be in response to terrorism. Those of us who serve in the military take an oath and hence have a moral obligation to take whatever actions are necessary and directed by the President to "defend this great nation against all enemies, foreign and domestic." It does not matter whether the enemy is massed in an opposing Army or Navy, or is masked in an individual terrorist cell.

Although international terrorism is a challenge to our entire national leadership, the responsibility for dealing with terrorism lies with all of our citizens. It is obvious that our nation cannot successfully conduct foreign policy without a clear sense of national consensus. I believe that, if we fail to understand and develop that consensus in this critical area, then our failure may further encourage groups to utilize such "hoodlum acts" for political persuasion. The outcome of those acts, if allowed to continue unchecked, may be nothing less than the loss of the freedoms we hold so dear.

Defining the Problem

We know a great deal about terrorism. We know that terrorism is usually not as random, undirected, or sporadic as many once thought it was. Terrorism is targeted for a specific purpose, usually with definite political goals. We also know that terrorism has become an arm of the state in some cases; it is being sponsored and used as a political tool by legitimate governments.

Today, several unscrupulous sovereign nations are sponsoring terrorist training camps on their soil, and thousands of trained assassins are being tutored at these "universities" of murder and destruction. Secretary of State George Schultz referred to these sponsors and supporters of terrorism as a "League of Terror" which includes Libya, Syria, Iran, North Korea, and Bulgaria in its membership.

Recently, much intellectual energy has been focused on attempts to define terrorism. The claim is made that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." But is terrorism really in the eyes of the beholder? I do not believe so. Terrorism is the murder of a British policewoman by an assassin inside the Libyan "People's Bureau"; terrorism is the Rangoon bombing which claimed the lives of four South Korean cabinet members; terrorism is the murder of 241 Marines and Sailors by a "smiling" fanatic in a bomb-laden truck on a Sunday morning in Beirut; terrorism is the killing and

wounding of as many as 92 American and Lebanese innocents in September 1984 by another bomb-laden vehicle which was only partially defeated in a fanatical attempt to destroy the entire Embassy Annex and all inside. In short, we cannot allow an insidious corruption of logic to confuse and prevent us from properly defending ourselves and our vital interests.

A National Strategy

Defense measures are relatively easy to develop, justify, and implement, but they make up only half of the “readiness-against-terrorism” equation. Defensive or reactive measures alone will not effectively combat terrorism. Only by showing the world that America has the will—and that our military forces have the capability—to defend and promote its interests can we hope to thwart and deter the terrorist.

Today, a national strategy to deal with terrorism does exist. However, much still needs to be done. Passage of the legislative package designed to help combat international terrorism that was sent to the Congress this year (but not fully enacted) would provide an excellent start. And this nation must continue to explore rational and coherent national policies for taking a pro-active stand against terrorism as well.

When considering potential preemptive or pro-active actions against terrorists one opens a Pandora’s box full of sundry challenges for this nation’s leadership. Recently, I convened a special conference at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., to study the complexities of terrorism. The conference’s 38 participants came from a wide variety of disciplines, and represented many of the best in the fields of military operations, ethics, the law of war, political science, sociology, philosophy, and theology. Their task was to discuss, from their various vantage points and professional backgrounds, the subject of terrorism. They would *attempt* to merge thought and principles into working guidelines that could be useful in dealing with the concept of terrorism on an international scale.

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Their efforts were successful beyond what I thought possible. Although the group did not come to a unanimous conclusion about any one single area discussed, it did, despite the participants’ diversified backgrounds and perceptions, come to a consensus about how to deal with terrorism. Admittedly, the problem of terrorism was looked at from a Western viewpoint of morality, and dealt with American characteristics and capabilities to respond to threats of terrorism. And the participants were not in total agreement as to what specific national policies should be implemented. But they did reach consensus on the moral and ethical framework which can and should be used in evaluating any planned response to terrorism.

Moral Response Criteria

What should be our response when threatened with terrorism? Can we attack bases where terrorist bombs are made? Can we attack the base or country supplying materials and money to the terrorist? What is the moral response to such criminal actions? What should the military advice to our national leadership be?

As a starting point in answering these questions, the conferees-affirmed that the traditional theory of “Just War” applies to international terrorism. The Just War theory relates to the moral justification of a person taking up arms in self-defense. The theory was considered in two specific divisions: *Jus Ad Bellum*, which is the right or obligation to respond to an act of terrorism or the threat of such; and *Jus In Bello*, the conduct or type of response that may be undertaken.

In the area of *Jus Ad Bellum*, the conference participants felt that several conditions must be met before a nation may morally take action to stay the terrorist's hand, or to eliminate the threat of terrorism.

First, there must be a *Just Cause*. Traditionally, this has been defined as self-defense against an unjust aggressor or the protection of legitimate state interests. Providing such protection is both a *lawful* and *moral* obligation of peace-loving nations. For those serving in the armed forces it also is the foundation of our oath of duty and call to service.

In this regard, the conference participants observed that the terms moral and legal are not conterminous: What is legal may not always be moral; what is moral may not always be legal. Further, what is both moral and legal might not necessarily be politically feasible: Therefore, any workable moral framework for a response to terrorism cannot be applied *ma vacuum*, but must be placed in context with the political, military, and other realities which necessarily impinge upon the decision making process.

According to this principle, a sovereign government should not respond to terrorism without moral justification, because such a response is precisely what the terrorist seeks: a governmental response that undermines public confidence by offending moral expectations or abrogating civil rights. Similarly, retribution and punishment, or violence used for purely symbolic or cathartic purposes, cannot justify our response.

A second condition for a moral response to terrorism is that decisions must be made by *competent authority*. The legitimate government is the only vested authority which can make decisions about how to respond. This condition is extremely important because one of the terrorist's objectives is to challenge a sovereign government's legitimacy. In view of the controversy over the way decisions were made during our involvement in Vietnam, it is critical that the decision making process in response to

terrorist acts be carefully defined and strongly supported by Congress and the public.

Another important consideration is that military force must be used as a *last resort*. All non-military pressures and actions, defensive postures, diplomatic, political, and economic sanctions, are potential alternatives to the use of military force. The use of military force may be justified only after all other alternatives are exhausted.

A morally justified response must have a *reasonable likelihood of success*. This requires the best possible intelligence to identify perpetrators and to confirm that clear and present danger exists. Only then can a proper response be designed and implemented.

It also is vital that decision makers foresee that *more good than evil* will come from any proposed response. This requires an analysis by decision makers, with all of the possible ramifications and consequences of an operation considered. For example, the danger of escalation, the international impact, and ultimate contribution to deterrence (prohibition of future actions of terrorist violence, which must be considered as a primary goal of such pro-active measures) are all considerations.

Once a decision is made that a response to terrorism is both necessary and morally justified, another set of conditions must be considered. These considerations will determine the morality of the specific actions which are to be taken (*Jus In Bello*). In this regard, two principles are paramount: any intended response must be *proportionate* to the threat; and it must be highly *discriminate* in its applications.

The issue of proportionality reflects our societal commitment to the principle that a sovereign state's action should be based on restraint. Our moral values would be compromised by any hint of wanton destruction of human life and property. We are not free to set aside our moral values just because a terrorist has done so.

Likewise, a planned response must be carefully targeted to exclude non-terrorists, even those who by force of circumstances would be considered “friendly” to the terrorists. This principle of discrimination is the essence of Western morality. Although terrorists make no such distinction, the principle of discrimination assures that every effort is made to avoid inflicting injury and destruction upon innocent people.

The issues of proportionality and discrimination demand the very best efforts by motivated, honest, and dedicated people. No response to terrorism ever will be absolutely clean or pure in its morality to all people. We do not live in a world of perfect absolutes, so we must do the best we can with the information available to us. At the same time, decisions *must* be made, and it is clear that moral decisions *can* be made.

Our goal is to deter aggressors from taking terrorist actions against us. We should work to make terrorist acts so counterproductive and costly, or seem so costly, that potential perpetrators will think twice before carrying out, or threatening to carry out, terrorist acts. In that context, even preemptive and retaliatory acts carried out for their deterrent effect may, under carefully controlled circumstances, be moral.

Our Challenge

In my opinion, we cannot afford to speak in grand terms about morality and Western world leadership if we fail to get involved, or if we lack conviction to stand by those terms with resolute and responsible action. To quote Shakespeare, we cannot “speak in a monstrous little voice which can only be viewed as a *legal* course of action, surely not as the *moral* course of action

expected of military and national leaders sworn to protect others.

I believe that the efforts made to date are essential first steps in learning how to deal with this crime against humanity. Our nation’s leaders are looking at these complex issues realistically, reviewing and developing national options, and proposing new legislation critical to dealing more effectively with terrorism. They also are encouraging our allies and friends to study this global problem with us, linking together to defend ourselves better.

If we deny terrorists the political and psychological benefits of their violence by ensuring that our response is both morally justified and fully supported by national consensus, then our nation and the other nations of the free world will move out of the shadow of the terrorist threat. Utopian goals aside, we can and must respond to this insidious threat if we ever hope to forge a world where “peace” means a world free of conflict, and “freedom” is for all people.

The time to do this is now, for the threat to the free world is not abating, but is in fact growing. The last part of the John F. Kennedy quotation with which I began this article is instructive. President Kennedy described the spirit and determination this nation must possess to deal with the terrible crime of international terrorism. This is our challenge:

“... But inevitably (terrorists) fail, either because men are not afraid to die for a life worth living, or because the terrorists themselves come to realize that free men cannot be frightened by threats and that aggression would meet its own response.”