

# 'Terrorism is not confined to Islamic groups'



**When states treat some acts of terror as more important than others, terrorists take benefit, says Sundeep Waslekar**

TWO rounds of terrorist attacks in London in a short period of time demonstrate that the current global war on terror is failing. Since 9/11, there have been approximately 10,000 terrorist attacks around the world, 90 per cent domestic and 80 per cent in non-Western countries. The media, however, only pays attention to the few attacks in the West or Western targets in Riyadh, Bali and Istanbul.

This selective approach to target only certain target groups while allowing others to be nurtured, strengthens terrorism as a phenomenon. On other hand, reducing all terrorism to Islam drives large sections of people into a corner. The reality is that out of the 175 strong terrorist groups in the world, only 42 groups act in the name of Wahabism. More than 100 groups engage in acts of terror on the platform of socio-economic revolution or self determination. The failure of the current strategy to disaggregate terrorism according to the real motives of the groups has created a mess. The attacks in London were an obvious result and more will follow if the world, particularly the United States, does not fundamentally alter the present approach.

If terrorism is seen in terms of its victims, it is easy to underestimate its

gravity. Terrorism has caused fewer deaths than poverty, disease, malnutrition or genocide and conventional war. The real danger of terrorism is that it causes policy disruptions. A country facing terrorism often organises its entire policy framework to combat terror. Further, governments curb civil liberties and some tend to use terror as an excuse to justify authoritarianism. This results in the discounting of the democratic principle, underdevelopment and more terrorism.

Prime Minister Blair has adopted a different approach than the George Bush did in 2001. He is not delivering 'crusades' speeches and he is not seeking to form any new global coalition. I am in touch with the person who is handling the entire situation for Blair and they are going about it in a dedicated but businesslike manner. Since Blair himself is not seeking any loud noise from the US, and I think he is wise in doing so, the United States appears relatively low key in its response to these round of attacks.

Blair's statesmanlike response needs to be seen in the context of the growing need felt all over the world to reexamine the present war on terror. Exactly a month ago, Strategic Foresight Group and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in the European Parliament brought together 35 Islamic and Western leaders at the European Parliament in Brussels to discuss fresh strategies to deconstruct terror. Most of them were serving or former foreign ministers. They together concluded that it was misleading and inappropriate to associate terrorism with any religion. A new set of policy measures for a safer world must be based on zero tolerance for acts of terror but a clear distinction between groups as per their motives. The Brussels

Consensus also calls for transformation of fragile societies to dissuade people from joining or supporting terrorist groups.

The United States and UK tend to concentrate rightly on Al Qaeda but wrongly ignore other groups. There are local radical Islamic groups in both the countries, such as Al Fuqra in the United States and Al Muhajiroun in UK. These groups may or may not be linked to Al Qaeda. But there are enough indications of their association with various patrons in Pakistan. Also, according to Harvard expert Jessica Stern, Lashker-e-Taiba has a base in the United States. Another Pakistani group, Harkat ul Jihadi Islami, now operating out of Bangladesh, has bases in 40 countries. So long as General Musharraf reigns in Pakistan, and is supported by his friends in London and Washington, ironically, terrorism will gain strength by strength and target American and British assets.

Terrorism in the United States and UK is not confined to the Islamic groups. The map of terrorism in the United States has prominent places for Creativity Movement, an extremist Christian group; Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front, extremist ecological groups; Aryan Nation, Nazi Low Riders, and National Alliance, racist groups, mostly targeting the Jews. UK has Combat 18, opposed to globalisation and capitalism, besides various Irish and Protestant groups. If all these groups are left alone to grow, what can Americans and British governments expect in the future?

Therefore, Brussels Consensus emphasises a comprehensive and non-discriminatory approach. Acts of terror must be totally rejected, whether they target commuters in London, school children in Beslan, or a temple complex in India. When states treat some acts of

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The spectre of terrorism will grow unless the international community agrees on a truly principled and cooperative approach. At the root of the present conflict is a contest of values. Those adhering to terrorism claim to do so in the name of justice. Those opposing them claim to profess freedom. In the minds of millions of unemployed youth, who are waiting for being recruited, freedom and justice appear to be counterpoised. Unless the leaders realise that freedom and justice are both essential and mutually reinforcing universal values, there is a risk of their promoting certain policies in the name of freedom, ignoring justice. The war against terrorism is essentially a war of philosophy and ideas. If the West wants to win this war, it must learn to work together with the leaders of Islamic and other developing countries to mobilise the forces of moderation around the world and to alienate the forces of extremism, hatred and illegitimate force.

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