

# THE TERRORIST IN THE MIRROR

The US and the UK perpetuate self-serving, hypocritical foreign policies which will continue to be rejected by the Muslim world.

**T**ERROR IS A term that rightly arouses strong emotions and deep concerns. The primary concern should, naturally, be to take measures to alleviate the threat. To proceed in a serious way, we have to establish some guidelines. Here are a few simple ones:

1. Facts matter, even if we do not like them.
2. Elementary moral principles matter, even if they have consequences that we would prefer not to face.
3. Relative clarity matters. We should seek enough clarity at least to distinguish 'terror' from two notions that lie uneasily at its borders: aggression and legitimate resistance.

If we accept these guidelines, there are quite constructive ways to deal with the problems of terrorism. Let's turn to the "War on Terror". Since facts matter, it matters that the war was not declared by George W Bush on 9/11, but by the Reagan administration twenty years earlier. The administration came into office declaring that their foreign policy would confront what Reagan called "the evil scourge of terrorism", a plague spread by "depraved opponents of civilisation itself". The campaign was directed to a particularly virulent form of the plague: state-directed international terrorism. The main focus was Central America and the Middle East, but it reached to southern Africa and South-East Asia and beyond.

A second fact is that the war was declared and implemented by pretty much the same people who are conducting the re-declared war on terrorism. During the first phase of the War on Terror, Donald Rumsfeld was Reagan's special representative to the Middle East. There, his main task was to establish close relations with Saddam Hussein so that the US could provide him with large-scale aid, including means to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD), continuing long after the huge atrocities against the Kurds and the end of the war with Iran. The official purpose, not concealed, was the view of Washington and its allies Britain and Saudi Arabia that "whatever the sins of the Iraqi leader, he offered the West and the region a better hope for his country's stability than did those who have suffered his repression" – as discussed by *New York Times* Middle East correspondent Alan Cowell, describing Washington's judgement as George Bush senior, authorised Saddam Hussein to crush the Shi'ite rebellion in 1991, which probably would have overthrown the tyrant.

LET'S TURN TO the second of the guidelines: elementary moral principles matter. One example, of critical importance

today, is the Nuremberg Tribunal. In sentencing Nazi war criminals, Justice Robert Jackson, Chief of Counsel for the United States, spoke eloquently, and memorably, on the principle of universality. "If certain acts of violation of treaties are crimes," he said, "they are crimes whether the United States does them or whether Germany does them, and we are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us ... We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow. To pass these defendants a poisoned chalice is to put it to our own lips as well."

That is a clear and honourable statement of the principle of universality. But the judgment at Nuremberg itself crucially violated this principle. The Tribunal had to define 'war crime' and 'crimes against humanity'. It crafted these definitions very carefully so that crimes were criminal only if they were not committed by the Allies. Urban bombing of civilian concentrations was excluded, because the Allies carried it out more barbarically than the Nazis. The self-exemption of the powerful from international law and elementary moral principle goes far beyond this illustration, and reaches to just about every aspect of the two phases of the War on Terror.

We might want to bear this in mind when we read George W Bush's impassioned pronouncement that "the United States makes no distinction between those who commit acts of terror and those who support them, because they're equally as guilty of murder," and that "the civilised world must hold those regimes to account." Bush's remarks pose a dilemma. Either the US is part of the civilised world, and must therefore send the US air force to bomb Washington; or it declares itself to be outside the civilised world. The logic is impeccable, but fortunately, logic has been dispatched as deeply into the memory hole as moral truisms.

But let us now adopt prevailing Western hypocrisy and cynicism, and keep to the operative definition of 'terror'. It is the same as the official definitions, but with the Nuremberg exception: admissible terror is your terror; ours is exempt.

THE INVASION OF Iraq is perhaps the most glaring example of the low priority assigned by US/UK leaders to the threat of terror. Washington planners had been advised, even by their own intelligence agencies, that the invasion was likely to increase the risk of terror. And it did. The National Intelligence Council reported a year ago that "Iraq and other possible conflicts in the future could provide recruitment,