

Is the "war on terror" being won? (II)

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James A. Goldston, Executive Director, Open Society Justice Initiative

Government responses to the challenge of terrorism since 9/11 have been plagued by three major problems.

First, resorting to military force has undermined political and law enforcement measures which successfully defused prior cycles of terrorism.

Second, uncritical acceptance of the notion of a "clash of civilizations" has exaggerated the role of religion and culture as sources of, and solutions to, terrorist violence. The result has been, in some cases, to validate some of the terrorists' own distorted ideas.

Third, the burdens of sacrifice have not been equally shared. By stigmatizing and alienating Arabs and Muslims, policies of racial, ethnic and religious profiling have fed the false perception that the fight against terrorism is a fight against Islam. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Animesh Roul, Executive Director, Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict

The phrase global "war on terror" (WOT) is flawed on many counts and the struggle it represents is not succeeding at all at the moment. WOT is only targeted against the perpetrators of 9/11 and their sympathisers, not against all terrorist acts irrespective of religion, location and agenda.

Years after its inception, WOT has only abetted the horizontal proliferation of terror outfits and terror cells, spreading across the globe, from Madrid to the Maghreb and Kandahar to Kashmir. Waging full-fledged military campaigns has backfired in Iraq and Afghanistan. The coalition's efforts in the country have instead fuelled divergent terror groups to unite against organised State forces. This is definitely a wrong counterterrorism strategy. It is important to cure the disease by treating the symptoms first.

It is high time the US and its allies should reflect on their policies so far and initiate a broader socio-political "Campaign against Terrorism" where the root cause of terror needs to be addressed first, instead of the current emphasis on blunt military operations.

Alex P. Schmid, Director, Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence

The "war on terror" (WOT) appears, so far, not to have been more successful than the "war on poverty" or the "war on drugs". There is, incidentally, a difference between "terror" and "terrorism". The first usually refers to a state of mind (panic and shock) caused by intense fear while the second refers to a special tactic - basically amounting to committing war crimes in peacetime for intimidation, coercion or propaganda.

Neither as "war on terror" nor as "war on terrorism" does the WOT terminology make much sense. Nor is the term "war" very appropriate for what the other side does outside Afghanistan and Iraq - engaging in a series of one-sided, punctuated attacks from the underground on mainly non-military targets.

Since the confrontation with salafist jihadism is not a "war" in a conventional sense, it is doubtful whether it can be "won" in a conventional sense.

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