

From "Australia's Foreign Wars: Origins, Costs, Future?!" <http://users.cyberone.com.au/ibuckley>
Illustrated version is available from [The British Empire](http://www.britishempire.co.uk/) <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/> (see Articles)

Appendix J

The Question of Terror (from *Eureka Street*, June, 2002)

Ian Buckley*

In actively supporting the United States in its war in Afghanistan our own government claims that we Australians too are there 'to fight terrorism'. But what is terrorism? Do we always recognise it? And what can we do to stop it?

Historically, although individuals or groups have engaged in terrorist activity to attain some end, more typically terrorism has been the provenance of governments. Not that such activity is ever described that way:- always it has been action 'essential for good government', force used only 'to maintain order'. For example in the 1930s when Japan, facing sky-rocketing trade barriers and attempting to emulate the West's colonial success in the East, invaded Manchuria it was 'to restore order' - to combat the 'terrorism' of the resisting Chinese!

Whenever terrorism ("A system of terror....Government by intimidation....A policy intended to strike with terror..." - Oxford) has been used with the backing of government resources to coerce whole populations (their own or those of other states) it has been enormously destructive of people and their life-support systems. The idea goes back a long way, e.g., the Roman Empire's siege and destruction of Jerusalem, certain Crusades, the Thirty Years War, 'the Terror' of the French Revolution and in more recent times that of the Holocaust during WWII. Besides the threat and use of physical violence, siege, blockade and starvation have been common features. Indeed, terrorism has been the prime instrument of war to force surrender. As in WWI, WWII and subsequent wars, it has been systematically employed against both the military and civilians of both sides. While mechanised war greatly amplified the terror faced by youth in the front lines, food blockade and other sanctions, along with aerial bombardment, sought to break the will of civilians (David Kennedy, ABC Background Briefing, Oct. 21, 2001). Thus regardless of the methods used, it is the attempt to coerce populations through the systematic application of terror that is the essence of terrorism. And since all such population-directed terrorism is evil, unjustified, and in defiance of international law, as agreed by all states under the Geneva Conventions of 1949, 1972, there is urgent need for terrorism in all its forms to be recognised - whether it's been part of our living history or still current.

Contemporary examples are all too real. We immediately think of the terrifying effects of the aircraft attacks on New York's Twin Towers and their occupants on September 11. In one sense that immense tragedy appears totally perplexing because while clearly it was a deliberate act, no responsibility was claimed and no demands made. What was the point?! It is not even certain that it was 'state-based terrorism'. Nevertheless, even if its

precise source remains unclear, at least by implication, this horrifying example of modern-day terrorism may involve 'demands' not only on the population of the United States but on all of us. So, despite the difficulties in understanding this awful event, we have to ask ourselves: what *was* it all about, and how should we respond to prevent all such repetitions?

Although to date we have no direct evidence of possible connections to the horror of September 11, the world has seen many other examples of modern-day terrorism of equal or greater magnitude which might provide a clue as to its origin. That most of these examples have been insufficiently recognised as 'terrorism' in the West, does not negate such a possibility. There was, for example the US cruise missile bombing of a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory in August 1998, allegedly in response to two horrendous terrorist attacks on US embassies in Africa. The US claim that the Sudanese factory was a cover for chemical weapons production was later retracted, yet that failed to influence its final outcomes. It was stated that the number of deaths caused by the attack was not great, so to the extent the matter was understood in the West, the incident could have appeared an 'honest mistake' of no great consequence. For the people concerned, however, there was a very different reality. That reality was that that factory happened to be Sudan's sole source of immunising and other agents for preventing diseases including malaria. Despite the later acknowledgment that the factory was not the source of chemical weapons, there followed neither apology nor reparations allowing its replacement. And adding to the human cost, sanctions which remained in place ensured that the Sudan could not import the life-saving preventatives, such as chloroquine for malaria. As Jonathan Belke put it, the factory's loss caused not just the immediate deaths, but the 'downstream' deaths of *tens of thousands* of Sudanese, many of them children (Boston Globe, August 22, 1999). If we pause to reflect on the human consequences of this bombing 'mistake', should we be surprised if some parents, or brothers, or sisters of these victims, having no recourse through international law or other means, volunteered themselves into a bin Laden or other terrorist network in order to draw attention to that atrocity attack on the Sudan?

The Sad Saga of Iraq

In trying to make sense of what has happened to transform and destabilise our modern world since the end of the Cold War, we may look at what has been happening to the people of Iraq. We need to ask how it came about that a brutal leader like Saddam Hussein for so long received enormous military support from the West and how even now, when out of favour, he has been permitted to remain in power while the Iraqi people continue to be subject to bombing and long-term debilitating sanctions. Might a better understanding of these events have a bearing on the recent terrorism attack in the West?

Throughout the 1980s Saddam's Iraq, a major oil producer, was at war with Iran, a country seriously at odds with the USA after it deposed its pro-Western Shah. While the Western powers (plus Russia) sold tens of millions of dollars worth of arms to Iraq (as well as Iran) Saddam gained all the high-tech weaponry he wanted as well as US support in the form of space-based military intelligence. But once the Iran-Iraq war ended (at

simply enormous cost to the youth of both countries) and once Saddam, embarking on an 'independent' oil policy, invaded Kuwait, his usefulness and popularity came to an abrupt end. Tragically, however, no appropriate international response followed. Instead of consideration via the UN towards effective action and sanctions to bring Saddam to order, the US (backed by Britain - and Australia) proceeded to a highly destructive military 'showdown'. Central to that was a savage campaign of aerial warfare which (a) obliterated several hundred thousand young Iraqis, mostly conscripts dug into bunkers on the Kuwait border (Mark Baker, *The Age* March 8, 1991) and (b) destroyed Iraq's civilian life-support infrastructure - its factories and its plants for power generation, water purification, sewage treatment, etc. Those acts of terrorism against the Iraqi people were followed by economic sanctions which severely limited oil export income and prevented repairs to the damaged infrastructure. Together these measures ensured that Iraq's economy remained severely crippled, reduced to an essentially pre-industrial state. No attempt was made to topple Saddam. After all, he was no longer a threat and could remain as stand-in 'manager' of the crippled country, thus preventing its total disintegration which, as an oil-producing entity, could later be bothersome. To some the overall end result might seem a very satisfactory solution.

But to the Iraqi people it has meant ongoing deprivation, humiliation and stark tragedy, especially for their health and well-being. Decline in comfort and living standards aside, the incidence of what were formerly preventable or treatable infectious diseases rose sharply and has remained high since the original attacks. The toll in disease and death has been great indeed, especially among the children. UNICEF and other UN Agencies report child deaths averaging some 5,000 *every month*. And we have to take on board the fact that this is a situation which the Iraqi people have endured for a full 10 years, aggregate civilian deaths estimated to be over half a million.

Here in the West we have been informed that the original infrastructure bombing and 10-year sanctions were necessary to control Saddam - when we should have known that Saddam, with or without his weapons of mass destruction, was in reality a spent force. Moreover we should have recognised that terrorising Iraqis not only does nothing 'to control Saddam' but is inhuman, unjust in the extreme. If we put ourselves in the place of the grieving mother, father, sister or brother, may we not now question that bizarre, inhuman approach? Might we not even see why a proportion of those so tragically affected, lacking other means of drawing attention to their plight, would want to take part in some terrorist activity. How else might they hope to engage the consciousness of unaware Westerners?

And What of Palestine's Plight?

What of Israel's 34-year military occupation and the expulsion of Palestinians of whom four and a half million remain refugees, including 1.3 million jammed into the Gaza strip? And what of the other remnant Palestinian territories, 63 non-contiguous cantons patrolled by Israeli troops, overflown by helicopter gun-ships and F-16s, road users liable to delays or detention at the military checkpoints? Through today's media exposure, most are well aware of the situation in Palestine - or, rather, what is left of its

Israeli-occupied lands. For many decades the State of Israel, strongly financed and armed with advanced weaponry by the USA, has systematically intruded into what was agreed Palestinian territory for the purpose of establishing new Israeli settlements, using the weapons and methods of terror to do so. All this contrary to prior agreements and in defiance of several UN Security Council Resolutions - yet with the blessing of successive US administrations. Throughout this long conflict there has been much violence, much terror from *both* sides, but with strong US backing Israel's military and economic strength is overwhelming and no just resolution is in sight. Indeed it seems clear that the present Israeli government is determined to continue its takeover of Palestinian territories - currently with the added 'justification' that such violent incursions are simply their contribution to 'the fight against terrorism'!! Having long lost confidence that the rule of international law will be upheld by the Western Powers, Palestinians clearly feel extreme desperation and many young Palestinians are literally queuing to join the list of suicide bombers.

While there is no doubting the terrorism carried out by young Palestinians, we must not allow ourselves to be hood-winked by Israel's denial of its own horrendous terrorism, as strikingly displayed in such places as Jenin. Clearly such tit-for-tat terrorist responses will continue endlessly until the international community intervenes to separate the combatants and truly secure for Palestinians their land. In addition to considerations of justice and the urgent humanitarian needs of Palestinians, there is much more at stake. The two World Wars of last century developed out of uncontrolled regional conflicts, indeed, that being a principal reason for setting up the United Nations Organisation. So the UN (which partitioned Palestine for Israel's birth in 1947) should be encouraged by the 'Powers' to intervene not only to save the Palestinians from Sharon's strategy of dispossession or death, but to head off the wider regional conflagration with its further risk of world war.

Is There a Solution?

It seems obvious that the underlying causation of all of the above has little to do with religion as such. It does, however, have a great deal to do with responses to serious human injustice. Circumstances may vary, but while victim societies can put up with injustice for a period, sooner or later individuals within those societies will take actions which, as we have recently seen, can be altogether extreme.

It is *not* the case that one terrorist event 'justifies' another. To claim that those attempting to explain the basis of the New York calamity are aiming to justify it is to misrepresent the situation. Obviously to 'justify' one terrorist event by a preceding one is the formula for endless 'payback', for never-ending terrorism - no solution whatever. The point to be stressed is that terrorism is *never* justified, no matter who it comes from, even if it comes from 'our side', even if it's been used to control some supposed 'rogue state', even if employed as part of the strategy of war. After all, the targeting of civilians and/or their life-support infrastructures by aerial or other means is absolutely prohibited in international law. The problem is that while we in the West can readily recognise terrorism directed at us, all too frequently terrorism directed towards Middle Eastern,

African, or Asian people has not been recognised for what it is. Without thinking too deeply about it, many have accepted the bombing and sanctions directed at distant 'foreign' populations as 'necessary', as 'justified' in some grand scheme of things better understood by others, the politicians and generals.

It is altogether plain that the recent bombing response by the US against Afghanistan was not only morally flawed but that it would end up with the worst possible end result for *all* concerned. Even if we were certain that bin Laden masterminded the New York attacks, such bombing could never be justified since, as a means, bombing could never have satisfied the supposed 'infinite justice' purpose of bringing bin Laden and other Taliban leaders to face charges of planning and directing the Twin Towers assault. Instead it was a 'show of force' in which the targets included Kabul and other cities, mud brick villages, hospitals, Red Cross warehouses and mountain tunnel networks, any location which *could* be a stronghold for Taliban personnel, senior or not. Thus although such attacks might have killed bin Laden and other senior members, they could never have brought them to face justice. Now, not only did the aerial attacks not apprehend bin Laden and his close associates, but they killed and wounded several thousand innocent Afghan men women and children as well as destroying much of their all-too-scarce life support facilities. And even worse than that, the bombing set in train vast movements of population which, due to past conflicts and disorders, were already on the point of starvation. We have this on the good authority of the NGOs and UN Agencies which were forced to stop trucking urgently needed food when the bombing began. There could be no secret that if at the onset of Afghanistan's notoriously severe winter some millions of men, women and children were forced into the open countryside to avoid the bombing, a horrifying toll of suffering and death from cold and starvation must result (many references in Chomsky's *The War in Afghanistan*', www.zmag.org)**.

Some may assume that the toll will not be 'too bad' and that in any case serious international efforts are under way to 'rebuild the country'. The lack of restoration by the US and NATO powers of the bomb damage to Serbia's civil infrastructure, along with their failure to remove land mines and depleted Uranium fragments scattered throughout that country makes it seem highly improbable that the US will remove its cluster bombs and other unexploded ordinance in Afghanistan or provide what is so urgently needed throughout its frozen famished countryside. This would require a crash program to repair all bomb damage - buildings for shelter, power and water, - supplies for warmth, for mere survival - and to rebuild the country's subsistence agriculture. This is not to say that investment in Afghanistan will not occur since that country sits astride the most direct pipeline route for central Asia's vast oil reserves to reach Indian ocean ports (see Richard Butler, New York Times January 18, 2002). But while assisting the West's 'oil interests', such developments would provide little benefit to all but a handful of Afghans.

Bombing could never be an appropriate response. Beyond generating an *additional* human tragedy of immense proportions, the recent bombing has not only greatly amplified the flood of refugees heading for Australia and other countries, but it has enormously increased the chances of 'payback' - i.e., as other terrorist events around the

world. Of course, the United Nations Organisation should have been the key organisation involved in investigating and dealing with *all* instances of terrorism. Indeed, this should have applied from the end of WWII on but as we know the major powers have long relegated that organisation to a subsidiary instrument, a mere tool in the big power 'game'. That was the fate of the League of Nations in the '20s and '30s - shamelessly abused, with the result we know too well. There is an urgent need therefore to give our United Nations Organisation a new lease of life, to take it seriously, make it work in solving the very real threats of terrorism, along with our other challenging problems.

Clearly there has to be a very serious response to terrorism but it must be specific to the event, it must identify those responsible for its planning and execution, it must gather the evidence and it must, with the assistance of the UN, bring the alleged perpetrators to trial in an international court of law. The US government has refused to participate in the International Criminal Court, just as it has rejected so many other responsible international agreements. As Australians we should insist our government desist from any involvement in arbitrary military actions outside international law but instead do its utmost to ensure that all cases involving terrorism are brought to justice in a properly constituted international court. To go on side-lining the UN while supporting military havoc overseas is a recipe for extreme disaster, our own along with everyone else's. We ignore the inevitable consequences of the present course at our peril.

* Dr Ian Buckley is a retired medical scientist and long-time member of the Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia).

****Chomsky**, Noam. 'The War in Afghanjstan', *Z Magazine*, February 1, 2002
<http://www.chomsky.info/articles/20020201.htm>