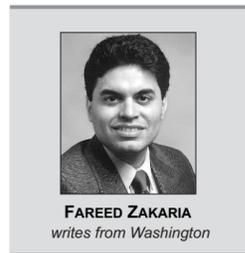


The best ways to Enkindle the lamp of hope beat terror

Open societies will have to get used to some invasions of privacy. We need pre-emption but against individuals more than states.



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

LAST week the British government foiled what it believed was the largest terrorist plot ever in that country. Police arrested eight men, and seized half a ton of ammonium nitrate, enough for an explosive five times as powerful as the Bali bombs that killed 200 people. The most striking aspect of the episode, however, is that the authorities see no involvement by al Qaeda. In fact, not one of the suspects is foreign-born or had spent any time in the Afghan training camps. These are British, middle-class Muslim suburbanites who the authorities say became terrorists.

Most terror attacks over the past two years have been planned by groups like this one. They are inspired, not directed, by al Qaeda, and draw their support from a variety of mostly private sources. Tackling the threat they pose is the key to security in this age.

Terrorism today doesn't need government backing because it is fueled by three broad forces: the openness of free societies, the easy access to technologies of violence and a radical, global ideology of hatred. It can be stopped only by responses at each level.

Western societies -- and increasingly others as well -- provide enormous freedoms to people living within them. Terrorists use these freedoms to hide. Now we have to find them. This means, as Tony Blair said last week, measures such as national identity cards and biometric identification systems. It also means much deeper cooperation between law-enforcement and intelligence agencies. People with known connections to terrorists should be picked up, at least for detailed questioning, if not detention. We need pre-emption, but of individuals more than of states.

Explosives that used to be difficult to obtain are now a phone call away. Esoteric know-how is posted on Web sites. We can't fight the dispersion of knowledge, but we can stop the dispersion of deadly materials. The errors over Iraq should not obscure the reality that terrorists are seeking chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and would not hesitate to use them. Counter-proliferation -- using bribes, sanctions and even, on occasion, military force -- needs to move to the center of foreign policy.

What drives terrorism, however, is not easy means but strong

motives. Militant, political Islam has brainwashed thousands of young Muslims around the world who believe it is their duty to fight against the modern world.

This ideology of hatred has grown as the Western-supported "moderate" regimes of the Middle East miserably failed to deliver economic opportunity or political freedom to their people.

Such ideologies are not caused but powerfully exacerbated by events taking place in the Middle East. Note, for example, how Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin triggered outbursts of anti-Americanism -- including violence -- in Iraq. The American-appointed Governing Council, perhaps playing to the Iraqi masses, harshly denounced the assassination. So, Israeli-Palestinian tensions empower radicals and retard progress in Iraq. And elsewhere.

President Bush often speaks of a war against terror. And in a metaphorical sense he's right. The magnitude and urgency of this struggle go far beyond mere law enforcement. But to speak of a war also distorts thinking by suggesting there is an easily identifiable enemy and an obvious means of attack. The vast bulk of anti-terror operations, in America, Europe or elsewhere, is aggressive deterrence and prevention at several levels done by police, intelligence agencies and other nonmilitary bureaucracies.

After all, whom would we wage war on now? Germany for being home to some of the 9/11 plotters? Spain because the Madrid bombers lived and plotted there? Iran and Syria? Would that stop the next Madrid bombing?

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia might seem better candidates, but their connection to terror is complex. From its earliest days Al Qaeda has sought to overthrow the Saudi regime for being pro-American. And al Qaeda's latest video is a plea -- one of several -- from Ayman al-Zawahiri to overthrow President Musharraf. If we attacked Saudi Arabia and Pakistan today, we would be doing al Qaeda's work for it.

For years Saudi Arabia and Pakistan funded radical Islamists as a way of gaining legitimacy. (In the Pakistani case, the government also trained Kashmiri terrorists.) But now Islamic terrorism has become a Frankenstein's monster that has turned on the regimes that nurtured them.

The Saudi and Pakistani cases show that once you nurture radical ideologies, they become uncontrollable, even to the states that created them. That's why the only way to combat this new global terror is to fight the ideology that fires it everywhere. So the war on terror is really a war of ideas. And I'm not sure we are winning it.

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KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

THE apparently lofty ideal of 'poverty alleviation' is, as it seems, gaining newer momentum these days in the expression of some of our political leaders. And it comes off at such a moment when prices of essential and edible items are going up in galloping strides. In recent times, the traders have been granted greater laxity in fixing and refixing the prices of all consumable commodities at their sweet will. It coincides with some irresponsible public statements on the part of some members of the cabinet. In this connection, we may recall the words of 'sympathies' from the finance and planning minister recently. His comments were on the ever-spiraling prices of agricultural products when he lamented that the 'poor' farmers or cultivators were being deprived of the prices they would deserve against their hard labour and investment. And very recently he was quoted by the news media as saying that "the prices of rice should have been higher to compensate the producers at the field level." One wonders if despite the truth about the deprivation of the cultivators, such ill-timed statement attributed to the finance and planning minister, would not be branded as a veritable outrage. By a plain observation, however, such reckless public utterance could amount to dispensing indirect patronage and filip to the so-called "big business". But the ultimate consumers belonging to the low income group -- already pitifully emaciated in their desperate bid for survival, continue to groan more audibly with newer punch.

Strangely enough, the distressing scenario we have traveled through above provides us yet another amazing coincidental episode. This pertains to the uncer-emonious 'exist' of the commerce minister Mr Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury. Notwithstanding his purposeful silence over the whole issue, it can be easier for anyone to smell something 'fishy' in such a 'sudden' deal. One might even wonder if Mr Chowdhury could be a 'scape goat' of a viciously obtrusive situation created by some of his colleagues in the cabinet and other party members.

The penultimate stage prior to his departure, if objectively analysed could provide ample testimony that the entire onus of responsibility of the unprecedented price-hike was put on his shoulders. Over the past couple of months, precisely for the first time the escalating trend in the prices of essential commodities was noticed, everyone in the ministry including the ex-commerce minister, took it for a temporary phenomenon. There was, however, no comprehensive plan to effectively arrest the price escalation. This gave the big traders opportunities to hoard and to keep on manipulating prices wishfully. As usual their material interest was in the upper hand where the miseries of the majority of the population continued to be of no consequence. At such a stage, the commerce minister was even bracketed with those greedy traders by his political opponents alluding to his own business interest.

When things continued from being bad to worse the government machinery started to make efforts at controlling the situation. The inter-ministerial committee sat a number of times with the representatives of the businessmen, trade and commerce bodies and others. A number of decisions were taken which included display of price list at the market places. The decisions even extended to slashing down of import duty on some of the items. Unbridled hikes in prices and

The uncertainties looming large over the power centre have been unfortunately their own creation. It is only natural that fighting the adversaries in the opposition and containing inter-party feud at the same time would turn out to be very difficult. It is here that one has to be totally free from impulsive acts and to refix strategies for meeting the impending crisis. Though already too late for a respectable rapprochement with the major opposition party, any sensible attempt on the part of the government shall be a welcome augury.

government's futile efforts to contain ending up in failure, gave the opposition Awami League and others a most potential front to capitalise upon in the current movement against the government. Even the younger section of parliament members belonging to the party in power expressed their bitter resentment on the issue and said to have been very vocal and unsparing in their criticism against some 'businessmen-ministers' in the parliamentary committee meeting recently. It was then anyone's guess that someone would be soon 'sized up'. This group of youngmen even demanded the immediate trimming down the size of the cabinet to a paltry 30 and also to ensure that the reshuffled cabinet didn't include any businessman.

On the aspect of terrorism, yet another bone of contention for the opposition, the government party members were reported to have been equally critical. They did literally echo the public sentiments, more specifically of the opposition political parties, when they demanded in unequivocal terms removal of the Home Minister. Fortunately, the retired Air Marshal could, for now, save his face. His fate, as of now, fits in quite spectacularly to the perceptual saying: "from frying pan to fire". Some observers think that it could be a very subtle but palpable 'trap' for the gentleman to leave voluntarily before he is discredited as the new Commerce Minister. Let us see how he plays the game and applies his wisdom in determining his next course.

In the face of April 30 ultimatum from Awami League and others in the opposition, Begum Zia and her party are reported to have been working on some yet to be known 'cohesive' plan to meet the challenge 'politically'. It is not however, conceivable how the damage already done to herself and to the party itself by internal cliques would be repaired. In fact, the process of division, if not disintegration, had surreptitiously stole in when Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury was forced to step down from the office of President of the Republic.

The President's son and MP Mahi B Chowdhury, being a naturally outspoken personality, was the invariable next target of the self same mischief mongers. His first offence (seen politically, not socially) was his unusual role-playing of a host to the Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina during her visit to his Munshiganj constituency. It was reported that Mahi B Chowdhury had erected a number of arches on the roads the leader of the opposition passed through, welcoming her to his place. In his opinion, this was not a political gimmick rather, a purely social gesture to a guest of honour. But his leaders and the extremist could not digest the bitter pill.

These are the trifles down to which the flares of disaffection could be traced out. Sooner the relationship between these two entities severed. From here, the Third Force programme of Dr B Chowdhury formally emanated evincing instant interest among the intellectuals, the civil society and the members of different sections of the people. His programme for soliciting the response of the civil society was ruthlessly

obstructed by the hoodlums and the police allegedly at the instance of the high-up in the government. The whole nation had the misfortune of watching the 75-year old ex-President being chased by some musclemen. Similar deterrent action in respect of Awami League meetings and rallies have been enough to accentuate public feeling against the government. Such provocative and ill-advised acts on the part of the government is even creating resentment among the party ranks.

When we talk about inter party rift we are at once reminded of the age-

old tradition of such clash of personality and interest within the same party since the termination of British rule in the sub-continent. In our case too the old tradition holds on among the members belonging to the same political party. This is equally true for the parties in position and opposition. And we are used to attach more importance to such incidence occurring within the party in power. For example, we can allude to the latest instance of the bitter personal clash between three members of the cabinet on the issue of the 3rd Karnaphuli Bridge. The process of its construc-

tion was to commence immediately but in the last moment it was deferred allegedly due to the clash of interest of the aforestated three ministers. It might take another two and a half years to accomplish the project. And God knows if the present government can do it within its tenure.

These are only a few examples so far known which are enough to conclude the actual status of order in the house. The uncertainties looming large over the power centre have been unfortunately their own creation. It is only natural that fighting the adversaries in the opposition and

containing inter-party feud at the same time would turn out to be very difficult. It is here that one has to be totally free from impulsive acts and to refix strategies for meeting the impending crisis. Though already too late for a respectable rapprochement with the major opposition party, any sensible attempt on the part of the government shall be a welcome augury. Let the leader pluck the courage. By such display of courage and farsightedness her unfortunate lapses could perhaps be forgotten by the people if duly and logically explained. In that case, it would be of little use to hold her political adversaries responsible for her failure. This can even be a moral and strategic victory because the nation will avert a bigger crisis otherwise.

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So the threat is very real, after all!

LONDIN LETTER

A spokesperson for the Muslim Council of Britain feels that a kind of 'Islamophobia' is growing in the country and "the whole Muslim community is seen as suspect." Another campaigner for a human rights organisation called the '1990 Trust' claims that Muslims are routinely harassed by the police "often when they were wearing traditional clothes or if they had Muslim-style beards.... Muslims understand there is a security threat, but it does not mean they should be treated unfairly."

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

EVER since the New York terror attacks on September 11 2001, the UK has been put on high alert against the possibility of similar raids on high-profile as well as "soft" British targets, either by the al-Qaida or some other Islamist militant group. Security services have been extra-vigilant in the wake of the Madrid bombings, deploying all their resources in an effort to minimise the chances of a repetition of the massacre on UK soil while trying their best to prevent widespread panic among the general public. Just over a week ago, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens warned that a major terrorist attack on London was "inevitable", but emphasised that everything was being done to ensure the safety of the country and the people. And he could not have been more serious because what he chose not to disclose before the crowd of TV cameras and reporters was that at the very moment he was facing them his officers were working frantically to foil probably the most devastating bombing campaign in the UK.

Following the pre-dawn operation on March 30, co-ordinated by Scotland Yard's Anti-Terrorist Branch, in which as many as 700 officers of the M15, the Metropolitan Police and local police forces took part and a number of locations across Greater London and the Home Counties were raided and several arrests made, a security source said: "We had been telling people for months it is a case of 'when', not 'if'. This is the 'when' we have disrupted. This is not the 'if', this is the 'when'."

The operation, codenamed 'Operation Crevis', took place in nine towns and suburbs and a total of twenty-four premises were raided and eight persons taken into custody. Several further

arrests are likely in the very near future, leading from information expected to be extracted from the detainees who are being held and interrogated at London's most secure police station, Paddington Green. A large quantity -- half a tonne to be precise -- of ammonium nitrate was also recovered from a nondescript industrial storage unit located in West London. Ammonium nitrate is basically an agricultural fertiliser produced by combining ammonia with nitric acid and since the 1930s it has been the main form of nitrogen fertiliser used by British farmers. But it has another, lethal, property that makes it the favourite explosive choice for many terrorists.

Combined with a small amount of a booster explosive, like Semtex, to name one, and fitted with a detonator and a timer, the fertiliser turns into a deadly weapon of mass destruction. It had been used by the IRA to make the bombs that wrecked London's Canary Wharf and the Arndale shopping centre in Manchester in 1996, by the Oklahoma City bombers in 1995 and more recently by Islamist terrorists in Bali, Saudi Arabia and Istanbul. And ammonium nitrate is available commercially and legally and being a stable chemical can be stored safely, until a determined terrorist with some knowledge of chemistry decides to turn it into a bomb.

As the Met Commissioner Sir John was speaking before the media, five days after the Madrid bombings, he said: "We do know that we have actually stopped terrorist attacks happening in London but there is an inevitability that some sort of attack will get through." Well, it nearly did, as indicated by the outcome of Operation Crevis, but the threat is still very much alive as a much more scary, chilling fact emerges out of the scenario. All the eight suspects taken into custody -- the youngest of whom is

17, six others aged 18 to 22 and one 32-year old -- are British Muslims. Apparently following a tip-off by US intelligence sources about a section of British citizens of Pakistani origin, they had been under 24-hour covert surveillance for three-and-a-half months, and all of them had been leading "outwardly very respectable" and normal lives in suburbia. The arrests have now confirmed the British security services' worst fear -- that al-Qaida, or some similar fanatic terrorist organisation, has been successful in recruiting middle-class and educated Pakistanis to assume the role of the "enemy within" to carry out terrorist activities in mainland Britain.

The arrests, understandably, have sent shockwaves throughout the Muslim community in the UK. True, the suspects have turned out to be of Pakistani origin, but a considerable number of British Muslims, regardless of their countries of origin, have been subjects of a growing paranoia among the native British population since September 11 and have suffered an upsurge of racist attacks and are now bracing themselves for another backlash of anti-Muslim feelings. Although the Met is trying hard to diffuse their apprehension by assuring Muslim community leaders that the security services know very well that the vast majority of their community are law-abiding citizens who unequivocally condemn anti-British, terrorist violence, the general feeling among ordinary Muslims is a mixture of scepticism and nervousness.

Their scepticism is compounded by the fact that many of them claim they are being harassed by police who use powers of 'Stop and Search' to stop them in the street or in their cars, or even search their homes on flimsy

pretexts, and they are subjected to such humiliating treatment for no apparent reason other than that they appear to be Muslim. Lawyers and groups representing the Muslim community in Britain confirm that police activity directed against the Muslims has risen sharply since 9/11. A spokesperson for the Muslim Council of Britain feels that a kind of 'Islamophobia' is growing in the country and "the whole Muslim community is seen as suspect." Another campaigner for a human rights organisation called the '1990 Trust' claims that Muslims are routinely harassed by the police "often when they were wearing traditional clothes or if they had Muslim-style beards.... Muslims understand there is a security threat, but it does not mean they should be treated unfairly."

On the other hand, the Met, while admitting that there has indeed been a dramatic increase in counterterrorist activities, insist that no community is being unfairly treated. "We understand the concerns of the communities who feel they are being unfairly identified with terrorists, but would categorically say that no one is being targeted by police because of their culture or faith," says the Assistant Commissioner in charge of Special Operations: "For us to do so would be the most counterproductive course of action we could take -- because it is not police actions alone that will ultimately defeat terrorism, but the combined actions of all communities." In line with this principle, senior Met officers are regularly meeting with Muslim leaders and encouraging feedback from the community.