

Fight against Terrorism

Written by PAO

Friday, 09 December 2005 09:00



Terrorism is absolutely the threat to the future of all peaceful states. Terrorism aims at the heart of all states having a democratic constitution: Not only does it menace their institutions, their representatives and not the least their peoples. Due to the countermeasures it triggers, terrorism also shakes the democratic roots of both our constitutions and identity.

Terrorism, yet, does not observe any rules or international law; it does not know compassion either. Its victims mostly are innocent people, men, women and children who are exposed to each attack without suspicion or protection.

This makes people furious, produces a feeling of helplessness and increases everybody's preparedness to retaliate with radical means. Be careful, though: it is restraint and striving for the rule of law that makes the difference between the terrorists and us. The terrorists will have won a partial victory already, should we abandon this difference. It makes sense, therefore, not immediately to call for the police, the military or the secret services when fighting terrorism, but to look at what's behind the terror at first and derive the most effective strategy from there.

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There are many reasons for terrorism. In addition to the well-known fundamentalist religious motives and the equally known nationalistic considerations, terrorism always needs a breeding ground where it can prosper and which provides it with a basis for its spreading. This basis frequently is to be observed in those countries where poverty and oppression leave the people hopeless to change their miserable conditions of life to the better.

Somebody who grew up in slums, witnessed his parents dying in slums and has no reason to hope for a better future of his kids, has nothing to lose by devoting himself to terrorism. As a consequence, we need an all-embracing strategy if we want to defeat terrorism. Before talking about the use of force, we have to recognize that fighting terror is tantamount to fighting the roots of terror. Only if there is hope for a better life in the terrorism's countries of origin, the political arsonists and top terrorists will find it harder to recruit suicide attackers for their cause.

This means that it is the task of politics to dry out the breeding ground for terrorism by a combination of political pressure and economic support. The only real chance of the fight against terror to be successful is when people and rulers in the hotbeds of terror have much more to lose than they could gain by terror. The effect of such a policy can be well observed on the Balkans: After the mutual killing had been stopped by NATO's massive use of force and by the threat to use it, the peoples' conditions of life were improved so decisively that all parties involved would lose much more by resuming force and terror than they could ever win.

As a matter of fact, I know that terrorism cannot be extinguished completely regardless of which well thought-out measures might be used. There will always be political arsonists, blinded radicals and religious fanatics who will bring terror to the world and who can only be successfully fought by using all means. At the end of my opening speech, I therefore want to refer to other problems, which, apart from the much too neglected fight against the roots of terrorism, have repeatedly prevented or at least delayed a successful fight against terrorism during the recent years.

Whereas terrorists are not subject to any restrictions in planning or implementing their actions, there are a whole lot of regulations in our countries the compliance with which impedes the fight against terrorism. For example, the police cannot arrest a terrorist because it does not know the data of the secret service, or a court cannot sentence a terrorist because it is not allowed to have an insight into all relevant documents, or suspects cannot be bugged because a certain legal precondition has not been fulfilled etc. etc. As a matter of fact, our fight against terrorism at any time is also a fight for our own fundamental rights, but it is a fight against time as well. We

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must stop impeding ourselves in our activities. Anything must be done that is necessary and possible, taking our democratic principles into consideration, in order to win our fight against terrorism.

We must not obstruct ourselves in the fight against terrorism, but have to make use of the most promising means. A much better interconnection of our information sources and assets than we have at present is an indispensable precondition for that. This is the key to success in the fight against terror. In this sense, I wish you a fruitful conference and success in your future efforts in the fight against terror. Let me underline my thoughts with an actual example – Uzbekistan! As you all know, it is an ally of the Anti Terror Coalition, erupted by uprisings in the last month. During the time of the cold war, a strong, centralized state, the Soviet Union, had total control over this region. The people had simply no chance for terrorist activities or uprisings. But at least they were supplied with all necessary food, medical service and living areas.

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union the successor state failed to gain total control over its territory despite trying to establish a centralized state with strong police and military. On the other hand the new state was even more unable to provide its people with the necessary needs for life. The opposite is the case, the living conditions are deteriorating since fifteen years due to growing corruption and the failed try to introduce market economy. As a consequence of this, the people started looking after alternatives, finding them in fundamentalist Islamism. So it became a question of time, when terrorism was growing and uprisings destabilize the state. Operation Enduring Freedom slowed down this process, since the Anti Terror Coalition needed an ally in this area and by that stabilizing and supporting the Uzbekistan government.

What could or should have been done instead of that in order to prevent such a development? The Anti Terror Coalition had had the opportunity to connect their engagement in Uzbekistan with conditions: We help you in stabilizing your country and you start to fight corruption. We help you in dealing with your economic problems and you start democratic reforms. We fight together against terrorism in and outside your country and you allow NGOs and GOs to set up programs in order to help the poor people in your country to give them a better future and a perspective in order to give them an alternative to joining Islamic fundamentalism.

Here I would like to come back to my initial thoughts about such states. We cannot compare such states with our own, we cannot compare its societies with our society, we cannot compare our understanding of basic law with theirs and we cannot compare their culture and cultural understanding with ours. We have to take into consideration, that we cannot change 4000 years old clan-based societies simply by putting troops in and bombing some terrorists out. We have to work on all levels to have long lasting success in the fight against terrorism:

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We have to accept the different culture; we have to support them in changing - or better – modifying their way of life in order to meet the requirements of a changing world. NGOs and GOs have to work on clan level, helping the people in dealing with their daily problems, as-sisting in solving social and economical problems and by that achieve a better understanding of our culture and needs. But we have also to work on governmental level, to assist in fighting corruption, economical and ecological problems in order to support in setting up a more modern system, able to deal with all problems on their own. Finally our political leaders have to make it clear to the political leader of such a country, that dictatorship and suppression of the people is not the way to assure the political survive on the long run and that support and help is only given in exchange for reforms.

by Lt. Gen. Egon Ramms