

The War On Terror Could Have Been Won

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IT HAS been almost a year since the attacks on Sept. 11 shocked the world, but the war on terror is far from over. The extent and the vicious nature of the tragedy had raised deep hopes, worldwide, that the root causes would be addressed, and valuable lessons would be learnt, but such hopes have fast dissipated.

There was no lack of support, from many countries in the world, for America's "war on terror," and no lack of cooperation either -- sometimes reluctant but often willing. In the fields of intelligence, a great deal of assistance was offered and rendered in tracking down suspects and squeezing their financial resources.

Yet the Americans have plainly frustrated, if not betrayed, the trust of those who had hoped the anti-terror war would be conducted on the firm basis of objectivity, a high degree of responsibility, and justice.

It is very true that it was not possible to link the September atrocities to any understandable, let alone legitimate, cause. No cause could justify using passenger planes carrying innocent civilians as rockets against other innocent civilian targets, resulting in an immense loss of life, and catastrophic destruction.

Yet, if there was total revulsion for the September attacks themselves, there was certainly a prevailing feeling in their wake that America's selective approach to international problems and the misapplication of International Law and justice needed to be examined and drastically rectified.

Even away from the impact of the attacks, and since the dramatic collapse of the Soviet Union which left America the unchallenged leader of the world, concerns were already rising that the application of double standards, and the serious deviation from the right values and principles, accompanied by total reliance on the supremacy of military power, were leading to international chaos, hopelessness and despair.

Instead of taking Sept. 11 as the long awaited wake-up call, the US administration inconsiderately eliminated any possible advantage and quickly resorted to the old style of handling a major world crisis and a devastating national tragedy -- by imposing hegemony, pursuing short-sighted goals, and settling old scores. This is consolidating, rather than alleviating the bitterness and vast fears which many believed were behind the culture of hate and vindictiveness that produced the brutal September attacks.

Two significant blunders seriously compromised the American effort. One was US submission to Israeli pressure advocating that any Palestinian or Arab action resisting or opposing the continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands, should be put on the list of targets. The other was the frenzied calls for an attack on Iraq with the declared intention of bringing down Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's regime.

Both issues have been nurturing anti-American feelings in the region for a long time. They have contributed to deepening mistrust, tension and frustration. Many believed that if the Americans revised their policies toward these two pressing issues they would cover significant ground in regaining trust, and prestige; and as a result, achieve significant gains in the war against terror.

This unfortunately did not happen, in fact the exact opposite did. By unreservedly adopting the policy of a right-wing racist government in Israel, the US became directly accountable for every atrocity that Israel commits on a daily basis. By branding even legitimate Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation as pure unjustified terror, as Israel maintains, the US is allowing much of the support for its justifiable war on terror, to decrease.

It is true that some of the resistance methods, such as suicide bombings targeting civilians, are undeniably wrong, and even the Palestinian National Authority has described them as acts of terror. Yet the Palestinian issue -- the result of a struggle between two peoples, one of which is deprived of all its legitimate rights -- is a totally different matter and should be treated independently.

The US insists that it should change the regime in Iraq by military force, but is struggling to find a pretext, let alone a legal cover for this undertaking. In the absence of both, and despite extensive intelligence efforts to find any proof linking Iraq to Sept.11 or Al Qaeda, the remaining claims range from Iraqi defiance of UN resolutions, to stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which are a threat to regional and world security.

In the eyes of most people such allegations are striking examples of a selective approach to issues and an application of double standards. Is Iraq the only country that can be accused of failing to comply with UN resolutions? Is it the only country that possesses WMD, if it does?

What about Israel? While Iraq does not occupy even an inch of any of its neighbours' territory, Israel, in blatant defiance of International Law and UN resolutions, continues to occupy vast areas of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian land and build settlements on them, and continues to violate every international rule and commit every heinous atrocity. While Iraq is only accused of stockpiling WMD, Israel is known to possess a huge nuclear arsenal and ominous leaks indicate that the Israelis would use it.

The war on terror would have been won by now had it not been messed up and wrongly entangled with unrelated issues. Terror remains a real danger to our existence and civilisation. It should indeed be eliminated, and all efforts should be mobilised towards achieving that end. The first step though is to address injustice and accept the rule of law.

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