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Executive Luncheon Series

Counter-Terrorism Strategies in the Post 9-11 Era

International Cooperation (what works and what doesn't)

November 26, 2001

International Center for Terrorism Studies

Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Main Conference Room

Panel and Speakers Co-Chairman:

Prof. Yonah Alexander, Director, International Center for Terrorism Studies

Co-Chairman:

Michael Swetnam, CEO and Chairman of the Board, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies

Panelists:

Prof. Eric Moonman, The City University, London (and former M.P., Labor)

Massod Khan, Political Counselor, Embassy of Pakistan

Yang Youming, Counselor, Embassy of China

Tom Maertens, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State

Bruce Fein, Esq., Visiting Fellow, Inter-University Center for Legal Studies, International Law Institute

Joseph Montville, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Executive Summary

The program began with a brief presentation by Michael Swetnam describing the work and mission of the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies. He focused on the Institute's legacy as an independent, objective, non-profit organization dedicated to the study of technology and technology policy. Swetnam then introduced Prof. Yonah Alexander, who reviewed the recent publications of the International Center for Terrorism Studies (ICTS) and introduced ICTS's upcoming volume on medical responses to terrorism.

Prof. Alexander then proceeded to frame the debate for the seminar. "Terrorism triggers war," he said, pointing out that World War I was triggered by an assassination in Sarajevo. There's no telling where terrorism will strike next, he explained. Since no country is immune, all countries must cooperate to address the threat of terrorism.

Following Prof. Alexander's remarks, each panelist made a brief presentation. The floor was then opened up to questions from the audience, to which any panelist could respond. A summary of the individual presentations and the question and answer period follows.

Professor Eric Moonman:

Since the September 11th attacks, Prime Minister Blair has been extremely supportive of U.S. efforts to fight terrorism. Blair's support for the U.S. and handling of this issue has greatly influenced the mood in Britain toward Afghanistan. Other European countries have also exhibited their support, the most noteworthy being France, which has a history of staying out of the fray regarding such matters.

The media in Europe has handled the terrorist issue very well, alerting the public, maintaining objectivity, and going into dangerous situations to cover stories. Overall, the press has been highly responsible and supportive of U.S. and international efforts to root out terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

There are critics, however. Many are Muslim, though most Muslims are friendly, good citizens who favor peace. Still, Taliban supporters are currently protesting and causing unrest in both England and the whole of Europe. Many of these dissidents are merely taking advantage of the situation, rather than genuinely pursuing the ideals of peace. Legitimate peace movement leaders, in fact, have actually spoken out against these protesters.

The two most troubling issues affecting the U.K.'s fight against terrorism are the extent of success of Usama bin Laden's public relations campaign and the number of British Muslims who went to Afghanistan to support the Taliban.

Usama bin Laden's slick operation shows the extent to which public opinion can be bought with marketing and public relations expenditures. His often-aired video is, in fact, a form of "terrorist MTV," which equates assassinations to playing video games. Thus, the public needs to be constantly reminded

to guard against being seduced by such sales pitches.

Regarding the Taliban supporters, the danger is that having British Muslims shooting at British soldiers could cause a violent backlash against the peaceful Muslim community in Britain.

This backlash is already taking place in some European countries. In Germany, for example, there have been a number of attacks against that country's Islamic community. In the Netherlands, intolerance towards Muslims appears to be on the rise. Some countries, such as Greece, have experienced virtually no such hostilities, however.

In conclusion, there are some concrete measures that must be taken to eradicate terrorism. First, we must fight terrorists on their own terms. We can't afford to abide by the Queensbury rules of war in the face of such a dangerous and unscrupulous threat. Second, nations and financial institutions need to cooperate to shut off terrorists' financial resources.

The international community must come together and devise a cohesive, effective response to terrorism. This includes striking the appropriate balance between ensuring personal freedoms and taking the steps necessary to ensure national safety. And, finally, a plan must be put into place to manage the disruptive influence of protesters who seek not peace, but political advantage.

Massod Khan:

International cooperation is an effective, vital component of any meaningful effort to combat terrorism. Since September 11th, we have gained empirical evidence of what works and what doesn't in this regard.

An effective response to terrorism requires consensus in the international community. It also requires a multi-faceted, complex effort that includes military action, financial crackdown on terrorist resources, humanitarian efforts, and a plan for reconstruction following military campaigns.

The root causes of terrorism must be addressed, as well. We need to study terrorist motivations. We need to find ways to promote inter-faith harmony, and to distinguish between religion and terrorism.

We also must continue our efforts until the job is finished. Prematurely ending our engagement in Afghanistan, as we did in Iraq in 1989, will cause our efforts to be tragically wasted. We must remain engaged in this region until all terrorist hideouts have been eliminated.

We must not confuse terrorism with legitimate struggles in the world against human rights violations. Instead, it's important to develop non-violent methods for resolving conflicts and addressing human rights violations.

In Pakistan, there is some civil unrest being caused by those who criticize Pakistan's cooperation with the United States, but these people constitute a "vocal minority." The majority of the Pakistani public opposes all terrorism or extremism. Since September 11th, this majority has unified to join the fight against terrorism.

In Afghanistan, what is needed is a multi-cultural government. Otherwise, there will be fragmentation, which often fuels terrorism. It's important that the U.S. not walk away from its efforts in this region too soon, that is, before finishing the political reconstruction needed.

The solution is three-fold. All involved countries need to hold talks as soon as possible to address

terrorism and the situation in Afghanistan. Second, the United Nations' role must be strengthened, especially in terms of humanitarian efforts. And finally, the United States should help facilitate dialogue to develop the framework for a lasting solution in this region.

Yang Youming:

September 11th taught us that terrorism has evolved into an international threat that has significantly increased the danger to civilian targets. Thus, we need to update the definition of terrorism to recognize its international scale, its new methods, and its lack of discrimination between military and civilian targets.

China immediately supported the U.S. and condemned terrorism following the September 11th attacks. China is also a victim of international terrorist organizations, many of which train in Afghanistan. Attacks and bombings campaigns have been waged against Chinese financial markets, civilians, and diplomats.

The world's nations need to develop a consensus definition of terrorism. This definition must take into account its practical implications, such as how it will affect the positions different countries will take. The consensus definition should be one that fosters international cooperation.

Since terrorism now crosses borders, it has become everyone's problem. All countries need to be willing to work together by sharing intelligence, freezing terrorists' assets, etc.

It's also important to expand the role of the United Nations and its security council. This is vital to increasing international cooperation. Thus far, China has signed ten anti-terrorism agreements with other countries.

To effectively combat terrorism, then, there needs to be heightened awareness of the severity of the threat, a consensus definition of terrorism among nations, close cooperation by countries, and an increased role for the United Nations.

Tom Maertens:

The international coalition to combat terrorism has created a worldwide campaign to fight this threat, via Article 31 of the United Nations' charter regarding national defense. Cooperative efforts have included diplomatic, military, intelligence, and financial methods of countering terrorism.

Usama bin Laden's threat to use weapons of mass destruction has only hastened countries to band together to oppose such terrorist threats. To date, 120 countries have offered some form of military cooperation and financial support to fight this threat to international security. More than 25 countries have already made arrests of suspected terrorists. What's more, at least three planned terrorist attacks (including two against U.S. embassies) have been thwarted.

Further measures are still needed, however. Border security must be improved and immigration more closely scrutinized. Of course, this presents the challenge of finding the right balance between security and personal liberty.

We need to deal with terrorists on their own terms. Terrorists are illegal combatants with no regard for the lives of civilians, women, and children. We need to decide whether terrorists deserve the types of protections provided by the U.S. Constitution when their very organizations are illegal in concept and

they have no rules or limits on their conduct.

Even prior to September 11th, the United States was the largest contributor of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. This aid has only increased since efforts began to force out the Taliban and capture Usama bin Laden.

Bruce Fein, Esq.:

There is a common misconception that U.S. military courts are somehow less reliable than civil and criminal courts. History has shown, however, that military tribunals have worked, notably in the cases of the Lincoln assassination co-conspirators and the Nazi saboteurs. Basically, people (juries) will do the right thing. Also, defendants are made aware of the circumstances and rules of their trials, so they are able to conduct themselves in an informed manner.

“Racial profiling” of terrorists is not being used as a basis for arresting or convicting people. Instead, it is just a practical method of narrowing the field of those who are to be questioned. Even then, those questioned are under no obligation to respond (they have the right to remain silent).

In life, we have to rely on probabilities all the time. Military courts aren’t infallible, but they do work effectively and the probability of abuse is minimal.

Joseph Montville:

It’s important to distinguish between police intelligence efforts and the roots of terrorism. If we are too timid, we open the door for future terrorist acts to occur. The Twin Towers victims had no idea why they were being killed, since they didn’t even know they were targets. Today, everyone is vulnerable to terrorism, so everyone has a responsibility to understand the roots of terrorism and to take steps to prevent terrorist acts.

A common, major component of terrorism is “narcissistic rage.” That is, people who are degraded, insulted, and demeaned are more prone to acts of violence such as terrorism. This reactive rage is often prompted by a poor sense of self worth.

Culture can also be a factor that helps generate and sustain this rage. If people are raised in an environment of on-going conflict, they may well accept the death and destruction that comes from terrorism as just “the way it is,” or a normal condition of life.

The most effective means of countering terrorism is that of promoting a serious dialogue and understanding between conflicting civilizations. A major goal of this is to eliminate the concept of “second class citizens.” This is at least as important as military campaigns, intelligence efforts, and the criminal conviction of terrorists.

Question and Answer Session

Q: Will the U.S. prosecute suspected terrorists under criminal law or according to the rules of war, which would give them the protections afforded POWs?

A: The U.S. is still considering its options. Terrorists are, in fact, illegal combatants. The key is to work backward from the desired outcome, which is to end terrorism.

A: We are constantly seeking to attain the correct mix of the two, and we will continue to do so in this case.

Q: Can al-Qaida survive without Usama bin Laden and without Afghanistan as its refuge?

A: Usama bin Laden's senior officers could continue random, cellular acts. However, the Afghanistan experience will discourage most countries from harboring terrorists.

A: It's important to note that it is not so much the man or the group as it is the philosophy that drives these terrorist efforts.

Q: How did a breakdown in intelligence contribute to the September 11th tragedy?

A: Intelligence had, and still has, a vast number of threats to consider and a finite amount of resources, so choices had to be made. Also, please remember that intelligence did successfully foil the terrorists' millennium threat.

A: Two of the September 11th terrorists were on the government's list, but we just were not able to catch them in time.

Q: How do you account for the tremendous international cooperation that is taking place?

A: The world's nations now realize that no country is safe from terrorism, so they must all band together to eliminate this threat.