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**The global community and the war on terrorism: threat or
opportunity?**

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Irrespective of what component(s) contributed the evolution of the terrorism, the main challenge now is whether the global system's current confrontation of terrorist activities has resulted in the eradication of or at least a reduction in the terrorist threat to international security. Are the current policies the continuation of the previous ones, or has some fundamental change occurred?

With the events of September 11, a worldwide consensus has emerged among the global community as to how the terrorist threat as the priority of international peace and security should be tackled. Accordingly, confronting the terrorism has become one of the most important fundamentals of national governments' foreign policies. On the other hand it has become a source of pressure when applied to so-called rebel states, who regard the existing order as a threat to their systems and thus are unsympathetically questioning the current international system. The war on terrorism has generally gained legitimacy and justification among the international community, nation-states today considering it to be their international obligation to support the global movements for security. Consequently, the United States as the representative of the global system (or even as claimed, its head) and as the major victim and target of the terrorism, has come to dominate the scene with the new rhetoric of abolishing terrorist activities by prioritizing democratization processes.

From the US administration's perspective, future 11 September type of attacks can only be prevented through liberalization and democratization of the Middle Eastern countries. This was a key rationale used by the Bush administration to mobilize public support for conducting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In other words, the justification of starting war on terrorism was based on eradicating Al-Queda type terrorist activities in Afghanistan, and the subsequent war in Iraq was justified by the excuse of denying terrorist access to Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD). From this perspective, removing the Taliban and Saddam Hussein as the two components of the expanding terrorism constitute the great effort made by the U.S. to establish stability and security in the Middle East and, thus, in the world.

Irrespective of the purposes behind the U.S. administration's present talk of the necessity of democratization in the Middle East, one should ask whether this type of democratization would effectively work in the region. The fundamental question is now what the global community has accomplished by conducting almost three long occupation wars. Has the global system's approach to dealing with the terrorism led to any proper outcome, and is the world is a safer place now? Has the region shifted to a secured place, as a prerequisite of the democratization process? And have the terrorists' operational and organizational power declined?

The terrorism operates through persuading the thoughts and hearts of its believers and utilizes "life as a weapon". It talks about the global community's mistreatment of the Muslim world. Viewed in this context, the global community's presence in the region and conducting the current type of wars against terrorist activities will undoubtedly have counter-productive consequences. How would it be possible to find a military solution to a political-cultural problem? As the Middle East's current problems have cumulative

effect, rooting out the terrorism requires first identifying, and then solving, the regional difficulties. In order for the global community to remain safe, the Middle East must become stable and prosperous. This is a massive undertaking with at least two very complex components for global governance:

1. Committing to remove the authoritarian regimes in the region, which of course will destabilize the closed power circuits in the regional states, inevitably leading to further extremism and ultimately to terrorist activities. The result is again instability and the undermining of democratization.

2. Solving the Palestinian problem, this appears to be the most pivotal fuel of the terrorism. The consequences of conducting wars on the terrorism are as follows:

1. *Spreading insecurity across the world.* Assuming that the existence of insecurity and disorder will provide the best conditions for terrorists operations, U.S. strategies have intensified insecurity in the region. War followed by overwhelming military presence in Iraq not only resulted in a secured Iraq, but we are witnessing more instability and violence in the region. The underlying fact is that the first priority of Middle Eastern citizens today is security not democratization. In other words, the peoples of the region are now prioritizing daily matters such as safety, a certain future, better economic conditions, etc., rather than the growing rhetoric about promoting freedom and democratization. As a result of the global system's paradoxical conduct, there is effectively no place more hostile to democracy and the globalization process in today's world than the greater Middle East. Today, the Arab nations of the region are wary of the current U.S. policies. As history shows, Arab Muslims have always resisted domination by foreigners, particularly non-Muslims. No doubt, the more extensive presence of the West will bring more violence and dissatisfaction in the Arab public opinion. As a result, no place in the world is safe today for Western citizens.

2. *Escalating religious-ethnic fragmentation.* The war on terrorism has undoubtedly accelerated religious, ethnic and identical fragmentation at the worldwide and/or at the regional and national levels. At the global level, while the terrorist threat expands from the Middle East and the Arab world, the division between Islam and Christianity is widening and getting more complicated. Since the West is the place of diverse religious Muslim minorities, these reciprocal unsympathetic conditions will breed more anxiety and tension between the two worlds. In this context, Muslims today feel unsafe and humiliated in the West. Engulfing the two worlds, the terrorism is increasingly seeking more divergence between Muslims and Christians.

At the regional and national levels, the almost three-year war on terrorism neither resulted in a safer region, nor led to more convergence. On the contrary, waging wars in multi-ethnic countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq has intensified ethnic and religious factionalism and, hence, provided breeding grounds for terrorist activities. In Afghanistan, for instance, the U.S. in order to hunt Al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants has begun working separately with the central government and the influential regional commanders called Warlords or Mojaheddins. While paradoxical U.S. policies have stepped up insecurity and disorder, Afghans have become frustrated and disappointed of

the global community's efforts to fill the power vacuum in the country. Although the uncivilized Taliban regime no longer has a physical existence, their thoughts still dominate the country. In an illegitimate and malignant unity with terrorist organizations, international drug smugglers are taking advantage of ethnic and religious fragmentation and disorder inside the country, thereby fuelling the new terrorism. Absolute U.S. support of Karzi as the representative of the ethnic Pashtuns has broken up the natural power equations, thus disappointing the other political and ethnic factions and leading to their loss of confidence in the power division. This would work as a driving force for more skirmishes. As a result, a new wave of severance is on the way, notably between the Pashtuns and the ethnic Tajik and Uzbek, and among Shias and Sunnis.

Unlike Afghanistan, Iraq's political scene presents a more complex challenge to global peace and security. As a result of the manipulation of the power division, rivalry within the diverse ethnic Sunni, Shia and Kurdish factions has intensified to the extent that the extremist Sunnis (Zarghavi's group) today regard the Shias as their number one enemy. The enmity not only accelerated among the ethnic groups, also within the groups themselves there are different adversary segments with competing approaches toward the occupation forces, the role of neighboring countries, the future of the government, etc. The current division between the various Shiite factions is a substantial testament. Significantly, Moghtada Al-Sadar's Shiite group's uprising against the occupation forces is the result of current U.S. efforts to marginalize the Shias from the real power division. No Shiite group has forgotten the unsupportive America policy in the 1991 uprising, which left thousands of Shias massacred by the Saddam regime. Understandably, no trust today exists among the Shias as regards U.S. policies.

3. *Accelerating the regional countries' dissatisfaction.* Since the U.S. established its new and direct presence in the region, the regional states have started to obstruct the global community's policies. As an immediate result of the war in Afghanistan and subsequently in Iraq, the current U.S. administration never denied its purpose to change the regimes in Iran or Syria. Unrealistic U.S. conduct in dealing with the two solid opponents has caused these countries to be considered as threats rather than as opportunities in war against terrorism. As an underlying reality, the most sacred principle for Middle Eastern Establishments is safeguarding the system. While the US is determined to advance its grand strategy of regime change, it is understandable that the establishment in Tehran and Damascus will do their best to keep the U.S. and its allies busy and more engaged in Iraq.

No more important justification can be raised here for these countries' opposition to global governance. As for the other Arab allies, it gets more complicated – unlike in the past, future U.S. strategy leaves no place for authoritarian corrupt regimes. The divergence between stability and democratization comprehensively demonstrates itself here. Ironically, in today's Middle East any effort toward democratization equals instability, and instability equals increased terrorist activities. The paradox lies here: the region's democratization requires stability and security to be the first priorities. As the Iraqi political scene shows, any further attempts to advance the regime change policy will

in the short term lead to more insecurity, the engagement of the global community and ultimately the spreading of the new terrorism.

As regards Iran, the Islamic Republic is currently neither looking to export its revolution, nor using the ideological approach to set its regional policies as was intended shortly after the Revolution. Similar to any other political system, the core of the system gives the first priority to protecting itself through empowering the means of influence and those faithful to the system. The system upheld, the Iraqi political scene indeed presents a new challenge for the establishment in Tehran. From the perspective of Iran as the next target of the U.S. administration, Tehran's key role in the war on terrorism becomes one of a threat instead of an opportunity. Many elements make Iran an influential country in the war against terrorism: Iran's unique geopolitics (with 15 neighboring countries, located between Afghanistan and Iraq, the two centers of the spreading new terrorism) and its pro-western social and cultural orientation are two important facts in encountering terrorist activities. As Shiite radicalism declines and Sunni radicalism rises in the region, Iran could play a precious role in balancing extremism as the foremost fuel of the new terrorism. Accordingly, as long as the U.S. administration is determined to pursue the policy of regime change in Tehran, the Islamic Republic's role in the war on terrorism could be understandably uncooperative.

Conclusion

It is unrealistic to solve a profound political-cultural problem by a military solution. The war on terrorism can not be won militarily, but must be won politically and with long-term plans. The root causes of the terrorism originate in the region's problems, notably created by the policies of global governance. The two principles of stability and democratization essential for eradicating the terrorism have diverged. Ironically, in today's Middle East any effort toward democratization needs stability and security, and any stability in turn needs democratization.

Global governance needs to help to create a calm regional environment in which democratic change can more easily occur. In contrast, the almost three years long global presence in the region has intensified insecurity and fragmentation and hence fuelled terrorist activities. The current overwhelming military presence in fact leaves no chance for such developments. It must be recognized that any change in the region must come from within the societies. No example of imposed democracy has been successful in the world, since it needs to be offered in compromise with the national characteristics. A stable, democratic and prosperous Middle East depends on fair and just global governance, working with all the regional societies, not by one power alone. Whereas conducting the current type of war on terrorism may in the short term lead to some achievement in halting or reducing terrorist activities, it will cause more complexity in long term.