

Re-thinking Terrorism and Counter-terrorism After 9/11

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Simultaneous terrorist attacks other than those on 11 September 2001: Dawson's Field hijacking by PFLP in 1970, American Marines and French paratroopers headquarters in 1983, Air India attacks in 1985, Rome and Vienna airports in 1985, Bombings in Bombay in 1993, and East African embassy bombings in 1998.

The key aspects not understood are the unexplained absence of follow-on attacks in the United States, the dimensions and depths of Al Qaeda finances, and the superficial grasp of suicide/martyrdom dimension.

Al Qaeda is both a 'terrorist corporation' and an 'old boys network'.

Al Qaeda has been weakened but not destroyed. In near-term, Al Qaeda's ability to inflict pain is still intact.

Why haven't terrorists (1) used MANPADS more often, (2) engaged in mass, simultaneous attacks with very basic conventional weapons more often, (3) used tactics of massive disruption more often, (4) perpetrated more maritime attacks, (5) engaged in agricultural/livestock biological warfare, (6) exploited psychological potential of limited, discrete CBRN and cyber attacks more often, (7) used radiological weapons/threats, (8) targeted industrial/chemical plants, and (9) why haven't they yet realised their killing potential?

Long-term changes in terrorism: (1) for terrorists, the necessity to change prompts change (to stay one step ahead of counter-terrorism), (2) for terrorists, more sophisticated movements (adapt and adjust), and (3) for counter-terrorists, the main objective of depriving terrorists of physical sanctuaries.

Five basic, irreducible 'givens': (1) terrorism will remain industrial, (2) terrorism is a form of psychological warfare, (3) the United States and other democratic societies will remain vulnerable, (4) enmity toward the United States and other democracies will not diminish, and (5) terrorism is a perennial, ceaseless struggle.

The United States needs a separate, specific agency addressing terrorism and similar issues (like the British Security Service).

The United States 'personalised' its terrorist enemies (for example, the 'Osama bin Laden Dead or Alive' campaign): this is not the best way to fight terrorism.