

USA and Its Allies Must Not Use Double Standards If Success Against Terrorism Is to be Achieved

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Theme: [Terrorism](#)

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*One of the issues on which consensus should be created and can be treated at world level is that **terrorism in all its forms should be firmly rejected**. However this needs honesty and sincerity. **Problems arise if some bigger powers insist on condemning terror attacks made by others but at the same time justify the use of terror by themselves on a large scale.***

Those who claim to be in the leadership role in fighting terror have themselves been involved in several terror acts, including assassinations of highly respected national and world-level leaders, and at the same time have made use of many terror organizations and leading terrorists for achieving their narrowly defined objectives.

In fact some of the most serious problems have been created in the context of the supposed wars against terrorism and terrorist organizations which have been pursued in ways that have created terror of an even worst kind for an even larger number of people. This can be presently seen in the context of Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza which have resulted in terror of a much worst kind for a much larger number of innocent people compared to the Hamas terror attack to which it is supposed to be responding. The relentless attacks on Lebanon have led to similar concerns.

There are many example from recent decades in which similar opportunist use of terrorism and terrorist organizations was made.

In the 1980s the Sandinista government in Nicaragua was attracting wide attention with achieving very significant improvements in health, education and small peasant based farming cooperatives. Some of the development achievements it recorded could not be achieved by the Somoza dictatorship, a US client state, in the previous four decades. While the people of Nicaragua were very happy and hopeful with the achievements of the new government, the USA government was upset that this would spread a strong message regarding the superiority of the socialist model over the capitalist model. Hence the CIA and President Reagan launched a huge campaign to harm not just the Sandinista government but also the symbols of its success such as health centres, hospitals, schools and cooperatives. For this purpose various right-wing groups called contras (counter revolutionaries) were mobilized, armed and trained by the CIA in an operation costing several million dollars. In addition the CIA arranged for explosions at ports, refineries and pipelines.

America Watch, which subsequently became part of Human Rights Watch, accused the contras of targeting health care clinics and assassination of health workers, attacking and

killing civilians, torturing them, raping women and burning civilian homes. Clearly terror tactics were widely used by obtaining the collusion of terror agents. Human Rights Watch stated in a report (1989),

“The Contras were major and systematic violators of the most basic standards of the laws of armed conflict, including by launching indiscriminate attacks on civilians, selectively murdering non-combatants and mistreating prisoners.”

When concern grew at the Contras’ indiscriminate aggressions and the US Congress stopped their funding, **the CIA arranged illegal funds for the Contras including money from drugs trafficking and sale of arms.**

Image: President Salvador Allende



In 1973 several terror tactics, including kidnapping, bombing and assassination of most senior leaders, were included in the CIA plan to oust another social government committed to the welfare of people—the Popular Unity government led by **President Salvador Allende** in Chile, a very popular leader who was expected to prove the superiority of the socialist path of progress. Following Allende’s election the CIA director had a meeting with President Nixon and a note from this meeting, later declassified, stated—\$ 10 million available, more if necessary, full time job, best men we have, game plan make the economy scream, 48 hours for plan of action.

However before Allende could be removed, it was found necessary to get rid of **General Rene Schneider** who was committed to the constitution of the country and was a man of great integrity. Big money and weapons to get rid of him were provided by the CIA. Attempts to kidnap him were made in the course of which he was eventually killed. Then came the CIA-assisted attack against Allende in the course of which the presidential palace was bombed and Allende died. This led to the Pinochet dictatorship for several decades characterized by huge corruption, corporate plunder and inequalities on the one hand and the most terrible torture, executions and disappearances on the other hand, inflicted on tens of thousands of opponents including women. Hence terror tactics were used not just during the coup but continued till much later afterwards against innocent people. The Pinochet regime which tortured and killed opponents for decades got full support from the USA and the Chilean model was held out for emulation by a leading group of US economists the Chicago boys.

In 1961 the people of the newly independent Republic of Congo had high hopes of progress under the leadership of their very popular leader and freedom fighter **Patrice Lumumba**, but the democratically elected Prime Minister was ousted in a coup supported by Belgium and USA, and killed in a very cruel way. In this case also terror tactics like assassination were used not only during the coup but continued for a long time afterwards against innocent people, as this ouster was followed by Mobutu led dictatorship for decades, characterized by glaring abuse of human rights including large-scale torture, cruel suppression of opponents, plunder of economy and massive corruption. For the most part this dictatorship was supported by the USA.

In 1964 USA assisted efforts led to a coup to bring down the democratic government of Brazil led by **President Joao Goulart**. This led to a dictatorship characterized by death squads, torture and human rights violations.

Image: Mohammad Mosaddegh in court, 8 November 1953 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)



Mohammad Mossadegh was a popular leader and Prime Minister of Iran, elected democratically in elections, keen to get more resources for helping his people by curbing the profits of oil multinationals. This led to a coup by the combined agents of the USA and Britain in 1953, so that the unpopular Shah of Iran could be brought in again for monarchical rule, suppressing the democratic aspirations of the people. While Mossadegh was jailed and many of his supporters were jailed or executed, a secret police called SAVAK was set up which became notorious for its gruesome torture and repressive activities.

In Guatemala around the same time a CIA-assisted coup led to the ouster of the democratically elected government of **President Jacobo Arbenz** that was known to be devoted to the welfare of people. This was followed by nearly four decades of military rule with its death squads, disappearances, torture, and mass executions, claiming over 150,000 victims.

The Church Committee of the US Senate had investigated the allegations relating to the assassination and attempted assassination of almost a dozen foreign leaders by the US intelligence agencies like the CIA. Other books on this subject have mentioned close to 40 prominent foreign leaders who are likely to have been targeted with assassination or grave harm. In addition many disturbing questions have been raised in the context of the circumstances of the death of three prominent leaders of the USA at a young

age—**President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy Sr.** All three were involved in trying to find a path for the USA which is closer to the precepts of peace and justice, and the role of insider agencies associated with promotion of violence and war has been widely alleged in several well-documented reports.

In the case of **Fidel Castro**, the most popular leader and former President of Cuba, dozens of assassination and serious harm attempts were made but he survived them all. In addition there have been several other terrorist aggressions aimed at Cuba causing immense harm. There is an even longer history of disruptive and sabotage efforts by the USA and close allies against the Soviet Union and Russia.

In Indonesia the popular **President Sukarno** survived assassination and blackmailing attempts but was finally ousted around 1965 in a regime change that is widely believed to have been assisted by the USA. This was accompanied by a bloodbath aimed at particularly the communists and using religious fanatics as aggressors. The number of those who were killed was stated to be around half a million, although some estimates also mention a higher figure.

In Iraq the total number of those killed in direct and indirect ways in all the hostile activities of the USA and its close allies exceeds one million. Some of the most deadly new terrorist groups based on sectarian and fundamentalist ideologies were created as a result of the hostile actions of the USA and its allies here and in Syria (which too has experienced extensive devastation due to the various hostile activities of the USA).

Earlier the USA mobilized sectarian, fanatic militants from many Islamic countries and armed them heavily with the help of Pakistan to fight the Soviet army and the communist regime in Afghanistan. Over 15,000 of these armed militants later spread violent conflict in many other countries as well, while also attacking several US and western targets.

In Libya in 2011 USA, Britain and France again armed and used such militants for regime change in very violent ways, supported by thousands of air bombing raids. These militants again later troubled and destabilized several neighbouring countries.

Even within European allied countries like France, Italy and Greece there were reports of US interference to check the spread of leftist groups, including the use of gangster violence and other illegal methods for this. Even the most prominent national leaders like former **President Charles de Gaulle** in France felt badly threatened at times.

Several Cuban exiles who have taken shelter in the USA have been involved in terrorist activities against Cuba including airplane hijacking but have continued to find shelter and help in the USA. Similarly several other dictators or their henchmen used in serious human rights violations and crimes against their people have been finding safe haven in the USA from time to time.

A quote from a report of Amnesty International sums up the tragic situation —

“Throughout the world, on any given day, a man, woman or child is likely to be displaced, tortured, killed or ‘disappeared’, at the hands of governments or armed political groups. More often than not, the United States shares the blame.” (Washington Office of Amnesty International, Human Rights and US Security Assistance, 1996, page 1).

The 9/11 terrorist attack on the USA was a most horrible attack and almost the entire world sympathized deeply with the USA and with the innocent persons who had lost their life in this attack. The 9/11 attacks led the USA military and foreign policy establishment to launch a prolonged series of military actions in many countries with the stated aim of curbing terrorism and terror. These have been collectively called the war on terror or terrorism, the global war on terror and the 9/11 wars. Although there have been criticisms and debates linked to these names, for practical purposes the short description of war on terror has been frequently used to collectively describe the US military actions mainly in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan and elsewhere.

This war on terror has proved extremely costly in terms of loss of human life and displacement of people. According to the Costs of War data base prepared by the Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, Brown University, USA (briefly referred to as Brown University estimates which were also cited, although selectively, by President Biden in one of his national addresses), these costs from 2001 to now have been unacceptably high.

This data base tells us that a total of 906,000 to 937,000 human lives have been lost in this war on terror in terms of direct war deaths (people who died from bombs and bullets or directly in conflicts). This figure does not include the deaths caused by infrastructure collapse of water, sewage and health as a result of war, or diseases related to war impacts. However the Brown University base clearly says that “several times as many more have been killed as a reverberating effect of war.”

Regarding the direct war deaths 176,000 took place in Afghanistan, 280,771 to 315,190 in Iraq, 268,816 in the context of Syria/ISIS, 112,000 in Yemen and 67,000 in Pakistan, and the remaining elsewhere.

What is more, 38 million people have been displaced by the post 9/11 wars—5.9 million in Afghanistan, 3.7 million in Pakistan, 4.6 million in Yemen, 4.3 million in Somalia, 1.8 million in the Philippines, 9.2 million in Iraq, 1.2 million in Libya and 7.1 million in Syria.

This estimate has been presented as a conservative estimate and according to this data base, a more realistic number would be somewhere between 49 to 60 million, which brings it closer to the displacement caused by World War II.

What did these interventions achieve? In the case of Afghanistan, the people who faced food insecurity were 62% of the population in 2001 (before the intervention), in 2022 this number had increased to 92%. The percentage of children under 5 suffering from malnutrition increased in a big way. The percentage of people of Afghanistan living in poverty increased from 80% to 97%. Women faced heavy restrictions in 2001, they also face heavy restrictions now.

The war on terror caused many more indirect deaths compared to the direct deaths due to the increase of hunger, disease, displacement, collapse of water, sanitation and health infrastructure. If all these deaths are added, then according to the Brown University estimates, the direct and indirect deaths caused by the war on terror are about 4.5 million. If these are completely updated and all the countries affected are covered, the number would be even higher.

These statistics collected from many sources by the Brown University data base tell a very

sad story of a highly misguided war on terror hijacked to an entirely wrong path. The 9/11 attacks had created sincere and strong sympathy for the USA, on top of an already felt need for strong action against terrorism by many world leaders. Statements of sympathy, cooperation and help were pouring in without asking from several world leaders, including from Russia. This was the right time for mobilizing strong worldwide action against all terrorism in an unbiased way, based in the UN. Almost everyone would have cooperated and nobody would have been burdened too much by costs by pooling resources. But the hawkish policy makers in the USA concentrated instead on organizing the entire thing around their almost pre-set aggressive agenda, leading to such terrible results.

The USA is supposed to have some of the most capable intellectuals, some of the best universities, its democratic system is supposed to have checks and balances, how then it could continue such a futile and destructive agenda for such a long time? What is going so seriously wrong here? What is the remedial action needed? Answers to these questions have to be sought and only then we can say that the very costly lessons of the war on terror have been learnt.

US authorities must realize that their discourse on this and related issues increasingly lacks credibility among large sections of world's people, including those who are sympathetic to USA.

A much greater effort should have been made to find out the entire truth about the 9/11 attacks as so many important, disturbing questions have been raised by several eminently qualified persons and groups. In fact this is true also regarding the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel as here too many aspects of the attack remain shrouded in suspicion and doubt. Apart from taking much greater care to find out the truth there is need also for looking at the social and related dimensions of the response instead of merely relying on force and military power.

However instead of committing adequate resources to a broad-based program to work towards a terror-free society, the USA and its close allies diverted most attention and resources to invading Iraq, a terrible mistake which proved very costly in terms of entirely avoidable loss of a large number of human lives. As President Bush's senior counter-terrorism adviser Richard Clarke recalled later, he was asked to prepare a file on Saddam's links to 9/11. When he responded by preparing a detailed note that there were none, even got it signed by other leading intelligence officials before submitting, he got back a curt reply—update and file again. Such glaring mistakes should be officially admitted and responsibility for them should be fixed.

The war against terror has failed because it was not conducted in a democratic and transparent way, the best advice available within the establishment was ignored, facts were pushed aside and falsehoods were deliberately promoted to suit arbitrarily taken decisions. An important question here is—was anyone punished for very costly mistakes? Were serious mistakes admitted officially in ways such that responsibility for these could be fixed? Were real efforts ever made to find out the causes of serious failures, or honestly detail the circumstances in which very costly mistakes were made?

Apart from the costly mistake of diverting the main war effort to Iraq without reason, there was the failure to commit adequate ground forces to apprehend bin Laden and his close colleagues in the Tora Bora caves during December 1-16 2001. As explained with supporting views of field level army officers and senior intelligence officials in a report titled 'Tora Bora

Revisited', submitted to the foreign relations committee of the Senate headed by John. F. Kerry in 2009, repeated requests for reinforcements were refused or ignored allowing bin Laden and hundreds of his warriors to escape to Pakistan. Basically this report stated—about 2500 troops were needed to prevent escape, only 100 were provided, more were available easily but were not called in.

As long as the system does not fix responsibility for such glaring mistakes, these will continue to be made, as these were made subsequently with reference also to Syria, Libya and elsewhere. An even more basic question is—what are the grievances and arguments that attract significant numbers to the path of terrorism? Is enough being done to reduce the appeal of these grievances and arguments? If this is not being done, or if the grievances and arguments are seen to be becoming stronger for significant sections of people, then threat of terrorism is likely to increase.

It is well-known that in course of driving out the Soviet Army the CIA used Islamic militants from many countries using mediation of the ISI of Pakistan, and later many of these militants turned against the USA. Has the USA continued to opportunistically support such forces in other places, even if not to the same extent as before, to achieve short-term objectives?

A narrow-minded approach to counter terrorism based mainly on military force has failed. When will a broader approach based on longer term genuine commitment to peace, democracy, justice and development evolve? Only such a sustainable approach will lead to increasing non-relevance and loss of support for the ideologies of terrorism. If the USA is serious about correcting its record of very frequent and costly mistakes, its authorities should come out of their narrow and outdated thinking and approach these and related important issues with fresh, credible, transparent attitudes. Even those countries like India which have suffered a lot from across the border terrorism and wanted a relationship of cooperation with the USA and its close allies for reducing terrorism threats have been increasingly frustrated by the highly opportunistic attitudes of the USA and its close allies on terrorism, which appear mainly to be geared to advancing their own narrowly perceived interests at any given time. This kind of attitudes of the USA and close allies have increased the problems instead of solving them and progress will be made only by dropping double standards and opportunism and replacing this with the kind of sincerity that is needed for international cooperation on such an important issue.

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