

## Speech on Terrorism on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2007

### Fighting Terrorism in Democratic Societies

By Chris Patten

When does contemporary history, the modern world, begin? The study of history is divided into convenient chunks – the Homeric Age, the Roman Empire, the Mediaeval World, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and so on. The last nugget of the past is followed by our own times. But when did they start? When did events leave the rails and spin off in a new direction? Which deed roused us from complacently assuming that we knew what our world was about and surprised us with the recognition that things had changed, that all was now different, that nothing would ever be quite the same again.

Britain's fly-fishing foreign minister, Sir Edward Grey, is said to have observed one evening at the beginning of August 1914, as he awaited the dispatch of an ultimatum to Germany warning against the invasion of Belgium, "The lamps are going out all over Europe. I doubt that we shall see them lit again in our lifetime." It is not difficult to recognise, as he did, the ending then of one chapter and the beginning of another.

The eleventh of September, 2001, is a Sarajevo or Edward Grey moment for many of us, the real beginning of the millennium, the dreadful opening of a new century, the snuffing out of the lamps. Had those nineteen terrorists changed everything with the murder of almost three thousand men and women? There was no shortage of people to tell us that that was indeed the case. "Night fell on a different world", President Bush said just over a week later, "a world where freedom itself is under attack."

This was a world where evil-doers lurked in the shadows, a grim battlefield where only the fittest would survive. It was not enough to think that we in the civilised world would inherit the kingdom of the earth because of the strength and universal validity of our values. We would have to fight tooth and claw for what we believed and take that fight to our enemies. God was after all on our side; the God of the Old Testament; the God that

smote His enemies. “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” Divine pre-emption would scatter our foes.

The scale of the murderous 9/11 attacks was certainly unprecedented. There were more casualties on American soil than at any time since the Civil War. While the body count was horrendous, and the act itself as terrifying as it was meant to be, the world did not become as “night fell” a much more dangerous place nor was the murderous activity itself an entirely new manifestation of evil. For forty years after the Second World War, we had, after all, lived in what one UN Secretary-General, Perez de Cuellar, called “a world of potentially terminal danger.” Like the Abbé Sieyès in the French Revolution, we could say with relief at the cold war’s end that we had survived, thanks to mutual fear in Washington and Moscow that each side was capable of destroying not just its adversary but our planet.

So there does not seem to be more original sin about than there was, nor of course is its manifestation in acts of terrorism a new phenomenon. Josephus described the panic caused in Palestine by the brutal tactics of the Sicarii or Zealots in their campaign to end Roman rule there in the first century A.D. The Shiite Assassins stabbed and slashed their victims, aiming in the twelfth and thirteenth century at what they believed to be the purification of Islam. The Hindu Thugis may have murdered half a million people until stamped out by the British in the nineteenth century, strangling most of their victims with a silk tie. More recent terrorist groups include the Russian anarchists and Irish terrorists of the nineteenth century. Revolutionaries assassinated seven heads of state between 1881 and 1914. Among those leaders who died were President McKinley of the USA, King Umberto I of Italy and the Prime Minister of Spain.

My first personal experience of terrorism was the assassination of Airey Neave on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1979. Four years later, I found myself a junior minister in Northern Ireland, with a protection squad of four burly Northern Ireland policemen, at least while I was in the Province. Several people I knew in Northern Ireland were murdered. I once saw bits of human flesh being scraped off the road in Newry, and a boot – with or without a foot in it, I am not sure – collected from a nearby rhododendron bush.

Even after leaving my job in Northern Ireland I was sent fairly regularly to Washington and other American cities to explain British policy in Ireland and to try to persuade American politicians to stop IRA fundraising in their country. I was usually received politely, but nothing changed. It took 9/11, IRA involvement with Columbian terrorists and the bravery of the McCartney sisters - who refused to allow the sanitisation of their brother's murder at the hands of IRA members - to change public and political opinion in America, obliging politicians to recognise that the IRA was not a sort of cousin of the St Vincent de Paul society. Northern Ireland re-entered my life in 1998-99 when I chaired the independent commission that made recommendations on the reorganisation of the police force in the Province in the wake of the Belfast agreement brokered by Senator George Mitchell and made possible by the brave leadership of Prime Ministers of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahearn. As part of our work, we held about forty public meetings around Northern Ireland, some in places where no British politician had even been before. I was acutely conscious of the fact that my security was in practice in the hands of terrorists, who presumably felt honour-bound not to blow me up nor any members of my commission. To depend on a terrorist's sense of honour - now that was something! There is a sort of terrorism which requires (as I will argue) some degree of political accommodation if it is to be ended. This was certainly true of violent Irish republicanism, but its acts of accommodation are not for the squeamish.

My other principal brush with terrorists came in Sri Lanka. I went there in November 2003, while a European Commissioner, to give support to the Norwegian efforts to end the conflict. I agreed to meet the leader of the terrorist organisation, the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), to make clear to him that the international community wanted a settlement, would not accept one that had undermined the territorial integrity of the island, and wished him to abandon his terror tactics, especially they forced recruitment of children and attacks on Muslims in the east of the island. One of the Tigers's victims, some time after my meeting, was a friend and fellow Balliol College graduate, Lakshman Kadirgamar. A Christian from a Tamil family, an international lawyer of distinction who conducted the first formal investigation of a country (South Vietnam) for Amnesty

International, he was twice foreign minister of his country, arguing against foreign funding of the Tigers and in favour of democracy and civil liberties. He knew that trying to understand the political context of terrorism was not to condone it. “Terrorism”, he said, “is a method – a particularly heinous one – rather than a set of adversaries or the causes they pursue. Terrorism is a problem of what people (or groups of people) do, rather than who they are or what they are trying to achieve.” Lakshman was murdered at his home in Columbo in August, 2005, shot whilst taking his daily swim. The moderate and the brave have always been the most prominent targets for political savagery.

The scale of the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka makes the LTTE rather different from most terrorist groups. Using the word “war” for what is happening on the island would not be wholly inaccurate. But to describe overall what we are doing as fighting a “war on terrorism” is to misunderstand the task at hand and to chart a course where success is less likely. What is more, as we shall see, where America has been strikingly successful, it has been because the complexity and specific nature of the exercise has been recognised. This is evidently not as President Bush saw things. Having declared war on terrorism, the President went on to broaden the target for hostilities. The war turned into a fight against evil and evil-doers. A war on evil is an ambitious project, and alas even more un-winnable than a war on terrorism. You do not need to be a grammarian to know that you do not fight wars against common nouns but against personal ones.

Britain’s director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Ken Macdonald, noted at the beginning of 2007, ‘the fight against terrorism on the streets of Britain is not a war. It is the prevention of crime, the enforcement of our laws, and the winning of justice for those damaged by their infringement.’ So the “war on terror” is essentially un-winnable; any time you declare victory you can find that your crowing is the precursor to this or that extremist strapping bombs to his or her body and descending into an underground system to cause death and maiming. Prime Minister Zapatero discovered this in Spain at the end of 2006 when, shortly before an ETA bomb killed two people at Madrid airport, he praised the success of his peace talks with the organisation. If it is a war we are fighting – a war on a tactic and a cast of mind – how can we ever win it? Before ripping that statement of the blindingly obvious out of context, the fact that we can never win “the war on terror”, - let

alone “the war on evil”, should not lead us to the conclusion that the battle against terrorists is un-winnable too. Indeed, we have arguably been doing reasonably well in that battle on President Bush’s watch despite his strategy but because of some of his tactics.

What definitions of terrorism can we agree on? First, terrorists have a political agenda. Much of the terrorism that we have witnessed in recent years has been connected to the fight for national independence. Unlike conventional politicians, terrorists use violence or threaten to do so in order to accomplish their political objectives.

The amount of violence employed by terrorists varies and the options available to them have clearly been increased by technology. Terrorists have to decide how much violence, injury and death are required to carry their message, because murder is the manifesto. The hope will often be to provoke a reaction by the authorities that will appear unreasonable to those who may sympathise with the terrorists’ objectives. It has invariably been the reaction to acts of terrorism that has created more political momentum than the terrorist acts themselves. The assessment of appropriate security measures needs to weigh political costs against security gains.

Terrorist groups are not state organisations, though they are sometimes supported by states. During the Cold War, both America and the Soviet Union supported terrorists who were fighting national governments believed to be in the opponent’s camp.

While terrorists are not directly state agents or employees, the tactics they use have sometimes been practised by states, set on cowing their own people or those in other countries. In the French Revolution, terror was regarded by one of its main advocates, Robespierre, as “nothing else than justice, prompt, secure and inflexible.”

The victims of terrorist attacks are not on the whole the main targets. Invariably, the main targets of terrorism are first public opinion, both where the attack is launched and where the terrorist group has its core support. Another target is the government where the attack takes place, in the hope that it will over-play its hand in retaliating and act as an

involuntary recruiting sergeant for the terrorists or alternatively show its incapacity to maintain order.

The American academic, Louise Richardson, believes that there are three overriding motivations for most terrorists: revenge, renown and reaction. The four young British Muslim terrorists who attacked London on 7 July 2005 cannot have expected that this would have brought about the early establishment of the caliphate. They presumably believed that they were revenging wrongs done in the Muslim world by the British government for which its citizens should pay, including Muslims like themselves. They certainly achieved renown, not- - as Sir Ken Macdonald said – as ‘soldiers’ but as ‘criminals and fantasists’.

Revenge has been a potent force in the conflict in Northern Ireland. Catholic terrorists have responded to what they have seen as Protestant attacks on their community; Protestant terrorists have responded with their own bombs and bullets.

The intellectual godfather of modern Islamic terrorism was Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian writer who was partly educated in the USA. Sentenced to death after being implicated in a plot to overthrow Colonel Nasser’s government in Egypt, Qutb expressed gratitude when he received the death sentence at his trial. “Thank God.” he said, “I performed jihad for fifteen years until I earned this martyrdom.” Nasser realised the likely impact of hanging him, and offered him mercy and even the post of education minister in his government. But Qutb knew how he would make the greatest impact. “My words”, he told his sister, “will be stronger if they kill me.”

The reaction to terrorist acts tests any government’s political skills especially in an open democracy. Do too little, and a government may both appear weak and fail to prevent an escalation of violence. Crack down too hard, and the result may be early success on the security front at the cost of longer term encouragement of the forces that help sustain terrorism.

How much does poverty explain terrorism? A smart answer discounts deprivation, arguing that if poverty accounted for terrorist activity, most of it would have its roots in sub-Saharan Africa. There has, of course, been terrorism here, in Burundi, the Congo and Liberia for example. But terrorism has much more frequently come from further north, in Algeria, Egypt, Somalia and the Arab and Muslim countries of West and Central Asia. The countries of the Arab League, from Iraq to Morocco, have done almost as badly economically in relation to other regions as sub-Saharan Africa though they are not as poor in absolute terms. While wealth has been growing elsewhere, Arab countries have proved extraordinarily unproductive despite oil and gas revenues. They have young populations, with too few jobs but no shortage of chances for seeing on television what others enjoy. As Lawrence Wright noted in his book on the background to the Twin Towers atrocities, “Radicalism usually prospers in the gap between rising expectations and declining opportunities.”

Poverty itself is perhaps less significant in absolute than in relative terms. Relative poverty feeds grievance and anger. It is interesting that it is not usually the poor who have recently joined the most prominent terrorist groups. Better educated terrorists, speaking several languages, are more able to carry out acts of international terrorism. They obviously find it far easier than would the impoverished and uneducated to travel, find jobs and accommodation and adapt themselves to foreign environments.

Education may play a role in radicalising the young. Attention has focused particularly on the Pakistan madrassas – religious schools – typically funded by charities in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States through local religious parties. These madrassas have always been the most fertile recruiting grounds for the Taleban and other extremist groups. Qu’rani schools flourish in other countries where poverty inhibits the development of state education. The UNDP reckons that only 14 percent of children in Somalia attend primary school and a mere 17 percent are literate. Children at these schools acquire few practical skills but learn the danger of corrupting Western influences. They are vulnerable to the activities of those with radical Islamic agendas.

Would democracy smash terrorism? Is the ballot box the answer to the bomb? It is rather a simplistic argument - although I believe it to be true in the longer-term and in its totality. The overall argument about democracy and pluralism stands up if you define terms accurately and if you look at the connections between politics and economics. Democracy is not just about the electoral process, which can simply produce majoritarian and illiberal results. It should encompass the creation of all those institutions and values that go to provide both the hard-ware and the soft-ware of a plural, open state: independent courts and the rule of law, freedom of speech, assembly and worship, the right to own property, accountable public services, civil society. We have already noted the economic backwardness of Middle East Arab League countries despite their energy resources. There is clearly a connection, as UNDP has regularly asserted, between authoritarian governance in the region, attitudes to gender and education and economic performance. The combination of the curtailment of political and other civil liberties and low rates of economic growth produces unemployment and hopelessness. Large numbers of young unemployed combined with political and civil repression nurtures violence and extremism. So better, more accountable, more open governments, pursuing more liberal economic policies, provides the best long-term answer to political jihadsim.

The response to terrorism committed by Muslims, in many cases directed by or in imitation of Al Qaeda (described by Colin Powell as a holding company), is not helped when it is couched in the crude and illiberal terms of identity politics. Whether or not terror is a response to “globalisation”, the assertion of identity and meaning by those who feel threatened or left behind by predominantly western cultural and economic homogeneity, it certainly seems to be the case that terror based on religion is closely linked to asserting a particular kind of identity. It does not seem to embrace any legitimate or negotiable political goal. Some commentators talk of Al Qaeda’s aims being “limited” politically and territorially to the eradication of Israel, the expulsion of America from Saudi Arabia and the erection of a new caliphate stretching from Morocco to Indonesia. These objectives surely stretch the word “limited” well beyond breaking point.

Here, then, are the ends of many of the new terrorists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: to make us acknowledge the legitimacy of a division of the world along religious lines; to compel us



to acknowledge them as the spokespeople of the Muslim community; and, finally, to make Muslims acknowledge them as their natural leaders by the will of God.

We will not overcome “transformational” terrorism if we accept the legitimacy of identity as the basis for international society, for a transcendental world-wide view connected to that identity. The point has been well made by Amartya Sen in “Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny”.<sup>[12]</sup> He argues, “While religious categories have received much airing in recent years, they cannot be presumed to obliterate other distinctions, and even less can they be seen as the only relevant system of classifying people across the globe...The difficulty with the thesis of the clash of civilisations begins well before we come to the issue of an inevitable clash; it begins with the presumption of the unique relevance of an inevitable clash.” The rejection of a confrontational view of Islam is certainly appropriate and extremely important at this time, but we must also ask whether it is at all necessary or useful, or even possible, to try to define in largely political terms what a “true Muslim must be like.” Substitute for “Muslim”, “Christian”, “Buddhist”, “Confucianist”, “Hindu”, “agnostic”, “atheist” or “consumerist” and the point is even more obvious. Why do we behave as Professor Sen has described? Because we forget that the only way to “win” the fight against terrorism is to remember our humanism, the foundation of any global civil society. The first goal of terrorists may not be to force us to give up our civil liberties, but to lose our civic ideals. In open, liberal and tolerant societies, we need to beware binding the expressiveness of an individual to the expression of a single, given community.

The nature of the states – weak, rogue, failed – that help terrorism wilfully or inadvertently is not a straightforward issue. We can categorise states into four groups. First, there are those that have failed or are failing, and which provide terrorists with ample opportunities for fund-raising, arms purchasing and trans-shipment. Secondly, there are states which are relatively permissive, or willing to strike bargains with terrorist organisations on one basis or another, and where training, recruitment, stockpiling and supply may take place with a minimum of intervention. Thirdly, in some states deal-making and more “legitimate” fund-raising may occur, under the banner of charitable, business or religious interest groups; and where recruiting and propaganda may be

pursued. Fourthly, there are target states where surveillance, intelligence, safe houses and sympathisers are required. One state that was fingered as belonging to the first three of these groups was Iraq after 2001.

But the Iraq war is a terrible example of how terrorism can provoke a government into taking actions which do much more damage to it and its country than the original terrorist assault. As was predictable and predicted, not least by intelligence agencies in Washington, London and elsewhere, the Iraq invasion has in many respects increased rather than diminished the terrorist threat. Iraq under Saddam, evil as he was, did not seed terrorist violence and recruit terrorists, though what has been happening in the country since his fall has done all of this. The conflagration, in part a civil war, predominantly between Sunnis and Shiites, and in part a fight to expel American and allied forces, has provided a magnet for jihadist terrorists. It has sadly confirmed the unfair caricature of America as hostile to the Arab world, mainly because she is a friend of Israel, but also because of America's wish to steal Muslim resources. Bin Laden had hoped to provoke the US into an expensive and militarily and morally draining invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. He cannot have believed his malign luck when Iraq became the scene of the neo-conservatives' grievous and foolish error, taking attention away from Afghanistan and the adjoining Pakistan border regions where Al Qaeda continues to find refuge. We got rid of a brutal dictator in Iraq, but further brutalised the country and brutalised the region and the world. The Iraq war has made the world less safe and the effort to contain terrorism more onerous.

The bloody and blundering effects of the strategic response to Al-Qaeda and 9/11 by America and its allies have been costly – financially, politically and morally. Commentators very often refer to the alleged resemblance between Vietnam and Iraq, a comparison resisted by the Bush administration and its supporters since it implied that America was up to its eyebrows in a quagmire from which escape would prove immensely difficult. I have always worried that the comparison failed on another count. Vietnam was clearly the end of a process even if we could not see it at the time. Communism as a system and an ideology was about to crumble away. Technology and the opening of markets were set to transform the global economy and the living standards

of tens of millions in Asia. Capitalism in a variety of forms – from Leninist party control of the process to market gangsterism – would dig the graves of Marxism and Maoism. The troubling aspect of the Iraq war is that it reflects what Audrey Kurth Cronin has called “the coincidence between the evolving changes of globalisation, the inherent weaknesses of the Arab region, and the inadequate American response to both...”<sup>[17]</sup> It is unfair to refer solely to America here; Europe is culpable, too. What we have managed to do, is to give credence to Huntington’s thesis of “the clash of civilisations” by aggravating the Muslim sense of grievance in a part – the smaller part – of the Islamic world. Unless we make some strategic adjustments, we shall discover that we have started something that we cannot easily finish. That is why Vietnam is irrelevant.

Yet tactically, despite political and strategic blunders, the containment of terrorism has been pretty successful – a point that political leaders should try to avoid making without a satchel full of qualifications and the crossing of every finger and toe. If you do not regard us all as being in a good versus evil war on terrorism - with Iraq, the Omaha Beach of the campaign; if you reckon instead and more realistically that we are trying to cope with this or that group of terrorists at this moment in history, then the record is not at all bad.

This might encourage us to recall that counter-terrorism can and does succeed. It worked in Malaya and the Philippines in the 1950s; it worked against the Red Brigades in Germany and Italy in the 1970s; and it had some success against the IRA in Northern Ireland. Terrorist campaigns do end, though claiming victory is an unwise provoker of any terrorist who may be left, as well as of the gods. In any campaign, the keys are good intelligence and police work in which the public should have confidence; it is a particularly bad mistake in a democracy, where public faith in the basic integrity of government is vital for the defence of freedom, that intelligence was serially abused after 9/11 and in the run up to the Iraq war. To conclude a terrorist campaign, you need to know who you are fighting, and you also require achievable goals in your operations – closing down cells, winding up networks, drying up sources of financing. It is also wise to remove any underlying sense of grievance where you can. A settlement of the long-standing dispute with Palestine would do more to hack through the roots of terrorism in the Middle East than anything else.

It is always possible to create more causes of grievance by the way that governments respond to terrorism. Sir Robert Thompson, one of the architects of success in Malaya in the 1950s wrote of the crucial importance of the government functioning within the law. International legal standards matter as much as national ones. In his account of overcoming the Communist insurgency, he noted that – “There is a very strong temptation in dealing both with terrorism and with guerrilla actions for government forces to act outside the law, the excuses being that the processes of law are too cumbersome, that the normal safeguards in the law for the individual are not designed for an insurgency and that a terrorist deserves to be treated as an outlaw anyway. Not only is this morally wrong, but, over a period it will create more practical difficulties for a government than it solves.”

Democracies should live by their principles in fighting terrorism. It is those principles and the values they incorporate that distinguish the leaders of free societies from terrorist fanatics and psychopaths. Holding on patiently to that precept, there is no reason to conclude that the main threat to us all in future decades will be posed by terrorists. But a knowledge of history should inform us how best to deal with them, encourage us not to be dispirited in our campaigns, and remind us (without plunging us into pessimism) that terrorism itself is something that is unlikely to be expunged from our lives.