Between al-Andalus and a failing integration
Europe's pursuit of a long-term counterterrorism strategy in the post-al-Qaeda era

RIK COOLSAET

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EUROPE'S PURSUIT OF A LONG-TERM COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY IN THE POST-AL-QAEDA ERA

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INTRODUCTION

"Now, in 2004, with Al Qaeda having risen and mostly fallen, the threats that US intelligence must monitor in the current decade have in a sense returned to what existed in the early 1990s; only now the threat has many more moving parts, more geographically disparate operations, and more ideological momentum." The author of these lines, Paul R. Pillar, former deputy chief of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center and now at the National Intelligence Council (Washington, DC), is quite adamant about the state Osama bin Laden's network is in today: "The disciplined, centralized organization that carried out the September 11 attacks is no more. Al Qaeda still has the capacity to inflict lethal damage, but the key challenges for current counterterrorism efforts are not as much Al Qaeda as what will follow Al Qaeda."[1]

In public perception and political discourse terrorism is still widely perceived as a more or less structured international movement – an image Osama bin Laden, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and other *jihadi* spokespersons themselves are eager to uphold. Using century-old symbols and myths such as al-Andalus and a Caliphate reborn, portraying themselves as warriors of the global *jihad*, in an epochal struggle with the West, terrorist leaders are indeed hoping for this perception of a major global threat to last forever.

Four years after 9/11 however, Islamist – or better: jihadi – terrorism is poles apart from what it was in 2001. The international, regional and domestic endeavours against al-Qaeda, including the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan, have indeed been much more successful than most people realize. Compared to previous attempts at international cooperation to counter international terrorism, today's international counterterrorist cooperation is a success story indeed. By historical standards, an unprecedented level of cooperation and mutual support now exists among countries, international organizations and other partners all around the world. Never before has the number of states supporting terrorism been so small.[2]

Recognizing that the global cooperation against terrorism has been quite successful, the Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf has warned that this is nevertheless "insufficient to ultimately win the war against it". At the September

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1. Paul R. Pillar, 'Counterterrorism after Al Qaeda', in: *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2004, 27:3, pp. 101-113
2. For a detailed analysis of today's international terrorism, I refer to my: *Al-Qaeda: The Myth. The Root Causes of International Terrorism and How to Tackle Them*. Ghent, Academia Press, 2005

2004 United Nations General Assembly he stressed the need for a clear, long-term strategy striking at the root of the problem: an internal socio-economic reform in the Muslim world, which is of course the responsibility of the governments in place, but also an "active support from the major powers to ensure political justice and socio-economic revival for all Islamic peoples." Action is needed, he cautioned, before "an iron curtain finally descends between the West and the Islamic world".

Al-Qaeda has left a heavy imprint indeed. Its main contribution has consisted in plugging into existing insurgencies, rebellions and local brands of terrorism and offering an overarching jihadi perspective to these groups, who until then merely had their own local agenda.[3] Al-Qaeda stitched together local opposition groups and disenchanted youngsters in migrant communities in Europe in a shared world view of a worldwide oppressed *Ummah*, offering a salafist reading of the Koran as the religion of the oppressed – an ideological role once played by Marxism. Al-Qaeda has now ceased to be a formidable foe by itself, but it has become an inspiring myth to others. Local groups are being inspired by this myth, rather than being beholden to bin Laden. What is generally dubbed 'international terrorism' can best be compared to mercury blobs of a broken thermometer, all highly toxic, but unconnected to one another.

Most of the post-9/11 attacks, such as Casablanca (May 2003), Istanbul (November 2003), Madrid (April 2004) or the brutal murder of the controversial Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh (November 2004), point in the same direction. Their perpetrators are largely locally (or regionally) organized, self-sustained with microfinancing schemes such as cloned credit cards and fake or stolen ID papers, mobile phone cards and car trafficking, or the smuggle of precious stones or metals, operating without external support or instructions, and unaffiliated with what remains of an al-Qaeda hierarchy.

Jihadi terrorism today is a 'glocal' phenomenon: its core is essentially local, but its appearances are global. Even if remnants of the old structured al-Qaeda network probably still remain at large, al-Qaeda has failed to gain significant traction for actions in Europe and the United States. Jihadi terrorism now basically is a cloak patched from different sources of local discontent, real and perceived, stitched together by a puritanical and radical interpretation of Islam, and thriving on an enabling global momentum.

The root causes underlying this particular brand of terrorism are composed of one major global root cause and a multitude of local root causes.

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3. Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, London, Hearst, 2004

The main global root cause is an enabling global environment, characterised by an astonishing degree of solidarity amongst Muslim communities worldwide, build upon shared feelings of humiliation, bitterness and besiegement. The local root causes widely vary, depending on the continents and the countries involved and have nothing to do with 11 September. They range from decades-old separatist longings in a number of countries with large Muslim minorities, the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis, a darkened social, political and economic horizon for hundreds of thousands of young Arabs, and a failing integration in Europe of second and third generation youngsters from migrant communities with a Muslim background.

Where Europe departs from the American Global War on Terrorism

The United States widely perceives international terrorism as a global external threat – and quite understandably so in view of the magnitude of the 9/11 attacks. In the US, international terrorism is often portrayed as similar in scope to Nazism and Communism, threatening the very foundations of the global polity. The West and the US in particular are considered to be the primary targets of this new form of authoritarianism. As it is seen as probably lasting for decades, the ensuing strategy is a long-term domestic mobilisation of the nation, combined with a mobilisation of the international community in a hunt for Islamist terrorists.

The American global war on terrorism has become the central organising principle of US foreign and defence policy, comparable to the Cold War containment strategy. It basically rests upon a global decapitation strategy, a worldwide hunt for known terrorists, as well as an interdiction strategy, trying to deny terrorist groups the possibility to take advantage of local opportunities. Its military dimension is paramount, even to the point of creating turf wars with other US agencies.[4] Since the advent of the second Bush administration, the global war on terrorism has been couched in a more positive democracy-pursuing strategy, but the thrust of the strategy has remained unchanged.

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4. During the presidencies of G.H. Bush and B. Clinton, the Department of Defence played a subordinate role in anti-terrorism. The 1996 Khobar bombings (Saudi-Arabia), where 19 American soldiers died, resulted in a more pronounced role for the Pentagon in counterterrorism (defensive force protection) and anti-terrorism (offensive operations). See: *The Military*. Washington, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, Staff Statement No. 6, s.d. [2004]

Europeans share with Americans the conviction that no quick fixes for short-term success in the struggle against today's terrorism exist. But in several important aspects, Europe's fight against terrorism departs from the American war on terrorism.

Even if the European reflection on the very nature of contemporary international terrorism is not as elaborate and well thought-off as one might wish, the prevailing feeling in Europe is that simply going after known terrorists and their leadership, preventing financial flows and putting an excessive emphasis on coercion and force, is an unsatisfactory counterterrorist strategy. The international mechanisms of sanctions and suppression have been very effective immediately after 9/11, but are gradually becoming less and less relevant, because – as a result of the decentralisation and atomisation of jihadism – they address a set of circumstances which no longer apply.[5]

Characteristic of the European approach to counterterrorism is the constant reminder of the need to address the root causes of terrorism.[6] In its December 2004 meeting, the European Council once again stressed this approach:

> *"The European Council reiterated its conviction that in order to be effective in the long run the Union's response to terrorism must address the root causes of terrorism. Radicalisation and terrorist recruitment can be closely connected. The European Council called on the Council to establish a long-term strategy and action plan on both issues by June 2005, building on the report on recruitment recently adopted by the Council. It invited the Secretary-General/High Representative and the Commission to submit proposals to this effect."*[7]

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5. *First report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team appointed persuant to resolution 1526 (2004) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities.* New York, United Nations, 25 August 2004 (doc S/2004/679)

6. That the US-led Global War on Terrorism does not address root causes at all, is probably too sweeping a generalisation. '"Roots" was a taboo in the Bush administration for a time, with "evil" the only acceptable explanation for the attacks of September 11,' according to the *Washington Post* on 24 December 2002. Nevertheless, then CIA Director George J. Tenet was the first major American official to venture into the complex world of the root causes of terrorism as part of his Worldwide Threat Briefing, delivered on 11 February, 2003: 'The numbers of societies and peoples excluded from the benefits of an expanding global economy, where the daily lot is hunger, disease, and displacement – and that produces large populations of disaffected youth who are prime recruits for our extremist foes.' Formally, the *US National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, issued also in February 2003, confirmed the need to address similar 'root causes'. Such statements however seem to be somewhat out of synch with the ongoing Global War on Terrorism.

7. Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 16/17 December 2004 (Doc 16238/1/04 Rev 1)

Within the EU, there is a widely shared belief that the war in Afghanistan was and will remain the only part of the post-9/11 counterterrorism effort where military means played a significant role. In the European counterterrorism approach there certainly is an important part to be played by the European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), but its military dimension – the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) – is mostly seen as complementary and supportive of other policy instruments.[8]

Moreover, it is probably not far off the mark to state that another major difference between the American war on terrorism and Europe's fight against terrorism lies in the perception of the very nature of these root causes of terrorism. Europeans seem to widely share the assumption that the root causes of jihadi terrorism in the rest of the world are mainly local – just as is the case in Europe itself. Whereas the US Global War on Terrorism considers local terrorist groups to be part of a global Islamist insurgency, the EU's point of departure – admittedly more implicit than explicit due to a lack of in-depth reflection – would be to consider international terrorism to have returned to what existed before the rise of al-Qaeda in the 1990s: even if they use the same salafist rhetoric and thriving on a more enabling international momentum, most terrorist groups are primarily driven by domestic grievances, that remain the main drive behind their actions.

The successful al-Qaeda imprint gave rise to the perception of a formidable foe of global dimensions. In order to devise a strategy effectively dealing with the specific environment and dynamics of each of the local and regional terrorist groups, this perception needs to be deconstructed.[9]

The existing European counterterrorism strategy thus encompasses both the prevention of terrorist acts and endeavours to tackle the root causes at the global, regional and local level. It points – at least rhetorically – to the need to complement the necessary repressive dimension of its strategy with a long-term political involvement, albeit not yet formalised in any detailed counterterrorism strategy.

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8. The main areas of action of the ESDP contribution to counterterrorism are identified as follows: prevention, protection, response/consequence management and support to third countries. See: *Conceptual Framework on the ESDP dimension of the fight against terrorism*. Council of the European Union, DG E VIII/EUMS, 14797/04, 18 November 2004

9. This lack of international consensus on the very essence of the Islamist threat was also raised in: *Van dawa tot jihad. De diverse dreigingen van de radicale islam tegen de democratische rechtsorde*. Den Haag, December 2004

The threat being multifaceted and multidimensional, any such strategy needs to contain at its core a joint common focus in the many different dimensions it seeks to address, for European counterterrorism efforts to be coherent and effective in the long term. To this effect, this paper offers a three pronged approach: (1) repression and prevention of terrorist acts, (2) tackling local root causes, both within the EU and worldwide, (3) bridging a global perception gap.

Prevention of terrorist acts – and its limits

Preparedness to and prevention of new terrorist attacks form the corner stones of the homeland security dimension of the American counterterrorism strategy. For the EU too, repression and prevention of terrorist acts constitute the necessary first level of any counterterrorism strategy. Combining repression and prevention within a joint approach has been a conceptual revolution for all authorities involved, as has been the need for a close relationship – born out of necessity – between law enforcement authorities and the intelligence agencies. In some European countries, including France and Belgium, both institutional revolutions have been rather well integrated into daily practice since the 90s or even earlier, whereas in others institutional hurdles have proven to be much harder to take.

The first responsibility for this dimension lies with the local and the national authorities within the member states. But intra-European and international cooperation is a vital complement. Since 11 September, boosted by 11 March, the EU and its member states have intensified the domestic, intra-EU and international coordination of intelligence, police and judiciary efforts and devised new juridical, political and intelligence instruments in order to trace, prosecute and punish terrorist individuals and groups. It is stating the obvious when stressing that this endeavour needs to be continued so as to be able to prevent as much as possible new terrorist acts from being committed.

Even when considering that jihadi terrorism has largely returned to a pre-9/11 situation, and is thus largely driven by local dynamics, this nevertheless does not imply that no transnational links exist between jihadists in different countries. They clearly do. Some jihadi militants are known to travel profusely and to liaise regularly with one another through regional networking.[10] Usually no real operational coordination exists between these home-grown groups, only spo-

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10. The GICM (Groupe islamique combattant marocain) and Jemaah Islamiyah are examples of such loose regional networks of jihadists, but which do not amount to well-established structured organisations.

radic and volatile contacts – similar to those existing between the 19th-century anarchist terrorists. Within the network of Sunni Islamic extremists, according to Paul R. Pillar, almost everyone can be linked, at least indirectly, to almost everyone else: the overwhelming majority of these linkages, however, only consist of casual contacts and do not involve preparations of terrorist operations.

But since these contacts are part and parcel of the behaviour and tactics of local jihadi groups, transnational coordination and sharing of information between the relevant authorities, both within the EU and internationally, remain crucial elements of any long-term counterterrorist strategy. Identified gaps need to be addressed in order to enhance preparedness and maximise the chances of attacks being averted.[11]

But international and intra-EU cooperation against terrorism has been least successful where it matters most: victory will not be achieved as long as the circumstances are not addressed by which individuals turn into terrorists, both in Europe and elsewhere. Therefore, and in consistency with its proclaimed objective of addressing the root causes of terrorism, the EU has attempted to identify the mechanisms by which terrorists are recruited. In the course of 2004, the factors underlying the recruitment of terrorists have been identified as follows: radicalisation, regional conflicts and failed or failing states, globalisation and socio-economic factors, alienation, propagation of an extremist worldview, systems of education.

These underlying factors however have never been prioritised, nor made fully operational. Within this broad array of enabling circumstances, the EU has increasingly focused on one single factor, which is being privileged above all others: the **radicalisation process** by which ultimately individuals turn into terrorists. It is nowadays a common thread within EU counterterrorism thinking and action to single out this radicalisation process as the main focal point in combating terrorism.

Tackling terrorist recruitment through this radicalisation process strategy is inherently difficult. Still, in a sense it also is the 'easiest' root cause to address, as it allows for the identification of particular 'hot spots' where this radicalisa-

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11. *Efforts by the European Union to combat terrorism. Contribution to the orientation debate in COREPER.* Council of the European Union, JAI/7177/04, 8 March 2004. A thorough analysis of EU policies concerning terrorism is provided by: Franklin Dehousse, Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, *L'Union européenne face au défi du terrorisme*. Brussels, 24 March 2005 (*Studia Diplomatica*, forthcoming). EPC policy analyst Mirjam Dittrich gives a good overview of the post 9/11 EU responses to terrorism: *Facing the global terrorist threat: a European response*. Brussels, European Policy Centre, Working Paper 14, January 2005

tion might potentially occur, so that tactics and means can be devised to repress them. Radical mosques rank high amongst obvious hot spots, but prisons,[12] schools, neglected city districts and internet chat rooms spring easily to mind too.

However, repression of recruitment mechanisms will not in itself prove sufficient to effectively deal with terrorism. To dam up the complex jihadi terrorism in the post-al-Qaeda era, counterterrorism efforts, both domestically and internationally, therefore will have to go beyond mere repressive tactics and increasingly rely on other policy instruments, which are **more explicitly political** than has been the case so far. Prioritising possible root causes will allow for a strategy of addressing the factors thus identified, one by one.

Dealing with local root causes in the EU

Stressing the radicalisation process as the main track for counterterrorism runs the risk of overstating the potential results of a purely repressive approach, by leaving a most vital, but less palpable question unaddressed: why do individuals – in particular second and third generation youngsters from North-African descent, age 15-18 – appear to be most receptive to radicalisation in Europe? Without acknowledging the dynamics that lead these youngsters down this path, EU authorities and member states will never be able to be abreast of events, and will constantly be confronted with the situation that for every 'radicalised would-be terrorist' caught, a new one is in the making, the source of potential recruits seemingly inexhaustible.

Therefore, next to the need of an ever increasing intra-EU coordination of the intelligence agencies, police and judiciary, a second and equally important domestic dimension must be borne in mind. Even if remnants of the al-Qaeda network probably still exist and some recruiters with a mujahideen background are still around, in Europe as of lately a growing tendency of self-radicalisation and self-recruitment of individuals has been noted. Self-recruitment now appears to have become a more important source of jihadi recruitment than any organised international network of recruiters. Self-recruitment is largely the result of an individual track of self-radicalisation, based upon a process of personal **re-identification**, outside customary meeting places such as mosques.

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12. The group 'Martyrs pour le Maroc', created by the Algerian Mohammed Achraf, is an example of a network originating from the thousands of North-African inmates in the (Spanish) prisons, detained for minor criminal offences.

This process of self-propelled radicalisation is couched in religious terms – Takfir wal-Hijra being the most radical expression of jihadi activism – but Islam is not the essence. A **failing integration** is.

Second- and third-generation youngsters of North-African descent are more vulnerable to this process, due to the absence of any other means of positive identification. No longer able to identify with the country of origin of their parents or grand-parents, the countries they now live in constitute their sole natural environment for identification. Within this environment however, and to the difference of their non-migrant peers, they are confronted with a number of real obstacles, in particular discriminations on the job and the real estate market and educational deficiencies.[13] European cities always have been characterised by a form of segregation, with low income districts on the one hand and high-income districts on the other hand, with significant disparities in education and city services. Traditional low-income districts have attracted the bulk of migrant families in search of affordable housing – which in turn has stimulated an exodus of original inhabitants. Within migrant communities, despair and discouragement nowadays prevail with regard to their youngsters' chances of overcoming these situations in the foreseeable future.

Unable to identify with their parents' identities and usually better educated than them, they are more sensitive than their parents to the feeling of being excluded or rejected by their natural environment as second-class citizens. Their father's mosques do not capture their imagination, since the (often foreign) imams do not offer them a message they can identify with. They create their own subculture, withdraw from many social contacts, and sever family ties. As a result, these youngsters have a tendency to become an introverted generation. Many embrace Islam as their new identity, thereby interpreting it in concordance with their own life experiences and sometimes even as a kind of redemption for their petty criminal behaviour in the past.[14] Their interpretation of Islam is usually much more socially conservative than the Islam in their parents' countries of origin.

In a vicious circle of frustration and dissatisfaction, youngsters from migrant communities choose the easiest way out and pose themselves as victims, projecting onto society whatever ill-fortune they encounter. They form the hard core of radical groups of Salafist Islamists and rapidly radicalise into self-declared local vanguards of the worldwide jihad, sometimes under the influence of a charis-

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13. In the recent literature on Western Muslims, one can refer to: David Masci, 'An uncertain road: Muslims and the future of Europe', in: *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, December 2004
14. A similar point was raised in: *Saoedische invloeden in Nederland. Verbanden tussen salafitische missie, radicaliseringsprocessen en Islamistisch terrorisme*. AIVD, June 2004

matic individual. By seemingly acting in community with a worldwide liberation struggle they develop a sense of self-esteem. This feeling of commonality with jihadi theatres of war is the ultra radicalised and polarising version of a more general sense of **increased solidarity** among Muslims worldwide, as revealed by surveys by the Pew Global Attitudes Project and Zogby International.[15] As was noticed by the French Renseignements Généraux in 2004, some city quarters have tended to become 'jihadised' this way.

However, contrary to widespread perceptions, migrant communities do not form monolithic blocs. Within migrant communities in Europe, discussions rage on how best to handle radicalised youngsters. But for a number of reasons, these communities are unable to cope with this issue solely by themselves. They need a permissive environment that enables them to tilt the balance in their favour. This environment is the responsibility of both migrant communities and their fellow-countrymen.

On the one hand, Tariq Ramadan, Europe's leading Muslim intellectual, is quite explicit when he addresses Western Muslims' self-identification as a people apart and wallowing in what he calls an 'unhealthy victim mentality' and an 'us-against-them' mind-set. This perception of victimization and obsession with a minority status must be rejected, according to Ramadan, who further implores Western Muslims to reach out and connect with fellow citizens in their countries of residence, to resist the impulse to withdraw into isolated communities and to get involved in community politics.

On the other hand, for this effort within migrant communities to succeed, they need to find a partner in European societies and authorities. Many non-Muslims have no clue about the degree to which Muslims feel excluded from society. In some European countries, migrant communities are requesting means for launching a major awareness program, especially directed towards their youngsters, as well as for an increased professionalism of migrant organizations. Such schemes provide for an opportunity to further the much-needed **structured cooperation with migrant communities**, allowing for a possible gradual waning of the polarising mirror images.

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15. *Views of a changing world*. The Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 2003; 'Muslims in the American public square: Shifting political winds & fallout from 9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq', Zogby International, conducted in August and September 2004. In his speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, in May 2004, (former) Prime Minister of Singapore Goh Chok Tong made a similar analysis: "It is a fact that there is a living, vibrant Islamic ummah or global Islamic community more so today than in any time in modern world history."

The main task for authorities lies in the formulation of a common project that is able to bind migrant and non-migrant communities into a shared sense of communality. **Equity** probably comes closest to expressing the nature of this endeavour. A significant responsibility lies upon the shoulders of local and national authorities. The combination of feelings within migrant communities of being left aside and amongst the original inhabitants in low-income city districts of being pushed aside have proven to be a potent boost for reciprocal polarisation, as can be judged from the electoral successes of far-right political parties in many European countries.

Authorities must be seen as making significant efforts at **ending city segregation by bold social engineering** and **neutralizing discriminations** of all sorts, by whatever political party, structure or individual.[16] **Education** needs to be boosted so as to provide all youngsters with the same opportunities. Local authorities need to enhance **multicultural awareness programs for police units** operating in specific city districts.

Moreover, a much needed concrete step which both media and politicians can take is to cease to explain complex community problems by sweeping generalisations about **cultural backwardness**.[17] Islam provides a rationale for would-be terrorists, but is not the origin of their acts. The commonly heard rebuttals of Islam as a religion are deeply offensive to all Muslims. Such discourse can easily result in the formation of conflicting ethnic-religious fronts pitting Muslims against non-Muslims.[18] The Lebanese-born French essayist Amin Maalouf has argued convincingly that language and religion are the most vulnerable and sensitive dimensions of one's identity. When individuals feel attacked in one of these aspects, they start looking for others experiencing the same vexation. The group thus created then easily reverts to the kind of brutal and extremist group behaviour that could be witnessed in Rwanda, Bosnia or Lebanon.[19]

The current debate on integration and multiculturalism in many European countries tends to breed a climate which encourages individuals and groups of fanatical and volunteering young men to declare themselves the vanguards of a 'defensive jihad'. By their acts – not that different altogether the 19th cen-

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16. In their elaborate letter to parliament dated 10 November 2004 and dealing with the murder of Theo van Gogh, the Dutch ministers of Justice and Interiors, Messrs. Donner and Remkes, also stress the need to connect youngsters from migrant communities with Dutch society by removing the impediments to social and economic participation.
17. The Dutch intelligence agency AIVD made a similar – and widely criticised – comment in its: Rekrutering in Nederland voor de jihad. Den Haag, AIVD, 9 December 2002
18. Karen Phalet (red.), *Moslim in Nederland. Een onderzoek naar de religieuze betrokkenheid van Turken en Marokkanen*. Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, juni 2004
19. Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières*. Paris, Grasset, 1998

tury anarchist terrorist's claim of acting in favour of a marginalised and despised working class – young jihadists see themselves as avengers of an oppressed community, willing to perform ritual killings, such as the brutal murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in November 2004. A climate also which offers plenty of opportunities to Islamist recruiters and is propitious to self-recruitment. A climate finally which perpetuates the gap of misunderstanding between non-Muslims and Muslims, rendering more difficult the much needed joint effort directed against radicalisation and discrimination. Polarisation only breeds more polarisation.

Authorities and the media need to de-dramatise their common parlance. When confronted with incidents – especially when of a dramatic nature – involving youngsters of North-African descent, it does make a huge difference if the reaction is a 'declaration of war against Muslim terrorists' or a condemnation of these incidents as the unacceptable behaviour of a small group of young thugs, whatever their origin may be.

De-escalating the debate on multiculturalism is a necessary first step to this effect. Only when patiently described and explained the inherent difficulties of a multicultural society will people, Europeans and migrant communities alike, less fear its unknowns. This should make it possible to create an enabling environment for a more harmonious debate within migrant communities of Muslim descent on the place and role of Muslims in the Western world.

If on the contrary the polarization within Western and, more specifically, European societies is permitted to metastasize, Osama bin Laden will have won by default, since polarization between Muslims and non-Muslims was uppermost in his mind when authorizing the 11 September attacks.[20]

It is unfortunate, but the – natural – difficulties arising from large migration flows and their ensuing integration, now have become intertwined with the terrorism issue, the result being that harmonious integration has turned into a Herculean task. Even if there were no terrorism threat, a satisfactory integration of youngsters from minority communities as full members of Western societies would not happen without significant efforts on both sides. But this has now become all the more urgent, since ultimately such an effort will prove to be the only antidote capable of halting the consequences of insidious (self)manipulation.

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20. A similar warning was also raised by a Dutch parliamentary commission charged with evaluating the Dutch intelligence agency: *De AIVD in verandering*. Den Haag, Commissie Bestuurlijke Evaluatie AIVD, November 2004.

Dealing with root causes outside of the EU

Outside Europe the root causes of jihadi terrorism are mainly local too. Islamist terrorism predates the emergence of al-Qaeda in the 1990s. It varies in history, scope and lethality, depending on the regions and the countries involved. Therefore, the responsibility and the capacity for dealing with them mainly lie with local authorities. In some of these local root causes, the international community and the EU have a stake and a means of influencing the outcome. But in most, the levers are only indirect.

Poverty in itself is no root cause of terrorism. Notwithstanding conventional wisdom, there is no direct causal link between poverty and terrorism.[21] If poverty would be a primary motive of terrorism, international terrorism would be a constant major thread in history (instead of evolving in successive waves). Moreover, Africa, the continent that has been mired in pervasive poverty for decades and disposes of a per capita income that is now lower than it was in the beginning of the 60s, would nowadays be the scene and source of major terrorist activities. In most African countries however little or no terrorism exists.

The same goes for **failed** and **failing states**. They can be hotbeds of brigand, warlordish or ethnic violence, which sometimes can be widespread, as has been the case in Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, but they do not breed terrorist violence. They are not root causes of terrorism. They only offer at the most a facilitating environment for terrorists. Addressing these situations would in the first place be a blessing for the populations concerned, and contain the danger of regional contamination, but it would hardly have a major impact on terrorist activities.[22]

Autonomy/separatism. In a number of countries one cannot but fail to notice that many so-called 'Islamist terrorist movements', in particular in Southeast Asia, are interlinked with long-time disputes over territory and autonomy.[23] Al-

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21. Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, *Education, poverty, political violence and terrorism: is there a causal connection?* Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, May 2002; Walter Laqueur, 'The Terrorism to Come', in: *Policy Review*, 126, August-September 2004

22. To this effect, the December 2004 Report by the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change proposes the creation of a new Peacebuilding Commission by the Security Council. Its core functions would be to identify countries which are under stress and risk sliding towards State collapse; to organize, in partnership with the national Government, proactive assistance in preventing that process from developing further; to assist in the planning for transitions between conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding; and in particular to marshal and sustain the efforts of the international community in post-conflict peacebuilding over whatever period may be necessary.

23. The history of some of the radical Islamist movements goes back as far as a century, as is the case in the Philippines. See: *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*. CRS Report for Congress, 13 August 2004 (updated 7 February 2005)

Qaeda has capitalised on these pre-existing conflicts. But even in these situations it should be born in mind that violent jihadi groups only represent a tiny minority, even among Islamist groups.

The responsibility of local governments here is paramount. But if the European Union wants to be seen as an effective and even-handed player in long-lasting conflicts, the EU and its member states need to enhance their long-term conflict resolution strategy, making full use of the whole spectrum of means and instruments at their disposal. This would further be in consistency with their stated objectives of "integrating the fight against terrorism into EU external relations policy"[24] and of supporting the UN as the most appropriate multilateral forum for conflict resolution.

As proven in the past, if this longing is popular amongst the concerned population, a purely repressive track can never defeat separatism. If the international community supports the repressive tactics of a local government in the name of a global endeavour against terrorism, it will inevitably be perceived as supportive of a repressive regime and contribute to the emergence of anti-Western sentiments in the concerned population. If however a separatist group, not grounded in popular sentiment and not justifiable as a reaction to widespread and longstanding governmental repression,[25] turns violent, then support to a democratically elected government is justified, providing this government respects fundamental human rights and the Geneva conventions. Most of today's counterterrorism assistance is bilateral. In order for this assistance to be viewed as legitimate, it might be advisable to provide for a multilateral framework of fixed rules. Addressing this issue, the December 2004 Report by the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change has proposed the UN Security Council to enhance its role in this respect:

> "*Because United Nations-facilitated assistance is limited to technical support, States seeking operational support for counter-terrorism activities have no alternative but to seek bilateral assistance. A United Nations capacity to facilitate this assistance would in some instances ease domestic political constraints, and this can be achieved by providing for the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate to act as a clearing house for State-to-State provision of military, police and border control assistance for the development of domestic counterterrorism capacities. The Security Council, after consultation with affected*

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24. Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 17/18 June 2004 (Doc 10679/2/04 Rev 2)
25. Abu Sayyef in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipel is an example of such a group.

States, should extend the authority of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate to perform this function."[26]

Political extremism used to be a more important root cause of terrorism in the 70s and 80s than it is today. Most often, its effects are rather circumscribed and primarily local. The German Rote Armee Fraktion, Action Directe in France, the CCC in Belgium or the Brigate Rosse in Italy, all displayed the same characteristics of political extremism and lack of popular support.[27] **Religious extremism** broadly falls within this category. When political channels for dissenting opinions are functioning and safeguards for religious and ethnic minorities exist, terrorism is always the modus operandi of splinter groups.[28] Such terrorist groups can successfully be eliminated by a combination of infiltration, national reforms and collaboration with those regretting their former choices, by the law and in full respect of the law. But, as will be explored below, in today's current wave of jihadi terrorism, religious extremism acts as a booster for terrorism – without religion actually being the main driver. **Intercultural and interreligious dialogue** can help soften the prevalent polarised atmosphere, but its long-term effects upon terrorism should not be overstated.

The **Middle East** probably represents the major source of (potential) terrorist activities. To Europe the region has always been of particular importance, since it represents a 'Near' rather than a 'Middle' East. Europe has a vital interest in the region, not in the least since this region provides for the bulk of its immigration since the 60s.

Often ignored in the West, long before the first victims fell in New York and Washington tens of thousands of Muslims and Arab citizens had been murdered in a wave of terrorist attacks in Arab and Muslim countries. A conservative estimate puts the number of victims in the Muslim world at some 175.000 – mostly in the Maghreb – compared to some 4.000 Western victims since the start of the current wave of Islamist and jihadi terrorism in the early 90s. The year 2004 once again saw a marked increase in attacks against local targets in Muslim countries – a chilling reminder of the 1990s pattern.

The **impasse** in many Arab countries provides for the main root cause of local Islamist terrorism. Most Arab societies have been living in a crisis for more than twenty years: growing unemployment, emigration of the highly educated, dicta-

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26. *A more secure world: our shared responsibility.* Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. Washington, United Nations, December 2004
27. Aum Shinrikyo in Japan can also be considered to fall within this category.
28. IBDA-C in Turkey can be considered to fall within this category.

torships, all kinds of societal violence, repression and impoverishment. Since the demise of secular populist movements and of pan-Arabism, populations no longer expect anything from their leaders. They demand solutions without exactly knowing what these should be. This social crisis is due to a number of different, overlapping causes. The social systems no longer meet the needs of the people. While the economic system turns out more and more highly educated unemployed, a real connection is lacking between the educational system and the labour market. The political system is founded on military, bureaucratic and administrative control of the population and does not allow any form of real participation. "Just as the failure of Arab democratization movements in the 1980s gave birth to the Islamist fundamentalist tidal wave, the defeats inflicted on this mass-based and hence political fundamentalism have given birth to an armed extremist Islamism that has come to represent its globalization."[29]

Resolving this domestic impasse does not lie within the means of Western countries. No increase of development aid will do. The sheer magnitude of the task of breaking the impasse in the Arab world and dealing with the dynamics in the region mandates modesty in Western policy. Change has to come from within Arab societies themselves. Fortunately, there are some positive signs – the impact of which cannot be assessed as yet – that today the Muslim world is witnessing numerous efforts at introspection and reflection upon its own responsibilities.

A first post-9/11 sign that introspection is indeed occurring within the Muslim world at large is the manifesto published by 160 religious Saudi scientists and scholars in the spring of 2002 in which they pleaded for a more intensive dialogue with the West. At the time the manifesto was greeted with a torrent of conservative criticism, but it nevertheless shows that there are now Muslims who are cautiously criticizing the intolerant nature of Saudi society and education. Regional meetings focusing on the how and why of the region's own failures are now held throughout the Middle East.

That is also what the notorious *Arab Human Development Report 2002* is about. It was written on the initiative of a group of Arab intellectuals with the support of the UNDP. The report as well as the follow-up publications condemn the lack of political freedom, the oppression of women and the isolation of Arab science as the main causes for the development lag in the Arab world. The first report was a bombshell. It was downloaded from the Internet one million times, as the authors discovered. The third one was released in April 2005 and went

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29. Burhan Ghalioun, 'The Persistence of Arab Authoritarianism', in: *Journal of Democracy*, October 2004, 15:4. See also his interview in *Le Monde*, 25 March 2002.

even further in examining the ways in which the Arab polity could be radically transformed.[30]

The reports' lead author, the Egyptian scholar Nader Fergany, holds the view that the Arab and Muslim regimes bear a heavy responsibility with regard to the present malaise. But the same goes for the West which, under the pretext of spreading freedom and democracy, has not hesitated to support regimes that trample these very ideas. This confronts Western countries, the EU and the United States alike, once again with the all too familiar dilemma between stability and democracy. The international community's approach towards the region has always privileged the former to the detriment of the latter. Unpopular Arab regimes – keeping in check the seething anger of their populations by force – have thus benefited from the complaisance, and sometimes even the unconditional support, of the West.

This dilemma reflects a conflict between the short-term and longer-term interests of Europe's common foreign and security policy. In consistency with its proclaimed objective of integrating the fight against terrorism into its common foreign and security policy, the EU could play a vital role in waging the battle for the hearts and minds of peoples in the Middle East.

For Europe it is of vital importance to neutralize the commonly held view which persists in the Arab world of a West which is only interested in securing its own interests by bolstering authoritarian regimes at the expense of democracy promotion. If this does not happen, the democratisation process in the Middle East – that prudently started more than half a decade ago and got an impulse with the introspection and reflection upon its own responsibilities that started after 9/11 – will again result in anti-Western populism and stimulate the emergence of more intensely anti-Western regimes, so Burhan Ghalioun, director of the Sorbonne's Centre d'Etudes sur l'Orient Contemporain, has warned.

The main CFSP instrument in this regard is the European-Mediterranean Partnership, the so-called Barcelona Process. The dilemma between short term and long term objectives needs to be addressed within this framework, by **enhancing the dynamics of the European-Mediterranean Partnership**, especially in its political, cultural and economic dimensions.

A particular way for overcoming this dilemma is the creation of informal channels between European officials and Arab reformers, of liberal and moderate

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30. *Arab Human Development Report 2004. Towards Freedom in the Arab World.* New York, UNDP, 2005. Burhan Ghalioun was one of the many contributors to this report.

Islamic orientation alike, with the aim of fostering gender empowerment, political freedom, rule of law and civil liberties. In the past, Europe has privileged encounters with liberal reformers. Taking into account that only a very small minority of Islamists are in favour of the violent, confrontational strategy, as endorsed by Osama bin Laden, it might be advisable to take into account broadening the spectrum of potential partners in the region, as some observers have been suggesting as of lately. Most Islamist movements have now accepted democratic norms and principles, while simultaneously adopting a modernist attitude to Islamic law. This tendency is embodied in the Muslim Brothers, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party (PJD) and the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP). They accept the state not only as the framework for their main activity but also as legitimate in itself, thus abandoning fundamentalist views which deny legitimacy to the nation by counter-posing to it the Ummah, the supra-national community of believers.[31]

European engagement with moderate Islamists on democracy promotion in the region is risky for both the EU and the Islamists themselves. Both fear a hidden agenda behind the other's intentions, yet both stand to gain from a systematic dialogue on democracy. As has been argued by El-Din Shahin of the American University in Cairo, an even-handed approach by which Europe is moderately vocal but firm and consistent with the ruling regimes and as consistent and vocal with their Islamist partners as to the respect of the basic rules of democracy, will elevate democracy promotion to have the same salience as social and economic reform.[32] As a first step in exploring this issue, Dr. Ahmed Idrees, the Egyptian-born European Affairs Correspondent of the BBC Arab service in Brussels, has suggested the creation of an **ad-hoc unit of experts on Islamic extremism**, at the disposal of both the Council and the Commission. This unit could help European decision-making by monitoring and analysing the trends and causes of religious extremism in the Muslim and Arab world and present policy recommendations for specific measures.

A specific aspect of the West's involvement with Middle Eastern affairs which is linked to international terrorism, concerns the **peace process between Palestinians and Israelis**. The daily pictures from the Middle East, more than those of any other international tragedy, have kept fuelling the perception within the Muslim world of a hostile West. Over the past years this has led to the political conflict between Palestinians and Israelis being perceived as a religious conflict between Muslims on the one hand and Jews, supported by the Christian West, on the

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31. *Understanding Islamism*. Brussels, International Crisis Group, Middle East/North Africa Report N° 37, 2 March 2005

32. Emad El-Din Shahin, *Political Islam: Ready for Engagement?* Madrid, Fride, Working paper 3, February 2005

other hand.[33] It has driven a wedge between the West and the Islamic world and has thus developed into an ideal rallying cause for both Islamist recruiters and self-recruited jihadists. Ending the conflict between Palestine and Israel will certainly not suffice to halt Islamist terrorism. A renewed effort and a more balanced attitude on the part of the international community with regard to this conflict are nevertheless essential elements for a strategy aimed at conquering the hearts and minds in the Middle East.

Arab reformers, and in particular the authors of the UNDP reports, stress the need for Western support, but reject any direct outside intervention to bring political change upon them.[34] **Iraq** is a case in point. The invasion of Iraq struck a deep chord with many Arab and Muslim people, partly because Baghdad was the seat of the caliphate for several centuries (749-1258 CE), partly because of its location near the heart of the holy places, and partly because it felt like an additional humiliation by its implicit depiction of Arabs as being unable to bring down their own dictators.[35] The Iraq war has probably reinforced the image of a conquering West and has provided – for the time being at least – for an additional jihadi war zone[36] and a potent propaganda tool for (self)recruitment, superseding Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya. As could be expected, Osama bin Laden has tried to capitalise on the war in Iraq, depicting it at the end of 2004 as a central battle in a "Third World War, which the Crusader-Zionist coalition began against the Islamic Nation."[37]

As far as the prospect of democratisation within the Middle East is concerned, within the Arab world, leaders and people alike, Iraq is now probably seen as an example of chaos resulting from imposed change, rather than as a model of democratisation to emulate. From the leaders' perspective, the ease with which Saddam was discarded must have increased their own sense of vulnerability towards their people and their reluctance to pursue the modest endeavours towards political change.

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33. Maurits Berger in: *NRC-Handelsblad*, 27 March 2004

34. *Arab Human Development Report 2003*. New York, UNDP, 2003, p. 27

35. At the 31st session of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in June 2004, departing Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Abdelouahed Belkezziz, spoke of a 'debilitating feeling of impotence', albeit in another context. This expression however captures a mood that is widespread in the Arab world.

36. It should be noted that the number of foreign jihadists in Iraq has always been a matter of contention, with estimates widely diverging. In his testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, on 16 February 2005, Gen. Richard B. Meyers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed the view widely shared among observers that foreign fighters are a fairly small percentage of the total number of insurgents in Iraq, the core being comprised of Sunni Arabs (*Washington Post*, 17 February 2005).

37. Quoted in: Christopher Blanchard, 'Al Qaeda: statements and evolving ideology', in: *CRS Report for Congress*, 4 February 2005

Bridging the global perception gap

Even if the success of an effective counterterrorism strategy essentially rests upon the effectiveness of local actions, where EU levers are mostly indirect, one also has to bear in mind the global dimension, which is composed of the twin characteristics of solidarity and humiliation all Muslim communities nowadays experience. Osama bin Laden was able to exert a heavy imprint, precisely because of these prevalent feelings of humiliation, bitterness and besiegement that were already present within the Muslim world and migrant communities with a Muslim background.

In order to be successful at the local level, action at the global level is also necessary for containing and ultimately rolling back the momentum on which terrorism is thriving today.

The American journalist Thomas Friedman has pointed out that most observers failed to notice a crucial part in an otherwise notorious farewell speech by Malaysian President Mahatir Mohamed at the end of October 2003. Everyone condemned the anti-Semitic fragments, and rightly so, but because of this they missed his lucid diagnosis of the situation within the Muslim world. Mahatir talked about the feelings of humiliation, oppression and hopelessness which are prevalent in the Muslim world today, about the dignity of 1.3 billion Muslims being pushed aside and about the marginalization of Muslim communities all over the world. This, according to Mahatir, gives rise to anger and angry people do not think straight. "The single most underappreciated force in international relations is humiliation," was Friedman's conclusion.[38]

Mohammed Ayoon of Michigan State University makes a similar point: "The common denominator among Islamists (...) is the quest for dignity, a variable often ignored by contemporary political analysts in the West."[39]

The War on Terrorism does not provide for hope, or dignity. It only expresses anger and fear. What is most needed today is a perspective that will help neutralize the feeling of marginalization felt in "that vast and populous section of the world, stretching from the Maghreb through the Middle East and Central Asia into South and South-East Asia and beyond to the Philippines: overpopulated, underdeveloped, being dragged headlong by the West into the post-mod-

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38. Thomas Friedman, 'The Humiliation Factor', in: *New York Times*, 9 November 2003. Sir Michael Howard made a similar analysis in: 'Mistake to declare this a war.' Speech by Michael Howard at the Royal United Services Institute, 31 October 2001
39. Mohammed Ayoob, 'Political Islam: Image and Reality', in: *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2004, pp. 1-14

ern page before they have come to terms with modernity", as Sir Michael Howard, President-Emeritus of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, depicted it.

Since outside intervention rarely produces genuine political change within countries, the main contribution the West can make is helping to create a global environment that facilitates domestic reform and economic growth in the world, thus helping to neutralise the widespread image of a conquering or indifferent West.

Terrorism and security concerns are distracting Western policymakers in the rich countries from long-term development goals and from paying sufficient attention to the sources of insecurity which many outside the West perceive as a greater threat to their own survival than terrorism: civil wars, poverty, disease, organised crime or environmental degradation. Inequitable responses to threats further the perception that what passes for international security is the security of the rich and powerful, as was suggested by the aforementioned High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. In Part I of its December 2004 Report, the Panel points out that:

> "The credibility of any system of collective security also depends on how well it promotes security for all its members, without regard to the nature of would-be beneficiaries, their location, resources or relationship to great Powers."

Inequity is the main characteristic of today's international system: huge disparities in wealth, opportunities, empowerment and participation in (international and national) decision-making, together with an absence of perspectives on how to reduce these inequities. This widely shared perception of global inequity largely explains Osama bin Laden's success in linking disparate local groups under his global banner, pinning the West against the oppressed – much like the end of the 19th century, when a similar environment of global inequity enabled anarchist terrorists to present their attacks in terms broadly analogous to today's jihadi's.

No quick fix exists for rectifying this perception gap. No revitalised public diplomacy effort will do. It can only be addressed by restoring a minimal sense of community at the global level through a long-term effort aimed at the creation of a more just and fair world, built on shared priorities and concerns and founded on institutions, representative of the entire world population and where there is place for the interests and self-esteem of all members. Global

governance, that is how Nader Fergany, the lead author of the Arab Human Development Reports, named this perspective at the 2003 IRRI-KIIB international conference in Brussels on the root causes of international terrorism.[40]

One track the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy could pursue is explicitly advancing the goal of **acting upon the recommendations of the December 2004 Report by the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change** and the **ensuing recommendations** by UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, issued in March 2005 for deliberation and decision by the world leaders during a special Millennium review Summit in September 2005.[41]

Putting this encompassing vision of an inclusive world order at the centre of its CFSP and matching the rhetoric by concrete actions and by toning down the rhetoric that depicts terrorism as the single most important challenge for the whole international community, the EU will contribute to creating the reassuring international environment that will allow reformers in Arab and Muslim countries to be freed from the constant reproach of being mere agents of Western policies, thereby strengthening their ability to deal with the roots of the feelings of resentment, malaise and marginalization in their own countries and to find a way out of the domestic malaise. It will also make it easier to come to grips with the current intra-Islam debates between moderates and extremists – debates non-Muslims can hardly be expected to be successfully involved in.

The *fatwa* by the Islamic Commission of Spain denouncing Osama bin Laden as an apostate, in March 2005, was not widely noticed outside Muslim communities, but is not a trivial matter for these communities. It might force other Muslim authorities to express similar views, thus further de-legitimizing Osama bin Laden's interpretation of Islam and jihad.

Ultimately, the strategy of terror as a solution to the malaise felt by Muslim and migrant communities will prove to be as much a dead-end as it turned out to be for the anarchists when they tried to fight the marginalization of the 19th-century labour movement. None of the causes that al-Qaeda-inspired terrorists are said to pursue will be advanced through this strategy of violence. Quite the contrary is true. This strategy is self-defeating and will ultimately isolate the extremists from the communities in whose name they claim to act. But in order for this to become true as swiftly as possible, the perspective of a more inclusive international agenda and action is necessary. Without this, terrorism will keep on

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40. http://www.irri-kiib.be/speechnotes/terrorism/fergany.pdf
41. *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human right for all.* New York, United Nations, 21 March 2005 (A/59/2005)

smouldering, even after the eventual capture of Osama bin Laden. Only when hope is offered, will the breeding ground for terrorism dry out.