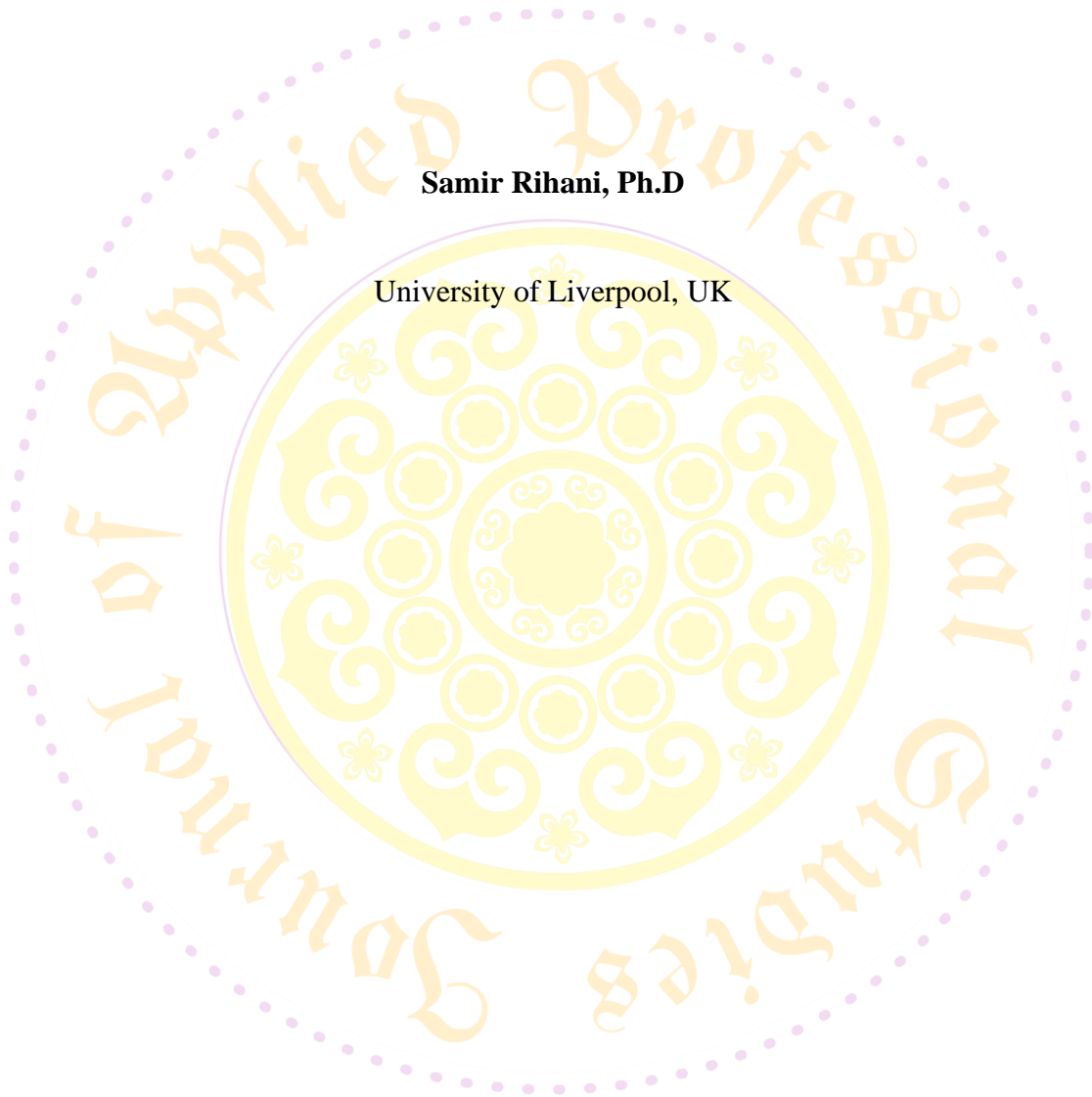


Conflicts, Wars, and Terrorism

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Introduction

Clarity and Objectivity in Place of ‘Smoke and Mirrors.’

Lewis Carroll, famous for his children books, wrote in 1871 ‘Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There’. Alice climbs into the mirror and enters a fantastic world full of perplexing features. Present accounts of terrorism are approaching the high standard of obfuscation set by Carroll’s fairy-tale.

On the face of it terrorism should be easy to understand: violent actions against civilian targets by extremist individuals and groups to intimidate states into changing policies and practices. However, the term has been used, overused, and abused, so often that it has lost much of its credibility. Despite the abundance of definitions, terms such as ‘terrorism’, ‘terrorist’ and ‘insurgent’, etc. are not convincing any more. Countries are put on or taken off the US list of ‘states that sponsor terrorism’ almost haphazardly. Professor Oppenheimer from New York University’s Center for Global Affairs suggested, “Countries that wind up on the list are countries we don’t like.”¹ The list in mid-2015 contained only a handful of countries; not impressive for a supposedly ‘fearsome global threat’!

Reports from the United Nations itself cannot be taken on face value either. For instance, a draft list produced in June 2015 of armies and groups that kill and maim children in conflicts had to be amended to exclude both Israel and Hamas after pressure from the US and Israel. The report had stated that “at least 540 children were killed, another 2,955 wounded... by Israeli airstrikes.” Hamas’ indiscriminate rockets had also caused death and injury to children.²

The matter goes further than just lists. President Clinton, under the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, decided to support groups fighting Saddam’s regime.³ Were these groups ‘terrorist’ organizations? That was certainly the view in Baghdad. Their activities; aimed at effecting policy changes, did kill innocent people. Or was the US supporting ‘freedom fighters’, as it did in Afghanistan in the case of the ‘Mujahedeen’ who later evolved into Al-Qaeda ‘terror organization’? This old debate has not been resolved. Subjectivity and academic rigor do not sit well.

US Code (§ 2331) defines international and domestic terrorism as activities undertaken by individuals and groups, but excludes actions by states. The atrocity of 9/11 in New York, and murders by Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Taliban are examples that fall well within this definition. However, infringements by the Egyptian, Syrian and Israeli governments against protesters, to cite a few examples, are excluded as acts of terrorism. Going further afield, was Pol Pot a terrorist? His Khmer Rouge killed a minimum of 1.5 million people in Cambodia.⁴ He is not a terrorist according to the accepted definitions of terrorism, but simply a tyrannical ruler who intimidated a whole nation into submission. There were acts during the Vietnam War that were difficult to distinguish from sheer terrorism but they are also excluded from the standard definitions!⁵

To add to the confusion, anomalies multiply when it comes to individuals said to have been involved in terrorism. For example, four ‘terrorists’ were later awarded the Nobel Peace prize; Sean MacBride, Menachem Begin, Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela.⁶ In recent years ‘terrorists’ from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) have been rehabilitated and are now part of the government in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. When does a ‘terrorist’ stop being one?

Other pressing questions remain unanswered. Is terrorism acceptable under certain circumstances? Does it only become real terrorism when Muslims; especially those from the Middle East and Africa are involved? Who decides? Terrorism is a global phenomenon but the ‘World’s focus’ appears to be fixed primarily on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This cannot be explained by ‘lack of information’. “In its 2013 Country Reports on Terrorism (issued in April 2014), the State Department stated that the majority of terrorist attacks in the Western Hemisphere were committed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).”⁷

The key topic of terrorism is bedeviled, therefore, not only by definitional ambiguities but also by subjective overlays imposed by regional and global geopolitical considerations. Remedies are difficult to formulate under these circumstances in which the problem cannot be described clearly. Terrorism and Counterterrorism are Two sides of the Same Coin.

The above focus on the Islamic and Middle Eastern dimensions has resulted in a number of peculiarities. That sector of terrorism has been elevated to the status of a global, rather than a local, matter of concern. Furthermore, it has turned into an issue that merits a multinational military response. The exaggerated scale and the associated military response have given birth to a counterterrorism industry which now embraces a large private sector element.

A serious matter that involves a complex mix of political, economic, historic, religious and ethnic components has been oversimplified into a battle between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ to be settled through mainly military combat. Reconciliation and addressing underlying causes, as in the case of Ireland, South Africa, and Spain are not on offer in this case. The way forward it was decided was clear: ‘counterterrorism’ driven by private/ public forces deployed in far off locations. The era of ‘endless war’ is here, as discussed later.

Several authorities on security and terrorism, including Professor Jackson (Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, Otago University, New Zealand), have challenged such myopic views of terrorism.⁸ He argued that actions by states and their agencies must be included in the way terrorism acts are reported and analyzed. He added significantly, “...the terrorism label is applied almost solely to non-state groups opposed to Western interests.”

George W Bush did much to promote current ideas about ‘Islamic terrorism’. He identified the ‘villains’ in this way: “They hate progress, and freedom, and choices, and culture, and music, and laughter, and women, and Christians, and Jews, and all Muslims who reject their distorted doctrines.”⁹ That was in 2001. Viewed in that light, it was difficult to see how such awful people could be persuaded to change their ways. The ‘War on Terror’ became an obvious policy choice. That war did not yield tangible results. Twelve painful years later, in 2013, Michael Sheehan, assistant secretary of defense for special operations told a US Senate hearing the war against terrorists will last at least ten to twenty more years.¹⁰

The endless nature of the process was predictable and is now firmly established. This was recognized by the report from the Baker Institute for Public Policy mentioned earlier. Violent counterterrorism generates its own counter thrust. Some of the Muslims caricatured by Bush refused to change into Westernized model citizens. Their numbers multiplied. Western governments are supposedly perplexed by the increasing ease with which young people are being radicalized. Viewed dispassionately the explanation is almost obvious. Destructive wars, drone attacks that sometimes kill innocent civilians and terrorists alike, and widespread destabilizing 'counterterrorism' activities are powerful recruitment tools especially when viewed by impressionable young persons. Radicalization is made easy by 'counterterrorism'!

Doubts about the utility of military force as a means to eradicate terrorism are fully justified. Independent observers regularly highlight the harm of confronting terrorism as war. Britain's Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, for instance called for a more sensible approach in a speech in July 2015 and referred in particular to the negative consequences resulting from calls by some officials to 'kill' Islamic terrorists.¹¹ Naturally, his views run counter to those advocated by the heavily privatized counterterrorism industry but that is only to be expected.

The mutually reinforcing coexistence between terrorism and militarized counterterrorism in the Middle East and North Africa (and other parts of Africa) is now unmistakable and augments the concept of 'endless war'. Certainly in the case of MENA this unhealthy partnership rather than 'terrorism' as such are the problems of the age that must be challenged forcefully and publicly.

The Blame Game in 'Terrorism'

Two principal actors feature high in the blame game: the USA and 'political Islam'. To a degree both aspects are not fully right or totally wrong. An effort must be made to go beyond that simplistic formulation to understand terrorism and deal with it effectively.

The USA does not have a monopoly over creating conditions that encourage terrorism in MENA and elsewhere. For instance, to some Israelis most Palestinians are terrorists. "We do not negotiate with terrorists" seemed a moral standpoint that justified permanent stalemate. On the other hand, to some Palestinians most Israelis are terrorists. The futility of negotiation became a sensible policy that has lasted for decades. The outcome is a permanent state of mutual distrust and instability.

Other powers have had, and some continue to have, a role to play in instability and violence. The USSR invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and groups soon emerged to resist the occupying forces. Leaders for these groups were recruited mainly from Muslim countries, and especially Wahhabi Saudi Arabia. Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China, in addition to the US, supported the groups, which they called 'Mujahedeen'.¹² That changed later when the Mujahedeen morphed into Taliban and al-Qaeda 'terrorists' lead to US entry into Afghanistan in 2001. The USA was admittedly involved but at that early stage it was presumably difficult to see where the process was to lead in future.

The Iraq war of 2003 and the uprisings in Syria and Libya were admittedly partly to blame for the emergence of intra-Islamic feuds and ultimately to the appearance of the Islamic State. However, IS was supported and funded by some Gulf sources and others from the region and beyond possibly

in response to Iran's rise as a Shiite power. The same is true of those fighting against the Assad regime in Syria. Russia, Turkey, and others are closely involved in that conflict. Shiite Iran also supports the Assad government and in that context funds and arms groups in Syria, Iraq, and the Lebanon.

In truth, the terrorism phenomenon in MENA is not new and predates US emergence as the latest hegemonic power. As mentioned earlier, there was conflict in 1860 between Druze and Christians in Syria (which included The Lebanon at the time) that resulted in some 11,000 deaths in Damascus and Beirut. The Ottoman authorities, it was said, encouraged the conflict, while France and Britain exploited it. There is nothing new there!

Muslim on Muslim violence is in full flow without any US or other powers intervention. To leaders of the Gulf States, for instance, anyone who challenges their right to rule is a 'terrorist' that must be eliminated at the first opportunity. At the time of writing there were 'terrorism' wars raging in Yemen, Syria, Libya, and of course Iraq with or without US involvement.

Political Islam, largely cited in the blame game, is a rallying flag rather than a primary agent. If one is not too fastidious about facts then the prevailing narrative on terrorism might seem plausible: Islam and conflict seem to be intertwined. This, however, leads to inevitable questions: is this caused by some intrinsic glitch in Islam that preordains Muslims to internecine vicious quarrels? Is this a recent development? Is it divorced from local, regional, and global geopolitics?

Even superficial analysis of these questions quickly dents the carefully constructed idea about the linkage between Islam and 'terrorism', to reveal a much simpler but no less worrying reality. Dr. Motadel, a Cambridge University historian, gave a vivid picture of intrigues in the Middle East by various powers; including Russia, the Ottomans, Britain, Germany, and the USA, utilizing factions of both Christianity and Islam to gain power and influence.¹³ Several papers in Antonius' 'The Arab Awakening' are devoted to detailed description of intrigues by Germany and the Britain to entice Arab and Muslim leaders to declare Jihad on this or that side of the conflict in WWI. The USA is only the latest participant in this game.

But Motadel's and Antonius' thorough surveys are themselves incomplete. Cooley (2005: 7-22) recounted a vivid history of conflict in the Middle East between ancient Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Hebrew dynasties that predated Islam by centuries.¹⁴ Moving closer to modern times, the conflict between the Ottomans (now replaced by Sunni Turkey) and Persians (now represented by Shiite Iran) was both lengthy and brutal and it continues to this day. The animosity is, and has always been, about political and economic power using the two Islamic schools as convenient rallying causes. Political Islam is simply a convenient diversion.

British and French colonialists were new, relative latecomers, and US entry in the context of MENA's long history is only a recent development. Record of the British and French in the region was riddled with efforts to 'divide and rule' through accentuating religious and other fissures. As mentioned earlier, George Antonius published his book on 'The Arab Awakening' in 1938 and any serious researcher examining present day painful conflicts, wrongly treated as mainly terrorism, could not gain full understanding of the subject without reading that record.¹⁵ Basically, MENA is a region that offers a kaleidoscope of ethnic, religious, historic, and social factors that

cannot be redesigned quickly by the application of brute force, as the 2003 Iraq war amply demonstrated.

Admittedly, the US and its allies adopted divisive policies after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. They favored Shiites and Kurds over Sunnis. The British during the twentieth century favored Sunnis over Shiites. The principle was the same. Dr K Haseeb, a past Governor of the Central Bank of Iraq, recounted that The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) set up to rule Iraq after that war “never used the term Iraqi people...[preferred] ‘Kurds’, ‘Arabs’, ‘Sunnis’, ‘Shias’, etc.” He added that, “Of the different prime ministers who took office between 1920 and 2003, eight were Shia and four were Kurds. Out of eighteen military chiefs of staff, eight were Kurds...Out of the fifty-five people on the “Wanted List” that the occupying authority published, thirty-one were Shia.”¹⁶ Despite all these facts constant repetition entrenched sectarian divisions that now assail Iraq with widespread so-called ‘terrorist’ activity.

However, much of the divisive push was locally generated and could not have achieved traction without a receptive environment. Local leaders seeking power played an enthusiastic role in this destructive project. To blame the current turbulence wholly on external interference and on Political Islam is not only wrong but would lead to equally mistaken prescriptions based on the military policies now advocated by the US and Europe to the ‘problem of Islamic terrorism’.

The current view of ‘terrorism’ in MENA asserts, wrongly, that Islam is becoming political. This is an odd viewpoint. Islam is and has always been political. There is nothing unusual or sinister about this. The position of Caliph has always been understood to mean ‘ruler’ in addition to any other religious connotations. Significantly, the schism between Sunnis and Shiites was from the start strictly political rather than doctrinal. Moreover, almost all religions are political. Judaism is accepted readily as an inevitable political feature of the State of Israel. Politics in Christianity hardly requires elaboration. Anyone in doubt about this should read the following Papal encyclicals:

Pope Leo XIII *Rerum Novarum* (1891): dealing with capital and labour.

Pope Pius XI *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931): focusing on reconstruction of social order.

Pope John XXIII *Mater et Magistra* (1961): addressing social and political progress.

Pope Francis in the latest encyclical (*Laudato Si*) issued in June 2015 “called for a new global political authority tasked with “tackling ... the reduction of pollution and the development of poor countries and regions”. His appeal echoed that of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who in a 2009 encyclical proposed a kind of super-UN to deal with the world’s economic problems and injustices.”¹⁷ These are wise words that will be reflected in the concluding remarks to this paper. Terrorism is not unique to Islam and it has little to do with religion; a point that merits constant repetition. The conflict between Muslim Sunnis and Shiites was and is over politics and power.

Researcher and author Karen Armstrong; for a time a Roman Catholic nun, wrote a history of Islam that highlights this very point perfectly.¹⁸ ‘Political Islam’ is inappropriate as an explanation or motivation for ‘terrorism’ and violence in MENA and elsewhere. ‘Politics’ of the domestic and external varieties would be a more accurate interpretation. That again has to be understood to avoid reaching wrong conclusions.

Why has Conflict, and Terrorism, Intensified in MENA Recently?

That is easy to answer. The region is undergoing changes of tectonic proportions that other areas in Europe and elsewhere have undergone in the past and with equally devastating levels of violence and pain. The changes are social, economic and political. These are being given expression to some extent by a persistent drive by some factions and interests aimed at fragmenting a number of MENA countries beyond that achieved by the colonial powers at the end of World War I. Whether this is generated by desires from within or imposed by external powers is difficult to establish but that does not alter the consequences much. Creation of the smaller units is presently mediated by focus on sectarian and ethnic divisions. As revealed after the 2003 war on Iraq, the civil war in Syria, and the chaos after the departure of Gaddafi from Libya, the concept of nationality in some parts of MENA; based on past borders, is under scrutiny. Domestic leaders eager to acquire power and wealth are not necessarily against the process. Five countries are expected by some observers to dissolve into fourteen smaller states offering enticing opportunities for aspiring local leaders.¹⁹ Seen in the context of competing regional and global powers out to promote their agendas, fragmentation makes sense. Iran has interests in parts of Iraq and in Bahrain where Shiites comprise the majority of the population. It has an interest in Syria as it offers access to the Mediterranean. Saudi Arabia, some Gulf States, and Turkey have their own interests in the Sunni majority areas. The Kurds have understandable nationalist aspirations that they wish to bring to fruition. Once the desires of powers external to the region are added, the push to fragment becomes clear.

Clearly, there many within the countries affected that believe in national unity and still recall the days when the borders were hardly questionable. Furthermore, there are others who strongly favour closer integration between Arab nations into one unit that would be a home for all ethnic and religious groups. On the other hand, fragmentation involves ethnic and religious cleansing on a large scale. It is far from clear which way the region would go. Hence, MENA is expected be in a condition of utter turbulence for many decades while a new structure takes shape. Acts of violence, abuse of human rights, mass movement of refugees, and yes some terrorism, is an inevitable outcome. At the moment this depressing prospect seems unavoidable unless urgent and constructive action is taken to ameliorate the effects of what is going on.

It must be said that the project to fragment the region is not a secret conspiracy and the painful consequences are known and deemed to be acceptable to external promoters as well as to local beneficiaries. Several commentators have attributed the resulting chaos to US confused policies. Thomas E Ricks' in 'Fiasco, as an example, mentions "deceit", "stupidity", and "total intellectual failure" and more besides.²⁰ Others, especially authors from MENA, argue that subdividing Arab states into small ineffectual units is designed to promote Israeli interests. They often quote a document attributed to Oded Yinon titled 'A Strategy for Israel in the Nineteen Eighties'.

Irrespective of intention, references to a 'New Middle East' have appeared repetitively in public pronouncements. Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State at the time, presented a vision of a 'New Middle East' in June 2006.²¹ Her statement was made in Tel Aviv at a time when Israel was in a full-scale attack on the Lebanon following similar action in Gaza. She explained that what was happening in the Lebanon was simply the "birth pangs" associated with forces unleashed by "constructive chaos" that would propel the whole Middle East into a new era. The rest is history.

Chaos, loss of governance, and associated proliferation of extremist groups that sprouted in the absence of states are now in full evidence in MEAN and other parts of Africa.

Evidently Condoleezza Rice was unimpressed by the resulting turmoil and violence that in some cases was and is straightforward terrorism. If MENA were to be reshaped then one cannot escape the inevitable (but seemingly acceptable) consequences. This is not an isolated viewpoint. Shortly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the newly arrived administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), Paul Bremer, had his first orders from Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense, Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and Wolfowitz, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense. The order was straightforward: dismantle the Iraqi state “even if implementing it caused administrative inconvenience.” (Bremer 2006: 39).²² “Constructive chaos” was on the menu and it was an inevitable and acceptable result! It is intriguing why there is so much fuss now about terrorism, Islamic State, etc. It must be underlined that new, and in some cases imported, local leaders participated in the process most enthusiastically. Viewed in this perspective, it is difficult to see what all the frenetic concern in the West about terrorism is about.

It was revealed in 2015 that dismissed senior officers of the Iraqi Army were heavily involved in the creation of the Islamic State.²³ Some of the officers and ‘insurgents’ were imprisoned together in Camp Bucca in southern Iraq after the 2003 invasion. There they planned their future activities. Among those held was one Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi later to become the leader of the Islamic State.²⁴ It is fruitless to speculate about whether this was done through naivety or as part of an ingenuous conspiracy. The significant point for the present purpose is that as an inevitable consequential conflict has erupted in Iraq as it arose in Afghanistan before and in Syria, Libya and Yemen later on. Much of the predictable violence; of which there is plenty, has no relation to spontaneous ‘terrorism’ as understood traditionally.

Geopolitical reengineering exercised by external forces results in conflict, violence, and terrorism. Zbigniew Brzezinski, US national security advisor in president Carter’s administration made a telling observation in 2002 in this context: “It is as if terrorism is suspended in outer space as an abstract phenomenon, with ruthless terrorists acting under some Satanic inspiration unrelated to any specific motivation.” He added, “The rather narrow, almost one-dimensional definition of the terrorist threat favored by the Bush administration ... has been both expedient and convenient.”²⁵ The Washington Post expressed the situation well in April 2015: “The state as we know it is vanishing in the Middle East. Strife in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen, foreign intrusion from states within the region and outside it, and dreadful rule by self-serving elites have all contributed to the destruction of societies, infrastructure and systems of governance. Nonstate actors of all kinds, most of them armed, are emerging to run their own shows.”²⁶ To call that terrorism is to miss the point completely. As stated earlier, terrorism is an outcome and not a primary phenomenon.

Remorseful Era of Endless War

The strong link between terrorism and counterterrorism that relies on military force which now includes profit seeking private sector partners has an inevitable outcome: endless war. President Dwight Eisenhower warned in a farewell address to the American people in 1961 of the growing significance of the military-industrial complex. Having gained much power during the Second World War, the complex was in danger of being out of balance with the rest of government. Far

from diminishing in importance the complex has grown exponentially since 9/11. It has re-emerged as the military-industrial-homeland security complex. Growth is founded to a large extent on and driven by private sector participation. Naturally, this new complex is now on the lookout for new targets. It profits from terrorism, real or imagined. As the USA begins to count the costs (financial and others) of recent wars and attempts to move away from the path of formal wars the outcome of the conflict in public policy terms between that and the needs of the companies involved in counterterrorism would assume critical significance to MENA.

The contest between the two policy options is on a huge scale. In the Prologue to his book 'Pay Any Price', James Risen provides a vivid picture of the colossal dimensions of the modern security complex. He wrote, "There were more than 1,200 government organizations and nearly 2,000 private companies working on counterterrorism, homeland security, and intelligence programs."²⁷ He also reported that related wars since 9/11 cost an estimated \$4 trillion. It is significant that Part III of Risen's book is titled "Endless War". Just as important, Risen made the statement that "The level of resources devoted to fighting terrorism still remains out of proportion to the actual threat level posed by terrorism."²⁸ The scale of private sector entanglement became clear when it was found that US private contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan outnumbered US soldiers! Counterterrorism in MENA and similar locations is now an essential source of profits and employment. The debate between the administration and lobbies that support the security complex is expected to be on a monumental scale. The matter will assume greater force as the presidential election comes closer.

Profits come at a price. There is concern that young people are being 'radicalized' and taken to MENA and parts of Africa to commit acts of terror. The concern is that they might, if they survive long enough, go back to their countries of origin to undertake similar actions. The phenomenon is based on a number of requirements. First, some young people are sufficiently amenable for radicalization that they are ready to leave their safe homes to go abroad to endure massive hardships in order to kill and be killed. Second, that radicalizers have a convincing case to sell. And finally, those behind the radicalizers have sophisticated organization, sufficient resources, and influence that allow new recruits to travel freely to places of action that might be thousands of miles away. Something is fundamentally wrong for all the above requirements to be met! 'Counterterrorism' and the destruction and hatred it creates have a major role in making this possible.

Western countries are understandably worried about radicalization despite all the money and other resources devoted to military counterterrorism. After years of that effort the situation has gone from bad to worse. The war in Syria against the Assad government attracted more than 20,000 volunteers who came from many countries to join resistance groups and, later, the Islamic State. More than 3000 came from Western countries according to the National Counter-Terrorism Centre. However, early in the process those who went to fight against the Assad regime were virtually encouraged to go to Syria. Turkey facilitated their entry into Syria through porous borders and funding was forthcoming from certain compliant Gulf states! In the summer of 2015 the picture started to change. Behind the scenes discussions between the USA, Russia and Iran seem to offer a glimmer of hope that a peaceful way forward might be found after years of pain for the Syrians, refugees that are now in full scale attack on Europe, and fear from returning 'jihadists'.

An intriguing dimension has been added to the story of terrorism. The Islamic State, supposedly a terrorist organization hated by one and all, has all the characteristics of a functioning state. It buys and sells oil, runs courts of law of sorts, has it seems sophisticated local government departments, and has access to international banking services without much difficulty. Its fighters not only capture sophisticated weapons but also manage to use them effectively! Intriguingly, the government in Baghdad sends money to IS to pay salaries and pensions of civil servants. Even more intriguing, a video released in 2015 purported to show the key supply road for IS between Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria open to traffic without it seems threat from Kurdish fighters or 'coalition' air forces! Nothing is certain when it comes to information about IS but it is a mystery that IS is able to continue to move forces and materials almost unhindered. All this comes about despite the existence of a massive counterterrorism apparatus.

For the present it seems Islamic State is able to continue to exist while billions are spent on actions designed to destroy it. It is possible to speculate that this fluid condition could last for years enabling remunerative counter measures; involving private sector providers, to continue to prosper into the future. Conversely, resolution of the Syrian crisis (presumably welcomed by Russia and Iran) might well present an opportunity to make some progress in Iraq in favour of reconciliation between different Islamic factions (possibly to be welcomed by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states). These speculations show that 'terrorism through the looking glass' is an obvious and justified concept: nothing can be taken on face value. Terrorism is a minor strand in a highly intricate multi-layered tapestry.

Terrorism, therefore, is not a simple activity but a complex system with many interacting elements. It is created and driven by diverse actions; most of which did not intend to generate such an outcome. Equally, its growth or decline would depend on actions that might not have an obvious link to counterterrorism. If the world community were prepared to accept actions that are now known to generate terrorism then it is quite possible that the terrorism threat is not as pressing as governments' pronouncements make out. As suggested in the next section this might not be an outrageous idea as terrorism, especially confined to a few far off locations, might be considered a serious but not critical threat. Conversely, if it is a key issue of concern then tools that are appropriate for such complex phenomena should be adopted.

How Significant is the 'Terrorism' Threat?

This is not an easy topic to consider rationally. Any death caused by violence is significant. Innocent people murdered or maimed by terrorist actions could not be dismissed as being numerically unimportant. Reasonably, every terrorist action, especially when it involves Western citizens, immediately hits the headlines with demands for action and promises of determined response. In addition, a few countries are being devastated by violence that includes a large measure of terrorism. Events in these locations are regularly; and rightly, in the news. Nonetheless, it is possible that the 'security industry' has a powerful incentive to exaggerate the threat globally. As mentioned earlier, terrorist groups welcome this publicity as it helps in fundraising and recruitment.

On the other hand, innocent people are killed due to many causes. In 2015, the co-pilot of a Germanwings plane killed 149 when he crashed the plane in what was thought to be an intention

to commit suicide. After a period of genuine grieve and re-examination of procedures travelers and airlines went back to their normal practices. Similarly over one million people worldwide die in road traffic accidents. Cars and lorries are not banned from roads. Homicides in the USA cause infinitely more deaths than the very few killed by terrorist actions, by American citizens and others. Guns are not banned as a result. By popular decision they are accepted as desirable and acceptable. The loss, awful as it is, is assumed to be unavoidable. It is, therefore, possible to consider the death of innocent people rationally and to select appropriate countermeasures without turning the topic into an emotionally driven 'war'. More to the point, it is critically important not to allow the use of force to dominate the debate and divert attention from other more fruitful lines of action.

It is helpful to draw a clear distinguishing line between terrorism and lawlessness caused by competition over power by domestic and external groups in the absence of effective state structures. However, even reports that do not make that distinction suggest that in relative terms the high significance of the terrorism threat is questionable. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2014 published for the Institute for Economics and Peace reported "Over 80 per cent of the lives lost to terrorist activity in 2013 occurred in only five countries - Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria. Another 55 countries recorded one or more deaths from terrorist activity."²⁹ The Executive summary to the report pointed out that terrorism is "... relatively small when compared to the 437,000 people killed by homicides in 2012, this being 40 times greater."

Apart from putting the terrorist threat into better perspective, the GTI report discussed correlation between terrorism and other factors: "From thousands of socio-economic, governance and attitudinal variables analyzed, three groupings of indicators show a multivariate significant relationship with the GTI:

- Political stability
- Intergroup cohesion
- Legitimacy of the state"

Afghanistan illustrates the above links to perfection. Basically, lawlessness and instability are often loosely identified as terrorism. Anand Gopal penned a revealing book about Afghanistan: 'No Good Men Among the Living'.³⁰ He chronicled events from the Soviet invasion in 1979 to recent times through the experiences of ordinary Afghans. In the process he exposed an entirely new facet to terrorism and counterterrorism. It seems that within months of the US invasion in 2001 Taliban leaders tried to surrender. Most handed their weapons to local tribal elders and to US authorities. On 7 December 2001 "...Karzai and the Americans occupied Mullah Omar [leader of the Taliban] home and announced the official end of the Taliban regime as crowds celebrated in Kabul and other cities across Afghanistan." (Gopal 2014: 48) The terrorists had all decamped or abandoned the cause "yet US Special Forces were on Afghan soil with a clear political mandate to defeat terrorism...How do you fight a war without an adversary?" (Gopal 2014: 109). The solution was simple. Without a strong central government local entrepreneurs exploited the opportunity to make vast fortunes in contracts to US and coalition forces. In return, these warlords provided 'intelligence'; mainly information against their local competitors; even when these were supporters of Karzai and his government. This it seems suited US forces: ready supply of 'terrorists' were found, arrested, often tortured, and some eventually shipped to Guantanamo.

The situation could have been comical had it not been for the catastrophic effects on the individuals concerned and Afghans in general. "Dr. Hafizullah, Zurmat's first governor, had ended up in Guantanamo because he crossed Police Chief Mujahed. Mujahed wound up in Guantanamo because he crossed the Americans. Security chief Naim found himself in Guantanamo because of an old rivalry with Mullah Qassim. Qassim eluded capture, but an unfortunate soul with the same name ended up in Guantanamo in his place. And a subsequent feud left Samoud Khan, another pro-American commander, in Bagram prison, while a boy [caught in the same raid] was shipped to Guantanamo." (Gopal 2014: 138) At twelve years old he was believed to be the prison's youngest inmate!

Donald Rumsfeld, US secretary of defense, described these people, including the boys, and other Guantanamo inmates as "hard-core, well-trained terrorists" and "among the most dangerous, best-trained, vicious killers on the face of the Earth."³¹ Was Rumsfeld right? There was, and is, much killing and violence in Afghanistan and later in Iraq and Somalia, and now (in 2015) in Syria, Nigeria, Libya, and Yemen. The basic question is whether it is strictly terrorism. Certainly in Afghanistan from end of 2001 onwards much of the fighting was between warlords driven by little more than the quest for wealth and influence with active participation by 'counterterrorism' agencies eager to find targets to fight.

Conditions in Iraq are almost identical to Afghanistan. Once the 2003 war was over and the Iraqi state, including the army, dismantled the occupying authorities handed power over to a collection of people driven by thirst for power and wealth and, in some cases, a large measure of fanatical association with certain sects of Islam. In the resulting chaos the Kurds used the opportunity to promote their national aspirations and Sunni Muslims sought to advance their own hopes. Islamic State in Iraq was a natural outcome. It is undoubtedly a terrorist organization but it is also a political entity. The two facets need to be disentangled and dealt with appropriately.

The situation after the 2011 removal from power of Gaddafi in Libya following active military participation by NATO, US and other regional and European powers shows precisely the same traits. The pattern seems to be to remove admittedly awful leaders after which the military powers that brought about the change step aside and leave the stage to armed groups and militias to create mayhem as well as commit at times terrorist acts. There are at the time of writing two main factions in Libya. One controls Tobruk which is said to have the backing of Egypt and some Gulf states. Supporters claim they are fighting against Political Islam and fundamentalism. The other group controls the previous capital Tripoli and Misurata. Reportedly, Turkey and one or two Gulf states, support this faction. In the absence of a functioning state the field is open to armed gangs to fight it out. As always, there is no shortage of weapons.³² Is what is going on in Libya terrorism or general lawlessness? Clearly, it is both but the terrorist angle is a secondary issue. It is futile to seek to solve the terrorist problem without first addressing the larger political economic problem. Yemen is the latest addition to the list of failed Middle East and North Africa states devastated by military interventions, lack of state structure, and all-out war between heavily armed militias. This, as in other cases, presents a perfect environment for recruitment of impressionable young people to join the fight that in turn leads to acts of violence and intimidation and the growth of migrants and refugees fleeing the scene. The environment is ideal for some people to commit terrorist acts.³³ At the time of writing, Europe is preoccupied with 'the problem of refugees' and 'the problem of terrorism' as if these are events in separate silos.

As stated earlier, any death or injury is unacceptable but in relative terms terrorism's impact is low in comparison to other causes of death and injury. There continues to be some specific terrorist incidents throughout the world and these are concentrated in a few locations. For instance the Park Palace Guest House in Kabul was attacked in May 2015 and over ten people were killed in that incident. Similarly, Taliban terrorists attacked the Afghan parliament in June 2015 and one woman and one child were killed in addition to all the attackers. In the same month Tunisia suffered a massive terrorist attack. On 17 August 2015 a bomb in Bangkok killed 20 and injured 120 people. Outbreaks of terrorist violence are also in evidence in Iraq especially against religious targets. The same is happening in Nigeria and Somalia. As mentioned above these are awful crimes (and are rightly being investigated energetically to find the criminals who committed them) but in relative terms they do not amount to much. They tend to deflect attention from broader issues that afflict MENA and some other parts of the world that merit urgent attention.

In the West, terrorist incidents and terrorist deaths are extremely rare. Attacks on the scale of 9/11 are unique. Beyond that event, 'Islamic terrorism' is hardly known. There are sporadic terrorist attacks but these are almost wholly committed by local people and relate to domestic issues. They are significant by their infrequency. The picture in the United Kingdom is the same. There were a few 'Islamic terrorism' events but these were and are insignificant when compared to actions by Irish and Scottish terrorists and these themselves have reduced to almost nothing in recent years.³⁴ There have been numerous warnings from spokesmen and women in the US administration and its extensive security forces of widespread and dastardly terrorist attacks by operatives already in the USA. Actual attacks failed to materialize. One reasonable explanation, suggested Professor John Mueller, "...is that almost no terrorists exist in the United States and few have the means or the inclination to strike from abroad."³⁵ Mueller added, "True, there have been no terrorist incidents in the United States in the last five years. But nor were there any in the five years before the 9/11 attacks, at a time when the United States was doing much less to protect itself."

Steve Chapman wrote, in 2014 in the Chicago Tribune, "Terror has fed the FBI's growth." He added, "We could win the war on terrorism. But end it? No danger of that."³⁶ That is now the dilemma facing the world in general and the West in particular. There is a consistent push to overplay the terrorist threat to aid the counterterrorism industry but once the subject is looked at in a dispassionate objective manner the threat shrinks to a mildly serious but not critical issue. Conversely, there are massive problems of insecurity and violence throughout MENA and beyond. These problems are in need of urgent attention and solutions that must go well beyond the failed ones of military action, as discussed later.

To summarize: in 2013 there were about 10,000 terrorist incidents worldwide resulting in about 18,000 fatalities. Compared with other causes of death and injury that might not be huge but the situation is undoubtedly unacceptable especially to those living in the few locations affected. Iraq accounted for 35.4 per cent of deaths followed by Afghanistan at 17.3 per cent and Pakistan at 13.1 per cent.³⁷ The reader would have noted that these are the very areas where the US and its allies have been waging military campaigns and more specifically a "war on terror" for decades! The parody of the chicken and the egg springs to mind here!

Terrorism, therefore, has to be seen in its proper perspective; away from the hype created jointly by terrorists and the vast organizations that have been created ostensibly to fight them. This and

other features addressed in this paper, reveal misconceptions that tend to encourage more terrorism and consign present counter efforts to predictable failure. This has been obvious for years which prompted me almost ten years ago, in November 2006, to post an article on my website titled 'Exploding the Myths of Terrorism'.³⁸ That article pointed out anomalies; relating to definition, scale, impact of counter policies, and factors that generate further terrorism activities. These points were being discussed even earlier than 2006 and they continue to be considered at present. The most pressing need at present is to identify and then discontinue domestic, regional and global policies that introduce so much confusion into the important subject of terrorism.

Iraq's Inevitable Rise to the Summit

Iraq now occupies the unenviable top slot of countries afflicted by terrorism. It is instructive to trace its decline to that lowly position and to demonstrate the predictable inevitability of the whole process. The sorry saga demonstrates that it is possible to create terrorism where none was there before. This would seem to be an odd concept in a world where it is assumed that most people and governments are united in their antagonism to terrorism and terrorists. It is not suggested here that any particular government or group knowingly set out to create terrorism. The process is infinitely subtler and more indirect than that. At its most basic level, the activity concerns decisions that are deemed desirable for whatever reason but which would have the effect of generating terrorist actions. These decisions were regularly implemented unhesitatingly as Iraq's recent history shows. A report titled 'Why Did the United States Invade Iraq? A Survey of International Relations and Foreign Policy Scholars' revealed the tangled web of uncertainties that still surround the motivations for the invasion.³⁹ The report suggests that private sector organizations (and persons) that are now involved in counterterrorism were active in the decisions taken at that time.

Examination of the motivations and considerations that led to the invasion of Iraq by the USA and its allies including Britain is proving to be somewhat difficult. An inquiry; the Chilcot Iraq Inquiry, was set up in July 2009. Six full years later the public in Britain is still waiting for its report. At the time of writing there is a storm; especially by those who lost loved ones in the conflict, about the delay by members of the Inquiry are adamant that they cannot set a date for publication.

The route by which Iraq, a country that presented hardly any terrorist activity previously, replaced Afghanistan at the top of the terrorism league was relentless. A sensible starting point would be the Gulf War (August 1990 to February 1991). The effects of the intensive bombing were immediately obvious even before the sanctions that followed had time to bite. A UN mission sent to Iraq in early March 1991 to assess the damage reported that the country "has, for some time to come, been relegated to a pre-industrial age."⁴⁰ That is precisely what James Baker, as Secretary of State, had promised! The process of dismantling Iraq as a functioning entity was unmistakable. Every aspect of the factors that define UNDP's Human Development Index suffered drastic decline, including education, health, and employment. All Iraqis, with the possible exception of Saddam and his close associates, felt the impact. Antagonism against all invading forces was unavoidable. Iraq began to change from an outward looking country into an inward looking society focused on hate and injustice committed by foreign forces.

The next catastrophe was not long in coming. The UN Security Council imposed punitive sanctions on Iraq in 1991. They lasted until 2003. Their impact became indistinguishable from genocide,

according to Denis Halliday who resigned in protest in 1998 as UN Assistant Secretary General.⁴¹ The sanctions, which were applied with brutal force, were comprehensive and included food and medicines in addition to almost everything else. Inevitably, babies and young children were the first victims. It is generally accepted that several hundred thousand children lost their lives as a result. Madeleine Albright, US ambassador to UN, said in May 1996 “we think the price is worth it.” Iraqis were not so sanguine.

The crippling effects of the sanctions attracted concern not only from those outside the UN but also from its senior employees. Halliday broke a long collective silence but then Hans von Sponeck, who had succeeded him as humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, resigned. “How long,” he asked, “should the civilian population of Iraq be exposed to such punishment for something they have never done?” Two days later, Jutta Burghardt, head of the World Food Program in Iraq, resigned, as she could not tolerate what was being done to Iraqis by UN agencies.

The UN Security Council was accused of genocide but it is possible to suggest that the UN became for a while a terrorist organization. A whole civilian population was under attack in the hope that they would depose Saddam. However, to Iraqis at large hate and grievance were extended to include the UN. Shortly after the 2003 invasion, when Saddam’s iron grip disappeared, the hotel that the UN Envoy in Iraq used as his headquarters was attacked, on 19 August 2003, by terrorists who killed him and other staff in the building. With the dismantling of the state and the army and the focus on sectarian divisions the slide into violence quickly and surely descended to what is seen today. As mentioned earlier in the paper, in issuing their order to their administrator in Iraq the senior Bush officials were aware their actions would cause “administrative inconvenience.” Events demonstrated they were right. The ‘inconvenience’ involved violence and, at times, sheer terrorism.

To bring the Iraq saga up to date one must mention the Islamic State. After the 2003 war on Iraq, Iran emerged as a regional Shiite power and some of its leaders saw Iraq as potentially little more than a province of the new Persian Empire. The government in Baghdad was in all but name part of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As expected, that produced a new crop of opposing Sunni fighters; including ISIL and its later incarnation as the Islamic State (IS). There is much evidence that this latter entity was funded and armed by some regional powers. The new situation created its own conundrums. Is the Islamic State a terrorism organization? Certainly its practices are repugnant to say the least but in a strict technical sense is it a group set up to resist Iranian Shiite expansion? Or is it an organization founded to help topple the Assad regime in Syria? Or is it simply a terrorist group that must be attacked by one and all? Another mystery to be added to a rich crop of mysteries associated with seeing ‘terrorism through the looking glass’.

The Iraq debacle shows that policy-makers sometimes know the consequences of actions that lead to terrorism and accept that outcome knowingly. This is not a new or isolated development. Brzezinski, President Carter’s national security advisor masterminded the US strategy to lure the USSR into Afghanistan and to arrange for a Mujahedeen led by Bin Laden to fight them. When he was asked whether he regretted the resulting mayhem and loss of life he replied, “What is more important...The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet Union? Some stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe...”⁴² The same form of thinking clearly was in operation at various stages of actions in Iraq. The rest is history. The same approach was and is evident in Assad’s

Syria. Since 2011 over 300,000 people have been killed in that country of which about 12000 were children, and millions have been wounded or rendered homeless. Syria is mounting the league ladder of countries devastated by violence and terrorism. History does repeat itself. It did not have a terrorist problem before but now it does.

The fundamental choice is between treating the disease or the symptoms. Noisy concern about terrorism would only begin to be taken seriously when actions that are known to increase the probability of instability, violence, and hence terrorism are avoided. This seems an obvious suggestion. The opposite has happened for decades in MENA and some other parts of Africa. An explanation to this apparently surprising public policy aberration is clearly necessary to gain understanding of the confused subject of terrorism and how to address it.

Need to Address the Disease not the Symptoms

An attempt at providing one possible explanation of the above policy failure has already been given in the form of the vast expansion of the military state security industrial complex and the role played by private businesses in that growth. This concept might seem somewhat extreme until one considers the considerable financial benefits accruing to some companies that are involved in the military and counterterrorism businesses. Pratap Chatterjee published in 2009 a revealing book; 'Halliburton's Army: How a Well-Connected Texas Oil Company Revolutionized the Way America Makes War'.⁴³ "KBR has grossed more than \$25 billion since it won a 10-year contract in late 2001 to supply U.S. troops in combat situations around the world... Today [2009], there is one KBR worker for every three U.S. soldiers in Iraq..." Pratap Chatterjee concluded, "So don't be surprised if the new LOGCAP contract, a \$150 billion 10-year program that began on September 20, 2008, remains in place, with some minor tinkering around the edges... KBR's army, it seems, will remain on the march." In 2015, Conrad Joseph Molden published an equally telling book, 'What Were the Consequences of the Iraq War Contracts: From Eisenhower's Warnings to Halliburton's Profits'.⁴⁴ War, and more specifically 'war on terrorism' are lucrative. The temptation to help the process is very tempting.

The process since Chatterjee published his book has gathered momentum. The military state security industrial complex is growing fast in the USA and in Europe. And its activities; often by eager local invitation, are spreading far and wide. "During the fiscal year that ended on September 30, 2014, U.S. Special Operations forces (SOF) deployed to 133 countries -- roughly 70% of the nations on the planet -- according to Lieutenant Colonel Robert Bockholt, a public affairs officer with U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM)... conducting missions ranging from kill/capture night raids to training exercises... Africa has, in fact, become a prime locale for shadowy covert missions by America's special operators."⁴⁵ Both special operations units and terrorist groups have grown in step with each other from 2001 to the present.

The whole face of counterterrorism has been transformed with heavy reliance on military action by forces that include large elements of private sector contractors. Unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, have become commonplace and counterinsurgency operations (or COIN a practice abandoned since Vietnam) have been revived and armies have been extensively privatized throughout the twenty-first century.⁴⁶

A policy that was tried and failed to counter the spread of drug traffic; 'Kingpin Strategy' by assassinating leading dealers is now applied in the counterterrorism effort. The US called it 'high value targeting' and the Israelis called it 'focused prevention'. Previously the policy was applied in Vietnam as the 'Phoenix Program'. The assassination of Bin Laden was an example of this policy in action. However, such difficult operations sometimes end in failure or the death of innocent people. Such occurrences are widely reported and are added to the long list of real or imagined grievances. The strategies, based on the use of extreme force, have failed to deliver consistent results.⁴⁷ The Global Terrorism Index reported in 2014 that terrorism is on a relentless increase despite these and other efforts.⁴⁸ The upward trend was highlighted by the US 'Annex of Statistical Information: Country Reports on Terrorism 2013, published in April 2014.⁴⁹ The evidence points unerringly to the need to re-examine counterterrorism policies. However, there is no evidence that this is taking place and an explanation for this failure is not forthcoming.

Certainly it is known that present actions are not yielding positive results. The 2015 National Military Strategy of the United States of America was published in July 2015.⁵⁰ Not unreasonably it made the point that the USA is the greatest power on earth. However, in the first lines of the Chairman's Forward the document made a revealing point: "Today's global security environment is the most unpredictable I have seen in 40 years of service. Since the last National Military Strategy was published in 2011, global disorder has significantly increased... We now face multiple, simultaneous security challenges from traditional state actors and transregional networks of sub-state groups..." Clearly, the 'war on terrorism' and the various wars that the USA has been involved in have not succeeded in reducing general instability and violence let alone terrorism. On the other hand there has been a massive expansion in the counterterrorism business.

The US National Military Strategy devotes much attention to what it calls Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), "led by al Qaida and the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)... strongest where governments are weakest, exploiting people trapped in fragile or failed states." The Strategy has a simple approach to such organizations: "to disrupt VEO planning and operations, degrade support structures, remove leadership, interdict finances, impede the flow of foreign fighters, counter malign influences, liberate captured territory, and ultimately defeat them. In support of these efforts, we are widely distributing U.S. military forces and leveraging globally integrated command and control processes to enable transregional operations." The focus is on winning a war. What should or could be done about 'weak governments' and how did they become weak? As the Strategy makes clear that is the fundamental problem.

The US 2015 National Security Strategy published in February 2015, however, had a broader agenda: "...weak governance and widespread grievance allows extremism to take root, violent non-state actors to rise up, and conflict to overtake state structures... We prefer to partner with those fragile states that have a genuine political commitment to establishing legitimate governance and providing for their people... inclusive politics, enabling effective and equitable service delivery, reforming security and rule of law sectors, combating corruption and organized crime, and promoting economic opportunity, particularly among youth and women. We will continue to lead the effort to ensure women serve as mediators of conflict and in peace-building efforts, and they are protected from gender-based violence."⁵¹

The report goes on to say: “Sadly, this is not the case today, and nowhere is the violence more tragic and destabilizing than in the sectarian conflict from Beirut to Baghdad, which has given rise to new terrorist groups such as ISIL...Resolving these connected conflicts, and enabling long-term stability in the region, requires more than the use and presence of American military forces. For one, it requires partners who can defend themselves. We are therefore investing in the ability of Israel, Jordan, and our Gulf partners to deter aggression while maintaining our unwavering commitment to Israel’s security, including its Qualitative Military Edge...” We are working with the Iraqi government to resolve Sunni grievances through more inclusive and responsive governance. With our partners in the region and around the world, we are leading a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL.”

The Strategy has been quoted at length as it does make good points but its focus continues to go back to military actions and military partnerships. There is scant evidence that avoidance of actions that weaken states in the Middle East and efforts to improve conditions; especially for younger people, are on the agenda. However, as discussed later, there is anecdotal evidence that a policy change for the US is in the air.

If to go back to the past, it is not known whether Condoleezza Rice’s 2006 comments about a ‘New Middle East’ and ‘constrictive chaos’ described a definite US policy or whether they were designed to put a positive imprint on a confused and erratic Bush administration dominated by a few war enthusiasts. Certainly the Middle East and North Africa region was plunged into a state of lawlessness that does no one any good, with the possible exception of the leading terrorists and those set up to fight them and profit from that activity. It is of course incorrect to blame all the problems on the USA but as the reigning world power it is responsible for some of the mayhem. “America is no mere international citizen. It is the dominant power in the world, more dominant than any since Rome. Accordingly, America is in a position to reshape norms, alter expectations and create new realities. How? By unapologetic and implacable demonstrations of will.”⁵²

Numerous books have described the end result of actions by the US, its agencies, businesses and allies. These included ‘The Three Trillion Dollar War’ by Stiglitz and Bilmes, ‘Losing Iraq’ by David L Phillips, ‘The Scourging of Iraq’ by Geoff Simons, ‘Fiasco’ by Thomas E Ricks, and ‘Killing Hope’ by William Blum, to name but a few. However, the book that comes closest to describing the linkage between flawed policies and actions and the resulting chaos and terrorism was written by Peter W Galbraith titled ‘The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End’.⁵³

These analytical records were mentioned because they seem to have had a beneficial effect that is, it must be said, is in its infancy. The US under the presidency of Obama has shown strong reluctance to enter new wars or to revisit past war zones to pick up the pieces. This is a major achievement taken in the face of constant clamor for more wars from certain quarters in the USA, influenced possibly by the powerful lobbies set up by the companies profiting from military action. President Obama’s reluctance to send more US troops into Iraq and other parts of MENA was and is unpopular for some in the USA. The policy is even more unpopular in MENA from which constant appeals for arms and troops are beamed at the US administration incessantly. Weak governments habitually look to outsiders to solve their local problems. Tellingly, and perhaps

annoyingly to some, the response from the US has been for governments to adopt more inclusive policies and ones that would address the thorny issue of better governance.

The US administration has taken other steps more recently that elevate the policy change onto new levels. To start with war was avoided in the Ukraine. Next discussions were initiated with Cuba that ended decades of hostility and resulted in reinstatement of diplomatic missions. However, the most dramatic step, which has major implications to MENA, was the P5+1 deal with Iran, masterminded by the USA and included the UK, France, China, Russia and Germany together with the European Union. The deal addressed Iran's nuclear program but its implication went much further than that. In particular, the discussions revealed willingness for closer cooperation between the USA (and others) and Iran. Inclusion of Russia was especially significant as it might affect attitudes towards the Syrian situation. It would seem that the scene might be set for actions that at long last try to address the disease in MENA; instability etc., rather than the symptoms of the disease as experienced in terrorism.

Conclusion

To summarize the situation on the terrorism/ counterterrorism front in MENA, many of the atrocities being committed in the region cannot be classed as 'terrorism' in the strict definition of the word: as acts of violence against innocent people designed to change government policy and practice. There are few discernible state policies left. Apart from widespread violence, corruption is the most dominant feature that is bankrupting the societies affected. Erosion of state power and the consequent virtual absence of governance impose a formidable package of punishing social and economic ills. As the Corruption Perceptions Index 2014 shows too many parts of MENA are at the lower end of the league of corrupt nations.⁵⁴ Corruption in Iraq in particular is now legendary. The association between violence, terrorism and corruption is not accidental. They stem from the same fundamental conditions.

Most of the violence, including acts of terrorism, is between factions led by individuals driven by little more than the search for power and wealth. Their grip on power requires funds that are often acquired through corruption. On the other hand, their power makes it possible for them to accumulate even more wealth through more corruption. Moreover, their position at the top necessitates the use of force within their organizations and against others. That in turn often demands resort to terrorist actions. The situation in Iraq and in Syria at the time of writing demonstrates all these features unambiguously.

In their quest for power leaders adopt classical expedients described by the Arabic Muslim historian and social commentator Ibn-Khaldun (1332-1406). He wrote a monumental book of many parts including an Introduction (Muquaddimah) that revealed the means by which dynasties, large and small, come into being.

The basic concept described by Ibn-Khaldun is based on the need to create 'group solidarity' (Assabiyah) through whatever means are at hand including family, tribal, and religious ties. The warring factions; often depicted as 'Muslim Terrorists' that have appeared in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa closely follow that pattern. They affiliate themselves with various ethnic, tribal and religious sects within Islam to attract recruits as well as funding

from domestic and regional donors. In reality, Islam to them is little more than a convenient vehicle. As mentioned earlier, Anand Gopal described the concept perfectly in 'No Good Men Among the Living'. The same is happening at the time of writing in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and increasingly in parts of Africa where state authority has weakened or disappeared altogether.

Western countries are not exempt from resorting to the same subterfuge. The controversial intelligence bill that passed the lower house of France's Parliament on 5 May 2015 illustrates the concept of using relatively minor transgressions against free speech to adopt legislation that restricts freedom of speech for a whole population. Support for the bill in Parliament was clear: 438 for, 86 against and 42 abstentions. The bill when it completes its various stages will deprive French judges from oversight of activities by the intelligence gathering services. The bill was rushed through Parliament after the awful attacks on Charlie Hebdo and the kosher supermarket in Paris.⁵⁵

The contention advanced earlier in the paper that there might be an implicit partnership of interests between terrorism and militarized counterterrorism is admittedly open to debate. On the other hand, no such doubt exists about the fact that terrorism has been on the increase while counterterrorism based on military action has been the policy of choice.

When a public policy is seen not to work it should be reviewed without undue delay. When a policy produces negative results it should be abandoned immediately. There is no indication that this is being contemplated despite indications that the US is veering away from all out war. This is intriguing to say the least. More to the point it is worrying as it lends support to the possibility that counterterrorism; with private sector involvement, has become a profit generating business. As mentioned earlier this is just as regularly seen locally in MENA as it is when it comes to leading world powers. At an emergency meeting of the Arab League on 18 August 2015, for instance, one of the two factions ruling Libya asked Arab countries to provide it with arms in order to enable it to fight the other faction (ostensibly associated with Islamic fundamentalism)! The distinct possibility that that would mean an extension to the violence and civil war in that country does not seem to worry those concerned. A statement issued after the meeting urged member states to assist Libya. Fortuitously, the UN has imposed an embargo on arming any of the fighting groups in Libya. Asking for arms 'to fight Islamic terrorism' is a popular pretext but hopefully the UN will stand its ground.

It may be thought that the correlation between increased military action and the rise in terrorism is a recent discovery that has not given decision-makers long enough to change course. That, sadly, is not the case. The linkage is nothing new. Chalmers Johnson, author of bestselling *Blowback* wrote a comprehensive article titled 'America's Empire of Bases' in which he stated, "From 1993 through the 9/11 assaults of 2011, there were five major al-Qaeda attacks worldwide; in the two years since then there have been seventeen bombings."⁵⁶ Evidence for this association between military action and the growth of terrorism is plentiful.

It is appreciated that the temptation to go down the military route is a knee-jerk reaction that follows every terrorist incident. On the other hand, it is expected that wiser options would then be considered once the initial furor has bated. For too long this sensible progression of policy making has not been in evidence. The focus on military action has prevailed and that option, as argued

above, is now shown to be counterproductive. If anything it has become part of the problem. Modifications based on drones and assassinations have not yielded better results. What else can one do to mindless terrorists, driven by blind religious beliefs or historic grievances?

What is to be Done?

Readers hoping for a magic bullet that would eradicate terrorism should read no further. They will be disappointed. First, the existence of such a magic bullet is a cruel delusion. The arrival of thousands of foreign troops will make matters worse and not better. Arming and training domestic factions; including what remains of the national armies in the countries worst affected, will fuel endemic violence and instability. Second, certain locations in the Middle East traditionally associated with terrorism suffer from weak states, absence of governance, corrupt rulers, and warring factions. Terrorism is a by-product and not a primary feature. Dealing with 'terrorism' will only address the symptoms. The fundamental task is to tackle the disease; admittedly a very difficult project for reasons explained below.

Readers are therefore reminded of a key point underlined throughout the paper: a distinction must be drawn between incidental terrorism events on the one hand, and endemic violence and lawlessness on the other which creates opportunities for acts of terrorism. There is now general consensus that these so-called 'lone wolf' terrorist incidents are impossible to eradicate. Such events are not restricted to 'Islamic terrorists' and they are not limited to the Middle East or Africa. The US and Europe are just as in danger of domestic 'lone wolf' attacks as MENA. Better surveillance coupled with public awareness seems to be the obvious lines of action and these are now well developed and institutionalized in most countries. This by itself is subject to limits imposed by personal freedoms and what scale of inconvenience citizens would be prepared to tolerate. The process, furthermore, relies heavily on well organized, multinational, and integrated police forces and legal codes to pursue and punish the guilty. These actions could not eliminate the threat completely but they help to discourage the practice.

This book is intended to deal with terrorism in the Middle East; a worthy topic that is considered a global priority. The paper sought to clarify the nature of this form of 'terrorism'. It was argued that in parts of the Middle East widespread violence and lawlessness often present opportunities for terrorist acts. Through ignorance or design, an idea has taken root that somehow Islam and the Middle East predispose the region to acts of terrorism. The paper sought to dispel this misconception not for the purpose of defending Islam or the region but to introduce clarity and objectivity. This, it was thought, would help avoid reaching wrong conclusions about the actions needed to rectify current problems. Iraq was discussed at length to demonstrate how a country that had no record of terrorism previously could find itself at the top of the league of leading countries suffering from rampant terrorism.

The case of Syria and Libya is the same as that of Iraq. Looking at terrorism without seeing it in the context of the prevailing conditions of chaos, violence, and overwhelming intrusion by regional and global powers (some of which might well have been benign) is to miss the cardinal point entirely. Further military action and more arms and troops in the region have been shown to be a failed policy. As the situations in South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Spain have demonstrated unerringly, broader strategies based on seeking solutions to social, political and economic

problems and accommodations of the wider grievances that created terrorism need to be addressed. This, admittedly, is a difficult task to set. However, it has to be faced sooner or later.

Tragically, decision-makers, domestic and foreign, who currently seek to control matters in the Middle East, do not seem to accept this conclusion. Some profit from the prevailing chaos, lawlessness, and lack of governance. This applies especially to those in power at present. For various reasons, others are still wedded to the futile and often counterproductive military response. Before discussing steps that could be taken to tackle prevailing violence and disorder, it is appropriate to outline other lines of action that would avoid further military action. There is for instance a 'do nothing' option. History suggests that societies, given sufficient time, find ways to repair themselves and overcome seemingly impossible odds. Collier, Hoeffler and Soderbom in 'Duration of Civil Wars' a report produced for the World Bank's Development Research Group in 2001 explored the subject and concluded that sooner or later civil wars come to an end.⁵⁷ Duration is affected by several factors, but general conditions in Middle East and North Africa would veer towards lengthy rather than short disputes.

Admittedly the do-nothing option seems like a council of despair and would consign the communities involved to lengthy periods of at time awful suffering. The flood of refugees that endure massive obstacles and dangers in their effort to escape the horrors in their countries by seeking shelter in Europe is an indication of the level of desperation that has gripped the communities concerned. However, the option could not be discounted completely. In the darkest days of 2015 citizens in Iraq took to the streets and forced their hapless government to consider reforms that were thought most unlikely only weeks before. Nonetheless, the option is admittedly unattractive. Its significance lies in the certainty that history shows that even seriously unstable communities ultimately find a way forward.

Another option that seems more attractive, especially from an academic point of view, calls for actions to improve governance and other public policies including in particular focus on economics, education, health and social services with specific attention to those actions that help younger persons. This is clearly a most sensible option and no one could possibly disagree with its intentions. Ultimately, action along these lines would have to be considered in any case. Difficulties in making progress along this path, however, are self-evident. Fundamentally, few functioning states remain in the countries most affected by violence and terrorism in the Middle East as well as North Africa. Who would mastermind and implement actions to enhance governance and other similar improvements? The competing factions in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen could be expected not only to lack the ability to participate in such a potentially desirable project but in all probability to be against it on principle. Success would spell the end to the warring groups and the dubious personalities behind them. Recent steps (August 2015) to implement minimal reforms in Iraq that had the considerable backing of the all-powerful Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani were little more than window dressing.

Another difficulty presents itself with this apparently sensible option: would competing regional and global powers accept a situation where their freedom to meddle and influence would be curtailed? And would the companies involved in counterterrorism and the security industry at large live with the diminution of business that settled and well managed states associated with good governance and democracy entail? There is considerable doubt there.

It is patently obvious that present policies based on military power have failed and are counterproductive. Replacing these policies is difficult, if not impossibly hard. The policies are not simply a US preference. There is widespread belief; especially within the countries most afflicted by instability, violence, and terrorism, that military action is the most effective option. Leaders in these locations constantly ask for the US to be involved militarily and to help equip and train national armies and religious and tribal groups. In practice, this is a recipe for more rather than less violence. In other words, it is not simply a matter of convincing the US administration to limit its military activities. This, in any case, seems to be quite possible at present as seen in actions and statements made by President Obama. The US is not minded to be involved in new wars and that is a welcome sign and one that should be applauded as discussed below.

Realistically, the task of finding alternative policies to military action could not be achieved easily or quickly. An essential step in the process is changing minds by giving wide publicity to facts rather than misconceptions about terrorism in general and so-called 'Islamic terrorism' the Middle East in particular. That is not an easy project, as the media in general have their own views on the subject. Confusion about the nature and scale of terrorism is endemic and occasionally created by interest groups to promote their particular agendas. At the best of times, it is a controversial topic that attracts strong opinions. Nowadays, Islam is constantly in the news, often with reference to terrorism. This association has colored prevailing ideas. Although the long running Palestinian/Israeli dispute was the traditional medium of concern, in recent years attention has widened to include Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and other locations of instability. Confusion has increased in step with that widening field. There is, therefore, a mountain to climb in seeking to bring clarity and objectivity into the debate.

The task of improving awareness and, hence, advocating alternatives to military action is not impossible and the effort would yield good rewards. This is possibly the most productive contribution that think tanks and nongovernmental associations could make. The Middle East has a number of active organizations; including AMEPPA (Association for Middle Eastern Public Policy and Administration), The Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, and GRC (Gulf Research Center) and others. While these bodies do an excellent academic work, they could possibly extend their work to include a targeted campaign of better information (most certainly not propaganda) to create objective awareness of what makes the Middle East what it is at present. In association with the above suggestion, it would be helpful for the organizations mentioned and others to recruit prominent people in the Middle East and beyond to speak out against more military action and in favor of other more subtle lines of action based on reconciliation and dialogue. This is not a difficult task as senior religious leaders; Islamic, Christian and Jewish, have already contributed ideas to that end as mentioned earlier in the paper.

Such contributions might be beamed at the UN with some benefit. Despite its tarnished image in the Middle East, the UN still retains enough credibility to be a major player in a new approach. The UN could act as an honest broker to bring antagonistic groups together to begin a dialogue. Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom demonstrated that what appears as an impossible hope might turn out to be possible given enough focus and determination. Ultimately, the UN might even contribute temporary managers to assist in filling part of the gap left by weak state structures. As mentioned earlier in the paper, Pope Francis in the latest encyclical issued in June 2015 put

forward such an idea. Pope Benedict XVI in the 2009 encyclical had already suggested the need for a super-UN to undertake that form of action.

Several thinkers, including the above Popes, considered equally imaginative steps. One such exciting concept would be to convince more prosperous countries; with UN help again, to organize a Marshal Plan type project to lift certain countries out of the deep troubles that afflict them. The focus would have to be primarily on education, health and employment for younger persons. This is an ideal opportunity for personnel recruited through the UN to lend a helping hand. Think tanks and others in the region would be well advised to build on these foundations.

The ideas presented above might seem unusual, timid, or far-fetched. People in the Middle East are enduring hardships that are historic in their magnitude and severity. Academics and practitioners have a duty to consider and suggest options that might help to lift the region out of its misery. At present, far too much pessimism and despair permeates much of what is being written about the area. This needs to be replaced by more constructive thoughts out of which at least some might prove useful. In dealing with such a complex set of conditions there is no other way forward.

About the Author

Dr. Samir Rihani was born in Iraq in a large Christian family. He went to university in Britain, and worked in the Middle East for a while. His professional life in Britain included senior appointments in both the public and private sectors; mainly in planning and development. He has written two books on complexity, one of which was co-authored with Professor Robert Geyer, Lancaster University. Samir Rihani is a research fellow at the University of Liverpool and for the last sixteen years he has served as a non-executive director on a number of National Health Service Trusts.

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