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Terrorism the New World Order?

By **Brett Wagner**

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THE CATASTROPHIC terrorist bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania two weeks ago provide a glimpse into one of the most fundamental challenges to American foreign policy in the 21st century: How can the United States provide effective international leadership when nonstate actors, such as terrorist groups and organized crime syndicates, can readily employ incredible destructive force?

Terrorism has the potential to paralyze U.S. foreign policy in the 21st century. Even a small band of well-armed, well-trained terrorists could mount a sustained campaign of terror capable of seriously eroding American support for any number

of current U.S. policies.

As the 20th century draws to a close, terrorism represents an unpredictable force on the international stage. Not only are several terrorist groups amassing state-of-the-art destructive capability, including surface-to-air missiles and quite possibly tactical nuclear weapons; many are also developing considerable financial, logistical and technical resources as well. In fact, many of these groups already have the resources available to stage major attacks with alarming frequency.

There is no way that the United States can protect itself, let alone guarantee the safety and security of its embassies and consulates abroad. For starters, reinforced buildings and larger security perimeters are no match for the modern terrorist. And even if the United States were able to secure its overseas agencies, the evolutionary nature of terrorism itself dictates that a weakness would eventually be exploited.

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Beyond that, the number of potential terrorist targets abroad is huge -- more than 250 U.S. diplomatic outlets are spread out across 164 countries. There is no way to protect them all. And since terrorist groups can choose a target thousands of miles from their own bases, there is almost no way to know in advance where these groups will strike next, or how to track them down. America is psychologically ill-prepared to deal with these profound and disturbing challenges to its foreign policy and international security. The nation is still trapped in a Cold War mind set in which it thinks that all of its adversaries can be readily identified, confronted, and ultimately held accountable -- by military force, if necessary -- for their actions. Unfortunately, terrorists are usually not very easy to identify, confront or be held accountable.

Consequently, the United States goes to great lengths in order to penetrate terrorist groups, prevent terrorist attacks and bring terrorists to justice. Despite such continuing efforts, Americans seldom recognize terrorism itself as anything other than temporary.

Regrettably, that is not the case.

Terrorists are cruel, brutal and ruthless but, by and large, they are dedicated to their causes, and are often more than willing to risk their lives to attain their objectives. Terrorist groups are commonly part of a larger sociological phenomenon, and typically belong to ethnic and /or religious groups with little or nothing to lose. As long as these people have nothing to lose, the rest of us will have everything to lose.

The time has come for Washington to develop a new strategy:
The challenge is how to give a voice to the chronically
disenfranchised groups from which terrorism springs.

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Fortunately, the United States has already participated in two diplomatic initiatives that go toward meeting this challenge: the continuing talks between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, as well as those between the British government and the political wing of the Irish Republican Army. Hopefully, these two initiatives can also provide a blueprint for the future.

This said, traditional methods of combating terrorism should not be abandoned or replaced, but redoubled. Resolving the

underlying conflicts that engender terrorism will prove much more important in the long run. Otherwise, terrorism could well become a defining characteristic of the new millennium, and U.S. foreign policy will increasingly become its hostage.

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