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Special Task Force on Terrorism

“The Root Causes of Terrorism”

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Introduction

1. Mediterranean countries have primary role in strengthening and promoting peace, security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region, In this manner, PAM provides meaningful engagement for Mediterranean countries to strengthen further their cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, taking into account the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and in combating international crime and illicit arms transfers and illicit drug production, consumption and trafficking, which pose a serious threat to peace, security and stability in the region.
2. Terrorism is a major violation of one of the most fundamental human rights, the right to life. As terrorism grossly and systematically violates human rights, PAM has always promoted the idea that terrorism should be regarded as a human rights violation.
3. On 23 October 2009, PAM has adopted a resolution on Definition of Terrorism. According to this resolution terrorism has been defined as “.....violence or the threat of violence, induced by political, ideological, religious or ethnic motives. Terrorist actions are carried out or designed to achieve maximum publicity, and to produce effects beyond the immediate damage to people, property and the environment. The methods used are extreme, destruction is ruthless, and the behavior is not constrained by the rules of war. The nature of violence is such so as to provoke fear and intimidation.”
4. The idea of “root causes” of terrorism suggests that there is some form of relationship between underlying social, economic, political, and demographic conditions and terrorist activity. According to this proposition, certain underlying conditions help to explain how, where, and why terrorism occurs. Uproot the cause and the problem vanishes. By contrast, leave the roots intact and the problem will bloom again. As a result, a failure to understand the linkages between these underlying conditions and terrorism may result in inadequate counterterrorist policies.

5. Understanding *why* people resort to terrorism is an essential prerequisite for determining *how* to respond. As Pape notes, for instance, ‘understanding that suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation rather than the product of Islamic fundamentalism has important implications for how the United States and its allies should conduct the war on terrorism’ (Pape, 2005).

6. Some people are clearly uncomfortable with the idea of root causes because it disturbs the “moral clarity” that they believe is necessary to confront terrorism (Bennett, 2002). They wish to deny that any form of terrorism could be associated with a legitimate political cause, because they wish to deny that terrorist groups have any legitimacy whatsoever.

7. Generally, root causes refer to a very broad range of issues that cannot be contained within a single social category: for example, factors such as poverty, social inequality and exclusion, dispossession and political grievance, oppression and human rights abuse, population explosion, and demographical factors.

8. There are many classifications of root causes of terrorism. For example, UN has short list of conditions considered being conducive i.e. root causes, reminding explicitly that the list is not exclusive. The list contains following conditions:

- prolonged unresolved conflicts
- dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations
- lack of rule of law and violation of human rights
- ethnic, national and religious discrimination
- political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance

9. Tore Bjorgo (2005) separates causes of terrorism as structural, facilitator, motivational and triggering causes. With structural causes he mentions causes like rapid modernization, globalization, increasing individualism with rootlessness, relative deprivation etc. For facilitator causes he gives examples like the evolution of modern mass media, transportation, weapons technology, weak state control etc. As motivational causes Bjorgo explains the actual grievances people experience at a personal level. These are the causes that actually motivate people to act. Bjorgo describes triggering cause as being the direct precipitators of terrorist acts committed by the enemy, or some other events such as political calamity, an outrageous act committed by the enemy, or some other events that call for revenge.

10. In this report I will investigate the root causes of terrorism under these sub-headings:

- 1) Political roots
- 2) Economic and social roots
- 3) Ideological and religious roots
- 4) Psychological roots

1) Political Roots

11. Most of the experts on terrorism have agreed on the central principle that terrorism is a form of political action. It cannot be taken out of specific historical contexts or treated as a generic phenomenon. It is a strategy rooted in political discontent, used in the service of many different beliefs and doctrines that help legitimize and sustain violence. Ideologies associated with nationalism, revolution, religion, and defense of the status quo have all inspired terrorism.

12. Historical contingencies and the perceptions and intentions of small, radicalized political conspiracies are most important in explaining terrorism. We must not forget that terrorism requires the active participation of only a very small number of individuals who may or may not represent collective interests.
13. The relationship between terrorism and democracy is a key concern. Not all democracies are equally inclusive or pluralistic or respectful of minority rights. Elected majorities may discriminate systematically against minorities. Many of the world's functioning democracies are limited or partial.
14. In the case of terrorism that is generated within a democracy, the degree of social, ethnic, and political heterogeneity or fragmentation within the state appears to be a critical variable. Highly contentious politics and divided societies are likely to be associated with a greater risk of terrorism.
15. Examination of an existing political system and its governance will provide the required information about the root causes of terrorism. When one is investigating the existing political system, one should start to investigate and analyze it at least from 40 years before the present day. For example, ethnic terrorism may be a product of a 'nation-state' because nationalism means that the dominant ethnic groups in the country have been prized above others, who have been subordinated in the country's political, economic and social life for a prolonged period. Without question, in the most successful revolutionary wars of the last 25 years, the strongest appeal has been to nationalism and patriotism based either on resistance to a conqueror or the gaining of independence from a colonial power (Wilkinson, 1974).
16. Political violence becomes unavoidable in an unequal society in which assets are not distributed fairly among people. Then, the potential rebels can apply violence to overturn the existing political and economic system (Boix, 2004).
17. If the political system is not a liberal democratic system, then the opposition may not be in a position to express its ideas and alternative as much as those holding state power. As Windsor notes, 'democratic institutions and procedures, by enabling the peaceful reconciliation of grievances and providing channels for participation in policymaking, can help to address those underlying conditions that have fueled' (2003) radicalization and terrorism.
18. PAM 2009's report on a definition of terrorism extensively covered and lent support to the right of peoples to self determination and to resist occupation as recognised in international law according to UN Resolutions 3034 and 3314.
19. How State responds to terrorism matters more than the type of government. The response to terrorism must be legitimate if the government is to defeat a group without expanding its support base. Violations of human rights in the pursuit of counter-terrorism will be counterproductive.
20. Governments should encourage the transformation of those radicalised groups that are linked to broader social and political movements or political parties. They should be encouraged to join the political game and enter into dialogue. Indeed, the government should offer a democratic pact: oppositions that accept dialogue and renounce violence by making a commitment to respect human rights, the rule of law, and democratic norms will be included in the political process.

21. Attention must also be paid to the victims of terrorism, who must be satisfied with the government's response. Governments should institutionalize aid for victims, who are owed apologies from those responsible for acts of terrorism as well as material compensation.
22. Democratic governments have a responsibility to educate their publics and to encourage heightened democratic solidarity, not fear, in the face of terrorism. Governments should not rush into decisions that are based on public pressures due to fear or hatred. Rather, the response must be considered, deliberate, and controlled by the civilian authorities.
23. As discussed in PAM's report of 2009 on a definition of terrorism, the concept of State terrorism is controversial. Military actions by states during war are usually not considered terrorism, even when they involve significant civilian casualties. The Chairman of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee has stated that the Committee was conscious of the 12 international Conventions on the subject, and none of them referred to State terrorism, which was not an international legal concept. If States abused their power, they should be judged against international conventions dealing with war crimes, international human rights and international humanitarian law. Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said that "The use of force by States is already thoroughly regulated under international law". However, he also made clear that, "...regardless of the differences between governments on the question of definition of terrorism, what is clear and what we can all agree on is any deliberate attack on innocent civilians, regardless of one's cause, is unacceptable and fits into the definition of terrorism."

2) Economic and social roots

24. Do economic conditions fuel terrorism? The answer varies: on the one hand, 'plenty of commentary and some academic scholarship suggest that economic conditions like poverty and income inequality very much matter for terrorism by affecting levels of deprivation, feelings of injustice, and hence political tension'(Burgoon, 2004).
25. On the other hand, some other scholars agree that it is difficult to establish a direct link between terrorism and economic conditions (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003). However, politics affects the economy through the design of economic policies. If these policies create more injustice, income inequality and poverty, then those people who are suffering because of those policies will raise their voices against the politicians. Therefore, there is a link between economic conditions and terrorism, although it is not a direct one.
26. Poverty is often presented as a basic underlying root cause of terrorism. According to this proposition: "Poverty of resources, combined with poverty of prospects, choices and respect, help enable terrorism to thrive" (O'Neill, 2002a). Poverty can breed resentment and desperation and support for political extremism. In addition, as well as providing grounds for grievance, poverty often means underdevelopment, poor or weak governance, or failed states, something that has been referred to as "back holes" within which fanaticism can emerge (Ranstorp, 2003).
27. Poor societies often make for weak states, which may not have the capacity to prevent terrorist activity or recruitment. They also lack the capacity for the types of education program that might reduce support for terrorism. It has thus been argued that "states that lack legitimacy and control over the economy and other traditional levers of power provide the space and oxygen for terrorists groups to flourish" (O'Neill, 2002b).

28. When people are denied access to clean water, soil, and air to meet their basic human needs, we see the rise of poverty, ill-health and a sense of hopelessness. Desperate people can resort to desperate solutions.” Yet, as is often pointed out, the active supporters of most terrorist organizations are not poor or uneducated. That the link between terrorism and social conditions is complex and it is not as clear as it might seem. Russell and Miller in their research published in 1978 had found that over two-thirds of arrested terrorists came from the middle and upper classes.

29. O’Neill pointed out that “modern terrorist organizations require management and technological skills found in the upper and middle classes yet they also need foot-soldiers who overwhelmingly hail from the poor and down-trodden” (O’Neill, 2002a).

30. Demographic factors have also been presented as key background conditions. Significant demographic conditions include rapid population growth, and especially a burgeoning of young males; and uneven population shifts across different ethnic groups (Simon, 2003). Homer-Dixon (2001) describes, in some regions of the world, “a demographic explosion that has produced a huge bulge of urbanized, unemployed young men.” A related demographic condition that has been associated with terrorism involves migration and shifts in the ethnic, religious, and social balance of a society.

31. Urbanization has been correlated with terrorist activity (Brennan-Galvin, 2002). Urbanization—especially in conjunction with unemployment and poverty—can generate a disaffected population, which enables terrorist recruitment and organization. According to Massey (1996) “Urbanization, rising income inequality, and increasing class segregation have produced a geographic concentration of affluence and poverty throughout the world, creating a radical change in the geographic basis of human society. As the density of poverty rises in the environment of the world’s poor so will their exposure to crime, disease, violence, and family disruption.” Homer Dixon (2001) brings environmental factors into play, “especially shortages of cropland and fresh water—that have crippled farming in the countryside and forced immense numbers of people into squalid urban slums, where they are easy fodder for fanatics.”

32. Related to absolute poverty, exclusion and social inequality can be sources of conflict when combined with other factors, and also terrorism (Ehrlich and Liu, 2002). In particular, poverty and inequality especially when affecting distinct national, religious, cultural, and/or ethnic groups—so called horizontal inequalities—is a breeding ground for conflict (Klugman, 1999). A combination of social tensions and heterogeneity can result in social upheaval, extremist politics, and civil war.

33. Changing the socio-economic environments that breed terrorism policymakers should design development strategies that mitigate the impact of rapid socioeconomic change on vulnerable segments of the population in poorer countries. More specifically, it is vital to implement long-term international aid and investment policies that help empower the groups that are most directly affected in order to influence the nature and pace of development.

34. The status of women is especially important. Although women are sometimes recruited as suicide bombers, in general they seldom support terrorism. Cross national studies show that the higher women’s relative educational status and political participation, the less frequent are political violence and instability. Three mechanisms may be at work: (1) educated and empowered women may socialize youth in ways that inhibit their susceptibility to recruitment to terrorism; (2) they also help strengthen civil society organizations that provide alternatives to political militancy; and (3) in the longer run, women’s education

contributes to declining birth rates, leading to a reduction in the problems associated with large youth populations.

3) Ideological and religious roots

35. It is known that terrorism has the potential to be used by different ideologies, systems of belief, creeds, ethnic or religious groups. And this has been the case in mankind's recent history. Terrorism needs an all-encompassing philosophy, a religion or secular ideology, to legitimize violence, to win recruits to the cause and to mobilize them for action (Richardson, 2006).

36. Radical doctrines can profoundly affect how people interpret their situation, respond to efforts to mobilize them, and choose among alternative strategies of political action. Gold cites evidence that terrorist organizations respond to cyclical declines in economic performance by using an ideological message to increase their recruitment. Bjorgo observes that 'the presence of charismatic ideological leaders able to transform widespread grievances and frustrations into a political agenda for violent struggle is a decisive factor behind the emergence of a terrorist movement'.

37. Fundamentalism is only one such employer of terrorism. Yet, it is known that fundamentalism exists among adherents to different beliefs and ideologies, including in the three great monotheist religions.

38. One of the significant changes in the field of terrorism over the past 20 years has been the increase in the number of groups claiming religious beliefs as source of legitimacy for their actions. World public opinion, approved or even encouraged by some Western scholars and politicians, tends to consider Islam itself as a genuine source of terrorist violence, overlooking the economic and socio cultural aspects of the problem. Islam does not cause terrorism, nor does any other religion with which terrorist acts have been associated.

39. Islamic religious ethics emphasize orderly and peaceful social relations and condemn clandestine violence against defenseless victims ... "Islamic law prohibits all violence except in official punishment of crime, strict private self-defense or against combatants in formally declared legitimate war as regulated by law." The use of civilian targets by the so-called Islamist terrorists leads unavoidably to a violation of Islamic rules of war.

40. Prejudices among believers of various religions, or about one specific religion, proceed from a certain lack of knowledge. The more human beings get acquainted with others, the more they realize that they have more to share than to litigate. All religions of the world advocate that human beings should live together in harmony.

41. In the mid-twentieth century, a new concept emerged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was drafted after the Second World War. This was the idea of *tolerance of religious difference*—an idea that was offered in response to the long and bloody history of religious conflict.

42. For the last half century, the Universal Declaration has set forth a formula aimed at averting religious conflict. Under Article Eighteen, everyone has the right to freedoms of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in the community, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. In parallel, Article 30 of the Universal Declaration reads: "Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any state,

group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.”

Even though religion may not be the sole cause of terrorism, it can be exacerbate the situation. In order to respond to this kind of violence we recommend:

- The promotion of inter-cultural education at all levels of society, providing background into different religious communities.
- The facilitation of interfaith interactions with an emphasis on people-to-people relationships.
- The establishment of an independent organization in order to monitor representations of religious communities on television, news media, textbooks, and other public forums.
- The encouragement of religious responsibility. While authorities have a responsibility to ensure religious freedom, religious leaders and other members of religious communities have a responsibility not to abuse that freedom by encouraging or justifying hatred, fanaticism or religious war.

4) Psychological roots

43. Terrorism is an extremely complex and diverse phenomenon. Explanations at the level of individual psychology are insufficient. It is not going too far to assert that terrorists are psychologically ‘normal’ in the sense of not being clinically psychotic. They are neither depressed, severely emotionally disturbed, nor are they crazed fanatics. A clear consensus exists that it is not individual psychology, but group, organizational and social psychology, that provides the greatest analytical power in understanding this complex phenomenon. Terrorists have subordinated their individual identity to the collective identity, so that what serves the group, organization or network is of primary importance. The role of the leader is crucial in drawing together alienated, frustrated individuals into a coherent organization. They provide a ‘sense-making’, unifying message that conveys a religious, political or ideological goal to their disparate followers.

44. O’Neill (2002a) suggests that “Terrorist leaders seek support from people who feel humiliated, threatened, aggrieved and without help” and that “Terrorism is thus often linked to a sense of injustice and impotence rather than sheer poverty” (O’Neill, 2002b). Gunaratna (2002) agrees that “In conditions of poor governance, rampant corruption, and human right abuses, terrorism flourishes.” This is a common theme: Rajae (2002), with reference to 9/11 but with general relevance, argues that the “roots lie in the politics of exclusion and the emergence of a triad of dispossession, empowerment, and an ideology that justifies violence.”

45. In 1985 the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution that found the underlying causes of terrorism to include “colonialism, racism and situations involving mass and flagrant violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and those involving alien occupation” (A/RES/40/61, para. 9).

46. Interviews with suicide bombers concur that feelings of humiliation, revenge, and despair are important explanatory factors in certain types of terrorism (Hassan, 2001).

47. The new media, particularly the internet, play an increasingly important role in establishing a sense of community among otherwise widely dispersed alienated youth. Terrorist communiqués, ideological writings, hate speech and internet propaganda should not go unanswered but be responded to by well reasoned counter-argumentation.

48. Programs that reduce vulnerability to terror and promote societal resilience represent a key component of antiterrorism. This requires research designed to understand what steps can immunize society against terror and promote societal resilience.

49. Early interventions are required to inhibit entrance into violent path. Considering the growing number of vulnerable individuals in émigré and diaspora communities, interventions that respect cultural differences while helping to integrate the refugees with the recipient society will be important.

50. Counter-terrorist measures must be designed to inhibit potential terrorists from joining the group. Once inside the group, the power of group dynamics is immense, continually confirming the power of the group's organizing ideology and reinforcing the member's dedication to the cause. It is also important to stimulate and encourage defection from the group.

Conclusion

51. If root causes are important for understanding and explaining terrorism, there are a number of policy implications. Underlying conditions and grievances will generate individuals and groups willing to perpetrate terrorist actions, even if counterterrorist efforts are able to interdict some groups and individuals.

52. Effective prevention that will reduce the terrorist threat will require more than effective domestic and international police and military measures, improved information sharing, and other such collaboration. Effective prevention will necessitate structural changes within the global system. Therefore, this suggests that efforts should be directed at addressing underlying grievances and enabling factors in order to undermine support for terrorism in societies at risk: investing in sustainable development, poverty reduction, progressive education, improved governance, and strengthening the rule of law, for example.

53. Our common goal must be to eradicate poverty, to promote inclusion and social justice, to bring the marginalized into the mainstream of the global economy and society. The use of force may be appropriate in certain cases but it is also problematic since its use can create new resentments, grievances and even the next generation of terrorists.

54. At this point clear distinction between self-determination and terrorism should be maintained. Self-determination is not only a part of customary international law but is also enshrined as one of the principles of the UN as laid out in Article 1:2 of its Charter. Self-determination is seen within the context of people fighting against colonialism, foreign occupation and to enforce international commitments made to them by the United Nations. The strength of the self-determination norm is such that international conventions dealing with terrorism have always acknowledged and distinguished between struggles for self-determination and acts of terrorism. For instance, the International Convention against the taking of hostages (came into force June 1983) clearly states that the Convention "shall not apply to an act of hostage-taking committed in the course of armed conflicts ... in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration on principles of International Law..."(Article 12).

55. What can PAM do? A few ideas...

- Develop a coordinated long-term strategy within the PAM member states to address the factors which contribute to recruitment into Terrorism.
- Conduct more detailed studies, including academic studies, of recruitment to terrorism in specific contexts such as in prisons, in schools, in universities; studies in to the role of the media, including the internet, in radicalization or in promoting support or sympathy for terrorists.
- Continue to investigate the links between extreme religious or political beliefs, as well as socio-economic and other factors, and support for terrorism.
- Make more efficient use of relevant external assistance programmes within member states including in particular support for good governance and the rule of law to address factors which can contribute to the support for terrorism,
- Promote better understanding of aspects of Islamic culture within Europe, in conjunction with leaders of religious communities.
- Highlight regional and bilateral initiatives in the field of countering terrorism strategies.
- Exchange best practices introduced at national level in the fight against root causes of terrorism.
- Urge PAM Member States to develop and implement the legislative framework for combating terrorism.
- All Member States to ratify 13 major legal instruments and additional amendments (as listed in PAM's report of 2009 on a "definition of terrorism" and adopted at the Istanbul Plenary Session) dealing with terrorism and continue to lobby for this in third countries bilaterally.
- Work with and within regional and international organizations to ensure their effective contribution to combating terrorism in accordance with UN obligations.

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