

The War on Terror

CAII • THE CHURCHES' AGENCY ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES: RESOURCING CHURCHES AND CONGREGATIONS ON GLOBAL CONCERNS



Why is 'the War on Terror' a Hot Topic?

- Terrorism and the 'War on Terror' are constantly in media headlines
- Terrorist attacks continue – showing the war cannot be won
- The War on Terror is pivotal to global politics and international relations
- It was the pretext for the occupation of Iraq
- The War on Terror is challenging interfaith relations, understandings of Islam, and responses to the Middle Eastern community
- Legislation restricting freedoms is being introduced in the name of counter terrorism, affecting us all.

“...terrorist acts are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the consideration of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or of any other nature that may be invoked to justify them...”

United Nations General Assembly, res.49/60
9 December 1994

When 19 men hijacked 4 planes in the US, flying two into the World Trade Centre, one into the Pentagon and crashing the fourth, destined for another Washington DC target, into a Pennsylvanian field, terrorism was seen to take on a new face. Nearly 3000 people were killed, from over 80 different countries, making the 2001 September 11 attack the most global and deadly terrorist event in history. The economic, social, political, cultural and military effects around the world were profound and the War on Terror was quickly launched as an international counter-terrorism response.

Yet the threat of terrorism, and international responses to it, are not new phenomena. As in the past, responses to terror impact on our own freedoms and how we live our lives. The fear of terrorism far outweighs the risks and with post 9/11 attacks in Madrid, London, Bali, New Delhi and many other places, it is clear the War on Terror is not being won. The challenge of how to prevent political violence remains unresolved. This Hot Topic explores the context for the war on terror, the nature of terrorism, some of the issues the war on terror raises for New Zealand and faith communities, the theology of terror, and the role churches can play.

What is terrorism?

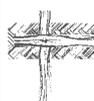
Terrorism is the use of violence or 'terror' for political objectives. It covers acts such as kidnapping, hostage taking, bombings, hijacking, suicide bombers, massacres, and assassinations. There is a psychological dimension that goes beyond each individual incident. Terrorism contains a threat of indiscriminate violence against ordinary people or political leaders, attempting to incite community fear and put a government under pressure.

Defining Terrorism

The political dimension of terrorism makes it difficult to define terrorism and terrorist acts. One person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter or patriot. Although the United Nations condemns terrorism there is no agreed international definition.

The case of Kanaky demonstrates the difficulty. In 1988 19 Kanaks took 23 French soldiers hostage, an act of terrorism to France and many in the outside world. But to many Pacific Islanders, the men were heroes of the Kanak struggle and engaged in the fight for independence. In the 1980s, the Kanak pro-independence party, FLNKS, was denounced, as a terrorist organisation but is now part of the New Caledonian government.

New Zealand has a legal definition of terrorist acts under the Terrorism Suppression Act 2002 (see http://www.legislation.govt.nz/browse_vw.asp?content-set=pa1_statutes for full details). This includes actions that intend/threaten death, serious injury, or harm to more than one person, or intend major social disruption, environmental damage and/or economic loss that will induce terror in the civilian population and/or force a government or international body to carry out or abstain from any act for the purpose of advancing an ideological, political or religious cause.



The Anglican Church in
Aotearoa, New Zealand
and Polynesia



The Salvation Army in
New Zealand, Fiji and
Tonga



The Methodist Church of
New Zealand



Christian World Service

A brief history of terrorism



Terror as a term to brand political opponents dates from the age of the French and American revolutions, although 'terrorist' acts date

back much earlier and have occurred in many varying contexts. Movements of the left, right and centre, governments and nationalists, and government opponents have all used terrorism to pursue their objectives.

The Zealots who led covert operations against the Roman occupation of Judea, including assassinations, have been called terrorists. The Hasaniyyin, the radical group that murdered important enemies (from whom we get the word assassins) in 11th century Syria and Iraq are also listed as terrorists. Other terrorist events from history include Guy Fawkes' failed gunpowder plot to blow up the English parliament, raids by John Brown in the 1850s as part of his fight against slavery in the US, the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II of Russia, the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand that brought the world to

war in 1914 and the February 13, 1978 bombing outside the CHOGM meeting in Sydney, killing 2 people.

Throughout the 20th century there have been assassinations, bombings (including in the US as early as 1910 when a bomb at the Los Angeles Times newspaper building killed 21 workers), hijacking and hostage taking labelled as terrorism in every region of the world. Groups such as the IRA, Black September, ETA (the Basque separatist movement), the Red Brigade, the Bader Meinhof group, the Weather Underground, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the African National Congress, and many more have been associated with terrorist acts.

Authorities have often labelled opponents 'terrorists', such as nineteenth century Russian Tsars about political reformers, British authorities on Jewish fighters for a Jewish state (some of those labelled terrorists went on to become presidents of Israel), and the Afrikaner South African government against those resisting the racial oppression of apartheid, including the now universally

lauded Nelson Mandela.

Governments have been implicated in terrorist acts, such as the 1985 French bombing of Greenpeace's Rainbow Warrior in Auckland.

The list of 'terrorist' acts that have occurred is long (see for example http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_terrorist_incidents). Some can be interpreted as criminal acts, others are seen as part of a broader war for nationalist freedom. Others are acts of governments. While demonstrating how difficult it is to define terrorism, the historical record shows that terrorist activity is not new, and has occurred in many parts of the world. The UN resolution on the elimination of international terrorism, issued on 9 December 1994 in which member states declared how deeply disturbed they were "by the world-wide persistence of acts of international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations" and "by the increase, in many regions of the world, of acts of terrorism based on intolerance or extremism..." could have just as easily been applied to the launch of the War on Terror in 2001.

Terrorism today

Did the world change on 9/11? The attacks in the US certainly marked a change in the scale and nature of terrorism and our increasingly globalised world meant many nationalities were victims (up to 85 different countries lost citizens) – among them Muslims, with an estimated 1500 people praying daily at the Twin Towers Mosque. The 7 July 2005 bombings on the London transport system (52 deaths) were considered even more shocking because the bombers were British born. There had been a sense until then that these types of attack were carried out by radicals and foreign fanatics not someone born and raised in the so-called democratic West.

Another change is the increasing linkages between events, conflicts and situations in today's world. Post World War II, terrorism was largely associated with the rise of nationalism and struggles for nation-states. This was usually undertaken locally, with terrorist strategies directed at specific national targets. Now terrorism is more global and geopolitical in focus. Al Qaeda's aims have included the US withdrawal from Saudi Arabia, the removal of western influence in Islamic lands and the establishment of an Islamic political order (reference: Church of England A). Bali became a target because of Australian business interests and tourism, while the Madrid and London bombings have been linked to the respective governments' involvement in the war against Iraq.

Terrorism today is increasingly synonymous with Al Qaeda and its associated Islamic fundamentalist groups, linking Islam with terrorism and portraying terror victims as western democracies and their citizens. The bombing outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta and the US embassy bombings in Kenya were viewed as attacks on Australia and the US, even though the fatalities and vast majority of the injured were local people and the actions taken in response had a great impact on local security, economy and politics rather than in the so-called 'targeted' country. Media coverage focuses on how many westerners were killed or injured, or the nationality of the people taken hostage, making some Pacific human rights groups question the links between racism and terrorism. "There is an impression that an attack of terrorism seems to gain or be given prominence if it is instigated against western or european targets, or if there is a western or european casualty among those attacked" (Simpson, PANG).

Hot Topics

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with thanks to Revd Dr Jim Stuart for the theological reflection

Yet much about terrorism remains the same. The sense of fear that now prevails is similar to that of the heyday of hijackings in the 1970s/80s, while any efforts to crack down on terrorist acts continue to lead to the erosion of human rights and freedoms. Continuous media coverage of terrorism contributes to a growing climate of fear, suspicion and the feeling that the terrorists are winning because they cannot be stopped.

Terrorism in NZ and the Pacific

New Zealand has experienced acts of terrorism, such as the French bombing of the Rainbow Warrior in 1985 – killing Greenpeace photographer Fernando Pereira – in Auckland Harbour, the Wellington Trades Hall bombing in 1984, and the attempted bombing of the Wanganui computer in 1982. New Zealanders have been killed and injured in the 9/11 attacks, the Bali bombings and the London underground bombings. While the likelihood of terrorism within New Zealand is considered low at present, increased international travel puts New Zealanders at risk from attacks occurring elsewhere.

Violence in the Pacific that could be labelled terrorism includes assassinations in Samoa, Palau and New Caledonia, the Fiji coup, war lord led acts of terror in the Solomon Islands, French counter-insurgency measures, Indonesian state terror in East Timor and West Papua, and actions by British, US, New Zealand, French and Australian colonial powers to control, dominate and subdue local populations.

Keeping It In perspective

All deaths have a profound effect on the family and community that experiences loss, more so when that personal loss comes as the result of violence. It is important that we give a similar emphasis to those who die in Basra as in London, to people of Islamic belief as to those of other faiths or none. All human beings deserve to have their dignity respected.

Yet for some there is something uneasy about a world when the deaths of 2900 people in the US on 9/11 necessitate an immediate global response when other 'terrors' are ongoing, ignored and often preventable. New Internationalist (340, Nov 2001) calculated (assuming annual deaths were evenly spread) that on September 11 2001:

- 24,000 people died of hunger
- 6,020 children were killed by diarrhoea
- 2,700 children died from measles

The death toll from South Sudan's civil war, has been equated to a September 11th every week for 20 years – yet we hear little about it and the HIV/AIDS death rate is currently equivalent to 8450 people a day.

Terrorism is just one of many risks, dangers and horrors in the world.

The War on Terror: A Theological Response

One could argue that Christian history is one of terror: terror inflicted on Christians and Christians inflicting terror on others. Christianity's primary source, the Holy Scriptures, contains a wide range of acts of terror from the personal terror of Cain's murder of Abel his brother to the state endorsed terror of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Within these Scriptures, the reality of terror has many faces: the terror of slavery and exodus, the terror of life in exile, the terror of the rape and exclusion of women, the terror of religious misunderstanding and resistance, the terror of persecution and crucifixion. Responsible Christian theology cannot gloss over this history. We need to remember that there is also a form of terror which literalises and misuses the Scriptures and does so in God's name. The bitter negativity of such biblical 'texts of terror' undermines the promises of healing and hope for every human being and every human community expressed in the biblical story and, in particular, the life and person of Jesus Christ.

Like the Scriptures, terror is also a subject of interpretation and subject to interpretation – one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter. A lot depends on one's perspective or context. As a tactic of terror, the Bible has been used throughout history by devout Christians to impose their points of view and cultural definitions on others and to use their religious beliefs to justify their actions. This kind of religious history is also a kind of terror that can lead to other acts of terror in response. Christians need to acknowledge this 'dark side' of Christian history by rejecting the many forms of terrorism such as bigotry has initiated: racism, segregation, anti-Semitism, homophobia, cultural hostility and social violence.

So from a theological perspective, it is important for Christians to develop a theological response to terrorism that, one, does not lead to further religious bigotry; two, offers hope and healing both to those who engage in terrorist acts and those who are the victims of such acts; and three, offers new life and new possibilities. This theological revision requires Christians to think differently and in a new way about how they read and use the Scriptures, about our understanding of who God is and finally about who Jesus is for Christians today.

The Bible as a Sourcebook, not a Textbook

Many Christians tend to treat the Scriptures as a textbook containing all the answers of life that humans seek. As a consequence more is read into the Scriptures than is there. A fundamental premise of Biblical exegesis is that a text taken out of context is a pretext, that is, that we can misuse Scripture by misreading it and reading into it what we want to find there. Such readings of Scripture have often led to the distortion of Scripture. The Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, used to liken this use of Scripture to using the Bible as a 'brickbat' on others.

The German Reformer, Martin Luther, often emphasised that the Bible had 'a wax nose'. 'We shape it any way we like,' said Luther. What we forget, often to our peril, is that the Bible is a historical document, a collection of many sources that were assembled over a long period of time. So from the start we need to put aside the notion that a supernatural being dictated the words of Scripture from on high and the sources cannot be questioned.

A basic premise of the Protestant Reformation is the affirmation that the Scriptures contain the word of God. The Scriptures offer us wisdom from the past but they do not and cannot give us certainty in the present. They invite us, according to the Book of Common Prayer, 'to hear them, read them, mark them, inwardly digest them and learn from them'. They call us to live by faith, to enter into the ongoing story of faith and continue the journey.

Participating in this journey teaches us humility, it helps us understand what it means to be the people of God and from this wisdom of the ages to reach out to others in compassion and love. Thus the Bible becomes more than a written record, it becomes the epic of our own lives lived out in and by faith. To make the Bible more than this, that is, to try to make it the one and only source of all religious authority or the final judge of all truth, is to turn it into a textbook of terror, from which texts are extracted which destroy the integrity of God and violate human beings. The day of using the Bible in this way is over.

Understanding who God really is

How is it then that the Bible throughout the history of Christianity has been used on the one hand to offer hope and healing, but, on the other hand to destroy and violate others and even to justify such behaviour? In the end, do we think of the Bible as a source of life? Part of this dilemma is the tendency of some to identify the language of the Bible with the language of God, to believe uncritically that the Bible has revealed God's language and is indeed 'the Word of God'. When we do this, we can easily reduce the Bible to dogmatism and use God's Word to justify our own prejudices.

continued

There are texts in the Bible that are used to justify a broad range of questionable characteristics attributed to God. The gospels suggest that God holds 'the Jews' responsible for Jesus' death; Paul seems to teach that God endorses the place of men over women, that God views homosexuals as overtly evil, that there is only one true way to God and people of other faith traditions are misguided and lost. All of this suggests that there is a destructive and terrifying side to the nature of God which can lead to horrible acts of violence.

Our present situation reflects this view of God. Osama bin Laden invokes God as the one who directed the suicide attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. President George W Bush unleashes the military might of the United States on Iraq in the name of God; Ariel Sharon calls on the God of Israel as he sends tanks into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to destroy houses suspected of harbouring terrorists; a young Palestinian with dynamite strapped to his waist walks into a crowded public restaurant and destroys himself and everyone else in the name of God. Catholics and Protestants in Ireland have invoked the name of God as they have engaged in acts of terror against each other. Religious leaders invoke God as they condemn homosexual people for the sin of being who they are while women are often excluded from roles of leadership in the Church for being who they are. Who is this God who visits so much terror on humankind?

For Christians the defining picture of who God is and what God is like is found in Jesus Christ. In John's Gospel Jesus reminds his disciples 'that whoever has seen Jesus, has seen the one who sent him'. (12:45) Later in the Gospel Jesus reminds the disciple Philip that if he has seen Jesus, he has seen 'the Father' and then asks Philip, 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?' (14:10f) If we take these words seriously, then we cannot and we dare not divorce who God is from who Jesus is. As Jesus practised compassion, so God is compassionate; as Jesus welcomed everyone, sinner and saint, so God's love embraces everyone; as Jesus came in peace, so God seeks peace; as Jesus spoke of the love of God, so God is love and whoever loves mother or sister in Jesus' name is a child of God. (1 John 3) In the God of compassion, love and healing there is no place for acts of terror and no justification for terrorism.

Who Jesus was and is for Christians today

A cursory reading of the Gospels suggests that Jesus left no written records. The only place where we witness Jesus actually writing is found in the story of Jesus' encounter with a woman taken in the act of adultery - John 8:1-11. That text reports that Jesus, while facing her accusers, knelt and wrote with his finger on the ground. John chooses not to tell us what Jesus wrote only that when the women's accusers read what Jesus had written they went away and left Jesus alone with the

woman. Jesus then asked the woman, 'Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?' And the woman answered, 'No one sir'. And Jesus replied, 'Neither do I. Go your way and sin no more.' This is an extraordinary story under any circumstance for it reveals to us how radical Jesus was - especially in the way he rejected violence.

Some have seen Jesus as ushering in a new consciousness beyond the traditional boundaries of our lives, a vision of how humans can live with one another without resorting to violence and terror. What if the religious categories and the tribal priorities of the past no longer matter? The apostle Paul expressed this greater emerging consciousness when he affirmed that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male or female, slave or free. (Galatians 3:28) What is clear is that Jesus lived a life of endless giving, that he did not return the hostility and violence of his critics, nor did he cling to his own life. The Gospel of Matthew reports that when Jesus was betrayed and arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter drew his sword in defence. Jesus rebuked him and reminded him of a better way, 'Put your sword back; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword'. (Mt 26:47ff) In doing this, Jesus suggested that those who reject the ways of terror and step beyond their fears in love and trust find a new sense of freedom. They discover that God's healing love is not limited by our particular cultural boundaries and religious practices. Jesus reminds all people of faith that the first step to God is to 'love one's enemies', to 'do good to those who hate you, bless them who curse you and pray for those who abuse you'. (Mt 5:44, Luke 6:27-8) Those who cross the boundaries of culture, tribe and religion seek a vision of a new humanity where all forms of terror are negated.

A vision for peace

The reality and consequences of acts of terror, whether political or personal, require a new vision of peacemaking. We will never overcome terror with terror. Terrorism is a state of mind as well as a personal and political strategy. Until we grasp the theological premises that the Bible is non-partisan and inclusive and that Jesus unequivocally rejected violence and terror and fully embraced a new consciousness of what it means to be human - only then can we begin to address the underlying causes of terrorism in our time. Perhaps the first step all Christians can take as people of faith is to make peace and non-violence a reality in our own hearts and communities. From there we can begin the task that inevitably faces every generation of Christians to try to understand the deeper underlying causes of terror and violence. If we can do that, we can strengthen our resolve to overcome acts of terror with words of hope and healing.

Jim Stuart

What is the War on Terror?

The 'War on Terror' was the phrase adopted by President Bush to describe US led counter-terrorism operations in the aftermath of the 2001 9/11 attacks. It is now instantly recognisable to people and is linked to a range of actions including military occupation, detention without trial, checkpoints, security searches, fingerprinting all citizens, monitoring international phone calls, monitoring internet use and emails, widespread surveillance, security papers/national ID cards and allegations of abductions and torture. Many commentators are concerned such actions will sow the seeds of future dissent and increase levels of violence.

The military actions against Afghanistan and Iraq have been waged in the name of the War on Terror. The first target was the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, who were accused of sheltering and supporting Al Qaeda leaders and terror cells, with terrorist training camps being run in the country. This war was fully endorsed by the UN and the International Community. The 'Coalition of the Willing' intervention in Iraq, overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime, has been more controversial. Carried out without the backing of the UN on the basis of what has since been shown as false intelligence on Saddam's ability to produce Weapons of Mass Destruction, it was promoted as another crucial action against the Axis of Evil, regimes Bush linked to international terrorism. The ongoing violence and occupation continue to undermine many countries' support of these campaigns in the name of the War on Terror, while other countries such as Iran have been identified as potential targets.

International travel has changed with increasing security at airports, including fingerprinting, eye scans, searches of all luggage and bans on carrying things such as scissors, knitting needles and nail files in hand luggage. Lie detector tests are being developed to identify passengers who may be planning illegal actions and full body scans are being tested as part of security measures. For people from so-called 'high risk' countries, travel is becoming increasingly expensive, difficult and sometimes impossible with strict visa requirements and lengthy questioning and searches.

People in the US have constant reminders of the threat of terrorism under a system of advisory alerts as to the current risk of attack. These can even be downloaded to your computer desktop. In Australia, residents are asked to 'be alert but not afraid' and report suspicious activity to a dedicated hotline.

Under the umbrella of the War on Terror, countries around the world have legislated counter-terrorism measures within their own borders, which to many infringe on privacy and violate human rights. There is concern that anti-terrorism legislation has been used to demonise peoples' movements, trade unions, the religion of Islam and groups questioning the status quo. "A strike by a union may be deemed an act of terrorism because it may turn away potential investors. The danger is that any struggle which is unacceptable to a government can be targeted by anti-terrorism legislation." (Aisake Casimira, Director, ECREA, 17/7/04) Human Rights Watch reports that the War on Terror has been an excuse for repression around the world, giving many countries the opportunity to crackdown on political opponents, separatists and religious groups, or to justify previously criticised human rights practices. Examples include Australia, China, Egypt, Malaysia, and Israel. (*In the Name of Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Abuses Worldwide* – 25/3/2003: <http://www.hrw.org/un/chr59/counter-terrorism-bck.pdf>)

The question of limiting individual freedoms to protect the community is a challenging one, highlighted most poignantly in the tragic case of Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes shot and killed by London police on 22 July, 2005 because they believed he may have been a suicide bomber. Some present this as a conflict between civil liberties, which protect the guilty, and 'the right not to be blown up'. But, argues the Church of England (report B), civil liberties are for the protection of everyone. "The operation of fair and proper legal procedures is necessary both for the reliable identification of the guilty and the protection of the innocent. Second, 'the right not to be blown up' is not properly described as a right because it is not legally enforceable. No government can guarantee that its citizens will not be blown up, though it clearly has to take suitable precautions to prevent this and in a democracy may be called to account by the electorate if it is judged to have fallen short. At most we can speak of a right to reasonable protection (or better, a duty of government to provide reasonable protection). The task becomes one of balancing rights and risks against one another." New Internationalist (376 March 2005) has reported that:

- the US continues to hold over 600 detainees in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, outside the protection of US courts and law. They have not been charged. According to Amnesty International 3,000 to 5,000 people, mostly of Muslim origin, have been detained by the US Justice Department and forced to leave the country since 9/11.
- Italy and the Netherlands have the highest wiretapping rates in Europe, tapping 72 per 100,000 citizens in Italy and 62.5 in the Netherlands.
- Poland is passing a bill that requires anyone buying a long distance phonecard to have ID.
- In Britain, Internet Service Providers are being asked to retain information on their customers' internet and telephone habits and to make this data 'searchable' by the authorities.
- Uganda's Suppression of Terrorism Bill 2001 imposes a mandatory death sentence for terrorists and anyone who aids, abets, finances or supports terrorism – including any journalist publishing materials deemed to support terrorism.
- Bangladesh is trying to amend its telecommunications law to make illegally intercepted emails usable as evidence in court.
- The Australian Government has declared a 1,700 kilometre maritime security zone far beyond the 370 kilometres they are allowed by international law to counter possible terror attacks.

In December 2005, allegations of CIA secret prisons in Europe and abductions of suspects who were taken to countries where torture is not outlawed for questioning were given credence. The British government is proposing that evidence secured by torture be used in court. Other countries already do so, sending suspects to third countries where their evidence, right or wrong, can be secured by brutality and then used while the method of securing it is ignored. Many people think they have nothing to fear if they do nothing wrong. There are 5 million people on the US Terror Watch list. How do you prove your innocence? What if you share a name?

The War on Terror is setting priorities for international relations and global resources. But emphasising terror as a problem can mean downgrading other more pressing issues. Terrorism kills only a tiny number of people each year compared to those who die in war or as a result of poverty. In 1999 Pacific leaders listed international financial crime, cyber crime, people smuggling, increasing civil unrest and drug trafficking, climate change and illegal fishing as the pressing issues threatening regional security. At that time there was no mention of terrorism. Post 9/11 policies and priorities have changed. Even the Pacific's smallest nation has joined the war against terror, with Niue police increasing security at the tiny international air terminal. "Many are concerned that the security concerns of our bigger partners, while important to us, must not dominate the agenda of the Pacific Forum, as issues of food, economic, social and environmental security are the major concerns of small island states. "Far more people die from and are threatened by poverty, hunger, and natural, environmental disasters than they are by terrorism" (Simpson, PANG). There is growing concern that anti-terrorism measures, while important, are taking resources away from more pressing concerns. Instead of funding health, education and anti poverty in the Pacific, Australian aid is increasingly for governance and law and order.

“ Is the war on terror worth it?

Would you allow authorities to install and monitor closed circuit TV cameras in your house, if it helped prevent terrorism? Would you grant police powers to knock your front door down and randomly search your home at any time for no apparent reason? To detain you without trial for prolonged periods? If not, how far would you be prepared to go? What rights would you sacrifice to combat the pernicious evil of modern-day terrorism? ”

article on the impositions of the war on terror on personal freedoms, New Zealand Herald 7/8/05

How do we counter terrorism?

President Bush said in an address to Congress on September 20, 2001, "Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated." See <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgrtpt/2003/>

The Church of England is calling for Britain's experience with terrorism over the status of Northern Ireland to be considered in responding to the current wave of global terrorism. The initial military and repressive (such as internment without trial) responses did not end the terror. A political strategy for peace making to complement the military containment is necessary. Any response to terrorism should be underpinned by an analysis of the causes of terrorism and must include reconciliation and peace building.

"The challenge to lay aside self-righteousness in assigning responsibility for terrorism. When our own community has suffered a violent attack, it is tempting to cast ourselves in the role of pure victim, and to insist that responsibility lies exclusively elsewhere. This may be true in terms of the immediate incident: we must never blame the victims of bombing, nor excuse the bombers. Nevertheless, when we examine the broader picture of events, we are reminded that we belong to an interdependent world order in which both good and evil are transmitted through many channels. ... It is part of the untruthfulness of sin that human beings deceive themselves about their complicity in evil. We tend to avoid the uncomfortable truth that by acts of commission and omission, and by what is done in our name by political leaders, we may be collaborators with violence and injustice. We must make a sober estimate of our collective responsibility for the state of the world, and a commitment to work for change in the light of the reign of God." (Church of England B)

New Zealand's Response



As stated on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) website, "New Zealand is a strong supporter of the international campaign against terrorism" and has made contributions to political, diplomatic, legal, intelligence and military initiatives. These have included:

- the 12 month deployment of Special Air Service troops as part of Operation Enduring Freedom against Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan and redeployment of 50 NZ Special Air Service (NZSAS) personnel to Afghanistan for up to 180 days from 1 April
- command of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamain Afghanistan since September 2003, with the deployment of 100 NZDF personnel and the objective of enhancing security and promoting reconstruction as it assists the Afghanistan Transitional Authority extend its influence beyond Kabul.
- contribution of naval and air assets at various times to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) air transport operations and to Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) in the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.
- commitment of two NZDF non-commissioned officers to provide command and leadership training to the Afghan National Army for a further twelve months to June 2005.

Complying with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 calling on UN member countries to adopt specific measures to counter terrorist threats, New Zealand regularly reports to the UN Counter Terrorism Committee. New Zealand's obligations under international law include taking steps to prevent terrorist financing, recruiting or other forms of support.

In 2002, the Terrorism Suppression Act was passed, supplemented by further counter-terrorism legislation in October 2003. New Zealand is now party to all of the 12 international anti-terrorism conventions and has strengthened border controls and intelligence capabilities.

New Zealand proposed a Pacific-wide counter-terrorism exercise in May 2004, which was held in November 2005. Exercise *Ready Pasifika* brought together officials from the Pacific Forum's 16 members, representatives from French Polynesia and New Caledonia, and regional law enforcement organisations. They explored the region's ability to plan for and respond to a hypothetical terrorist incident. Although the Pacific is seen as low terrorist risk, countries like New Zealand see it as important that the Pacific not become a weak link that terrorist organisations can exploit. "Ensuring that the Pacific is well-prepared to respond to a terrorist threat is an important means of protecting ourselves," Helen Clark said (8/11/05).

For New Zealand's Muslim population (now numbering about 30,000 people of 42 different nationalities), the War on Terror and the increasing association of terrorism with Islamic groups is impacting on their daily lives. Many feel they are having to defend their religion as a religion of peace and clarify that they and their religion do not condone or encourage such violence. Mosques are a target for vandalism and graffiti. In the wake of 9/11 and the London Bombings some people have endured abuse yelled from strangers. Several mosques in Auckland were vandalised in July 2005. Muslims face ignorance and suspicion of their religion and culture. They say they are increasingly targeted for 'random' security checks when they fly into New Zealand. Refugees and migrants from Middle Eastern countries are under increasing public scrutiny, the most well known is Ahmed Zaoui from Algeria.

Did you know?

- The New Zealand government appointed a Counter-Terrorism Ambassador (diplomat Dell Higgie) in August 2003. The role is to provide an overview and coordination of New Zealand's response; monitor international developments, and promote New Zealand interests internationally through advocacy and attending relevant meetings.
- A list of all individuals and organisations currently designated in New Zealand as terrorist entities under the provisions of the Terrorism Suppression Act 2002 is maintained by the police. The list currently comprises four parts which list individuals and organisations associated with the Taliban and Al Qaeda. <http://www.police.govt.nz/service/counterterrorism/designated-terrorists.html>
- In response to 9/11 the New Zealand Cabinet approved police funding for a range of counter terrorist measures. These include: an Assistant Commissioner to lead counter-terrorism and national security matters, a full time Special Tactics Group to respond operationally to terrorist emergencies, a full time Specialist Search Group and National Bomb Data Centre Manager, new liaison positions at diplomatic missions in London, Washington DC, Jakarta, and Suva and additional police at six New Zealand airports.

What's in a word?

While there is often dispute over what is a terrorist act, the War on Terror is more problematic. How can you wage war effectively on an emotional response? Who is the enemy? Where is the battlefield? Is all war not terror?

A report by the Church of England's House of Bishops is concerned that the War on Terror, "implies that modern terrorism is to be understood primarily as a military threat that must be opposed by military means". This obscures the complexity of what constitutes terrorism and the response to it and raises a dilemma for Christians over the use of force as opposed to peaceful means of conflict resolution.

The rhetoric of war implies the goal is the complete elimination of terrorist movements, which in turn makes each act of terrorism a victory for terrorists and shows governments and the international community to be 'losing the war'. (Church of England B)

In the US, the phrase has been rejected by a group of September Eleventh Families. After a visit to Afghanistan, Kristina Olsen, whose sister Laurie was on American Airways Flight 11, said: 'Now I know what people in other countries feel. We were so comfortable and sheltered. Around the world people die horrible deaths on a continued basis and it's routine.' (Aziz Choudry, ZNEt 11/9/2002)

The phrase has become associated with images of Iraq's missing Weapons of Mass Destruction, pictures of prisoners being tortured and abused, car bombings and assassinations. US authorities have looked at 'rebranding' their policy. New Zealander Kevin Roberts, the chief executive of global advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi, was invited by the US Defence Department in March 2005 to help military bosses come up with an improved phrase to replace "War on Terror". He suggested 'The fight for a better world' (New Zealand Herald 24/9/2005). However, the War on Terror remains a snappy sound byte and has become part of the lexicon defining world security in the early 21st century.

The Terrorism Suppression Act

The Terrorism Suppression Bill was introduced to Parliament on 17 April 2001 and enacted in October 2002. It legislates against terrorist bombing, financing of terrorism, dealing with the property of terrorists or associates, making property and financial or other services available to terrorists, recruiting terrorists, participating in a terrorist group, harbouring or concealing terrorists as well as outlining offences around the possession/use of plastic explosives and nuclear material. Parts of the Act are extra-territorial, meaning they can be applied to offences committed partly or wholly outside of New Zealand. For the full text see: http://www.legislation.govt.nz/browse_vw.asp?content-set=pal_statutes

Many groups in New Zealand expressed grave concerns about the new legislation. For Christian World Service, the Development, Justice and Aid Agency of New Zealand Churches, at issue was the definition of 'terrorist'. It cited past examples of when churches have been accused of funding terrorist organisations in their relief and development programmes. Some groups CWS funds on behalf of the churches, such as in East Timor, Sri Lanka and South Africa have been and are highly critical of their governments. Some of these people have gone on to be seen as liberators. The worry for CWS is that the Act could be used against such people on the basis of partial information from another government. "We believe that it is highly likely that people could be falsely accused of terrorism because of such information, especially when it is often difficult to obtain independent verification in areas of high conflict." As international security tightens, there has been difficulty sending money to partners such as the New Sudan Council of Churches and to UK based CAFOD for relief work in Darfur, because Sudan is a trigger for international security concerns.

The Churches Agency on Social Issues (representing the Methodist, Presbyterian, Associated Churches of Christ, and Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)) made a submission on the 2005 review of the Terrorism Suppression Act 2002, concerned that some provisions of the Act infringe on civil liberties and the presumption of innocence until guilt is proved in a court of law and perpetuate an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. They called for "deeper analysis of the causes of terrorism and a commitment to finding long-term solutions to the violence which is embedded in persistent and growing inequity" as well as the "necessary steps to contain terrorism and protect our people". They voiced concern that some sections of society could become marginalised by being defined as 'terrorism prone'.

The Human Rights Commission was also worried about the infringement of the Act's provision on human rights. One issue is that of the right to a fair trial when an accused is not provided with all (classified security) information about them. "There is no easy balance to be struck between the need to protect classified security information (in case, as claimed, divulging this information damages its provision and/or source), and the need to protect the right to a fair trial."

Other concerns included recognised standards of proof, suspicion as a basis for interim designations, and right to freedom from discrimination.

Terrorism and Poverty

In October 2002, Christian Aid released a report on the disturbing trend of linking development assistance and humanitarian aid with the War on Terror. The report (The Politics of Poverty: Aid in the new Cold War) examines how the policies of donor countries are starting to follow the language of the Cold War with aid viewed as a means of promoting the donors' own interests, rather than addressing the real needs of poor people. Programmes designed to help poor people have been cut, budgets re-allocated and hopes dashed as donor priorities have been shifted. In OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) discussions, it has been clear that some forms of military training and intelligence gathering are now being considered as suitable areas to be funded from aid budgets. The report can be downloaded at <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/indepth/404caweek/index.htm>

Terrorism and the churches



The churches in New Zealand, like their counterparts around the world, condemned the violence of 9/11. On 18 September 2001, Church leaders issued a joint statement on the terrorist attacks in the US and prayer vigils were held around the country.

When shocking attacks happen, churches on the ground are able to provide practical help for those immediately affected. For those who feel affected by terrorist events and scares, the churches can offer prayer, sympathy, support, condemnation of violence coupled with a reaching out and reconciliation to marginalised communities. With terrorism today being linked to Islam, interfaith dialogue and support is critical for the vast majority of Muslims who do not support, condone or carry out terrorist acts. Following the July 05 London bombings, police reported an increased level of hate incidents against buildings and individuals, although many of the latter (assumed by the perpetrators to be Muslim) were in fact Hindus or Sikhs. Yet these were less numerous and serious than might have been expected and it is believed that local interfaith connections across the country, which increased sharply after 9/11, helped to contain hostile reactions.

In developing closer interfaith relations, Christian churches should avoid the pressure to view their relationships with other faiths, and especially Islam, predominantly through the lens of terrorism. (Church of England B)

Selected references:

- Church of England Reports
 - A) *Countering terrorism: power, violence and democracy post 9/11*. A report by a working group of the Church of England's House of Bishops September 2005 <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/socialpublic/international/foreignpolicy/terrorism.pdf>
 - B) *Facing the Challenge of Terrorism*. A Report from the Mission and Public Affairs Council October 2005 <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/gs1595.rtf>
- New Internationalist Issues on Terrorism #161: The Roots of Terrorism, July 1986; # 340: Twin Terrors, November 2001; #376: State of Fear, March 2005 <http://www.newint.org/>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade: NZ and the Campaign against Terrorism <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/spd/terrorism/campaignterrorism.html>
- Simpson, Stanley (Pacific Network on Globalisation) "A brief history of terrorism in the South Pacific" Public Workshop: 'How Should Fiji Respond To The Threat Of Terrorism?' 17 July 2004



Questions for Reflection

1: "Western nations led by the US have joined forces in a new holy war – the battle against terrorism. But is the terrorist menace all it's made out to be?" This quote is from a 1986 issue of *New Internationalist*. How much do you think has changed?

2: Do you feel there is more reason to be afraid after September 11? How has your response been shaped by media coverage on the War on Terror?

3: Have you or people you know been affected by counter-terrorism measures eg in airports? Do you feel more or less secure? What would make the world safer?

4: Are you aware of the Terrorism Suppression Acts? How do you think this might affect new immigrants and Muslims living here? How does it affect you?

5: Discuss the ways that tightening security and surveillance measures as a response to terrorism reinforce fear and the perceived power of the terrorist.

6: How can a democratic society respond to the fear of terrorism and protect civil liberties?

7: What role should Aotearoa New Zealand take as a responsible member of the global community? What are the values that you believe should inform international relations?

8: George W Bush spoke of the Axis of Evil, devise your own list of evils in the world and discuss how to counter them most effectively.

9: How do we help people in Aotearoa New Zealand hear the voices of those seeking liberty and an end to violence and poverty in the rest of the world? It is easy to say we support world peace but what are we prepared to do about it?

10: What does our faith teach us about responding to acts of violence? How do we understand and deal with stories and acts of terror in the Scriptures?

11: Where are the opportunities to be a good neighbour, locally and globally?

12: How much are we driven by fear?

Take Action

- Find out more about global response to terrorism, including NZ's legislation. Some critical commentary can be found on: <http://www.arena.org.nz/terrbill.htm>
- Invite someone from a recent migrant community, the Civil Liberties Union, a lawyer working on human rights to discuss some of the issues of increasing counter-terrorism measures.
- Find out about the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence which is supported by NZ churches: <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/>
- Think about possible places of terror in your own community and invite a speaker or organise an appropriate action to overcome violence.
- Pray for those who perpetrate violence and for those who live in fear.



Prayer for Peace

Loving God

We pray for the millions of people who risk their lives daily to feed their families. We pray for those whose reality is terror and who live with constant fear. May they find the strength they need and sense your abiding love as a source of hope.

We pray for those who see their only future through a path of violence. We pray for the young men and women who are willing to give their lives in the name of a God of hate and division. Transform their hearts O Lord and help them find the means to turn swords into ploughshares and weapons of war into tools of life.

We pray for governments and their leaders in all countries. We pray that they find ways to stop the killing and violence in our world and our communities. Help them make laws that are just and fair and encourage ways to build peace and understanding.

We pray for ourselves and those close to us. May your love cast out all our fears and break down our indifference. Inspire us into actions that build community and overcome injustice of our world. May people of faith everywhere reject violence and choose the way of peace and reconciliation.

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Amen

Selections on the Imperative for Peace from Jewish, Christian and Islamic Sacred Texts

from the **Hebrew Bible**: Genesis 13:6-9; Numbers 6:24-26; Psalm 34:15; Psalm 85:7-13; Psalm 122; Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-5; and Proverbs 3:13-18

from the **New Testament**: Matthew 5:1-11, 21-24 and 43-44; Luke 6:32 and 35-36; John 17:20-21; Romans 14:19; Ephesians 2:13-14 and 6:12-17; and Hebrews 12:14

from the **Holy Quran**: Sura 3:20, 84 and 133-134; Sura 4:90; Sura 5:32; Sura 6:54; Sura 8:61; Sura 14:23; Sura 16:90; Sura 17:70; Sura 19:62; Sura 41:34; Sura 42:40 and 43

Tuesday, 13 December 2005 = 1,000 days of war in Iraq =

\$204.4 billion is the cost to the US of the war so far, the UK's bill up until March 2005 was £3.1 billion; 2,339 Allied troops killed; 98 UK troops killed; 30,000 estimated Iraqi civilian deaths; 0 number of WMDs found; 8 per cent of Iraqi children suffering acute malnutrition; \$35,819 million is the World Bank estimated cost of reconstruction; 53,470 Iraqi insurgents killed; 67 per cent of Iraqis feel less secure because of occupation; 47 per cent of Iraqis never have enough electricity; 20 casualties per month from unexploded mines; 20 per cent inflation rate in 2005; 25-40 per cent estimated unemployment rate in November 2005; 251 foreigners kidnapped; 70 per cent of Iraqis whose sewage system rarely works; 183,000 foreign troops are still in action in Iraq - 162,000 US troops, 8,000 British troops and 13,000 from other nations; 90 daily attacks by insurgents in November 2005 (in June 2003 - 8); 82 per cent of Iraqis are "strongly opposed" to presence of coalition troops; 15,955 US troops wounded in action. [see Peace Movement Aotearoa]

A Pacific Focus

In 2006 the Churches' Agency on International Issues will focus on global political issues in the Pacific including:

- globalisation and migrant labour
- climate change
- HIV/AIDS

Make sure you are on the CAII mailing list to receive these free resources.



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