

Heritage Lectures

No. 902

Delivered October 5, 2005



Published by The Heritage Foundation

October 21, 2005

Contesting the Threat of Terrorism

The Right Honorable Charles Clarke, M.P.

As we face the challenge of terrorist attack, most recently in Bali again last Saturday, it is our duty to analyze and then determine the means by which this threat can best be contested. Today, I want to clarify the values and society which we are defending; identify the threat with which we have to deal; and set out the central means by which we need both to contest those who seek to destroy us and to build the solidarity and determination which we need to succeed.

What Are We Defending?

The United Kingdom and the United States are both, in common with most of the developed world, societies which:

- Value and build free speech and freedom of expression, including free media;
- Believe in a society which respects all faiths, races, and beliefs;
- Believe in a society founded on the rule of law;
- Want every citizen to have a democratic stake in our society;
- Value the free economy which has built prosperity;
- Value the fact that women can play a full role in our society.

We all know that our society, based on these values, will continue to evolve and develop, and we can all point to aspects of our societies which fall short of these aspirations. But we also know that the achievements we do have are based on centuries of struggle in both your country and mine, of which the American

Talking Points

- It is wrong to claim that al-Qaeda and their allies are driven by some desire to seek justice in the Middle East—the part of the world where progress has been most difficult to achieve in the past 30 years.
- Al-Qaeda and its allies have no clear demands for the Middle East. The only common thread in their approach is a violent and destructive opposition to democracy in any form.
- But democracy is the strongest form of society and the most resilient. It is the aspiration of peoples throughout the world. Through democracy, extremist terrorism will be defeated.
- We must work internationally through the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States, through the relationship between the European Union and the United States, through the G-8, and through the United Nations.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/homelanddefense/hl902.cfm

Produced by the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis
Institute for International Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

Revolution was an outstanding example. The societies which we have built, with the values which they embody, are not slight or passing. They are deeply rooted and profound.

These values are embraced, both in the United States and in the United Kingdom, by the overwhelming majority of our citizens, from whatever faith group or minority ethnic group they come. Indeed, most of those who have migrated to our countries have migrated precisely because they want to embrace our values. So our society is characterized by common values but diverse backgrounds, faiths, and lifestyles.

This has been a stunningly successful model of integration. Compare the United Kingdom of the 1950s—before significant migration took place—with the United Kingdom of today. In so many key fields of life and endeavour—design, literature, food; there are too many to name—the vibrancy of diversity has powered creativity and economic success, but always within the framework of our common values.

Moreover, we know that our type of democratic society has been the ambition which has driven enormous political and social change over the past 30 years. In that 30 years:

- Fascist or militaristic Greece, Spain, and Portugal have been succeeded by democracy;
- Apartheid South Africa has been succeeded by democracy;
- Colonialist Southern Africa has been replaced by democracy;
- Latin and Central American dictatorship has been replaced by democracy;
- The whole totalitarian Central and Eastern Europe has been succeeded by democracy;
- In Southeast Asia, democracy has replaced dictatorship.

I perfectly well understand that in each of these parts of the world, massive problems remain and there are still significant issues which remain to be addressed. In Africa, for example, the issues remain acute, which is why the British government placed Africa at the center of our G-8 agenda.

However, it is the case that these are absolutely enormous changes in one generation, which proves that change for the good can happen and, moreover, that it can happen in very many cases without violence or bloodshed. And the fight for democracy is at the core of this change.

There will be many different analyses of the history, but my own view is that the 1945–89 Cold War was succeeded by the period to 9/11 in 2001, when democracy became better entrenched, and now, after 2001, all that democratic progress is under attack from al-Qaeda and their allies.

What Is the Threat?

I believe that this is precisely because we have developed a highly successful model of integration which enables people of all backgrounds and faiths to prosper and live together within the safeguard of common values. Our society is itself an affront, and a reproach, to the ideologues who believe that only their way of living life is the right one.

And make no mistake: The threat we face is ideological. It is not driven by poverty, or by social exclusion, or by racial hatred. Those who attacked London in July, those who have been engaged in terrorist networks elsewhere in the world, and those who attacked New York in 2001 were not the poor and dispossessed. They were, for the most part, well educated and prosperous. In the case of terrorists in the UK, they have also been ethnically and nationally diverse.

What drives these people on is ideas. And, unlike the liberation movements of the post-World War II era, these are not political ideas like national independence from colonial rule, or equality for all citizens without regard for race or creed, or freedom of expression without totalitarian repression. Such ambitions are, at least in principle, negotiable and in many cases have actually been negotiated.

However, there can be no negotiation about the re-creation of the Caliphate; there can be no negotiation about the imposition of Sharia law; there can be no negotiation about the suppression of equality between the sexes; there can be no negotiation about the ending of free speech. These values

are fundamental to our civilization and are simply not up for negotiation.

It is equally wrong to claim, as some do, that the motivation of al-Qaeda and their allies is driven by some desire to seek justice in the Middle East—the part of the world where progress has been most difficult to achieve in the past 30 years. I do not accept that in any respect.

Al-Qaeda and its allies have no clear demands for the Middle East. In fact, the only common thread in their approach is a violent and destructive opposition to democracy in any form.

- They find democracy in Israel abhorrent, and they seek to destroy it.
- They find democracy in Palestine abhorrent, and they seek to destroy it.
- They find democracy in Afghanistan abhorrent, and they seek to destroy it.
- And now they find the democracy in Iraq, which the United Nations is seeking to support and establish, so abhorrent that they are resorting to the most vicious and vile terrorism to do whatever they can to destroy it.

Their methods, too, are different. Because they recognize no common bonds with people who have different beliefs, they are prepared to kill indiscriminately. Indeed, mass murder is their explicit objective, their measure of success in their terms, and their methods of recruitment bear more comparison with self-destructive cults than political movements.

In fact, the whole approach of al-Qaeda and their like is more akin to 19th century nihilism than to 20th century liberation. But this modern nihilism is innovative, flexible, and cunning nihilism because al-Qaeda and the networks inspired by them approach their task with all the resources of modern technology and all the focus of modern zealotry.

The most important conclusion to draw from this analysis is that there is not some particular government policy decision, or even some overall policy stance, which we could change and thus somehow remove our society from the al-Qaeda firing line. Their nihilism means that our societies would only cease to be a target if we were to renounce all those

values of freedom and liberty which we have fought to extend over so many years.

Our only answer to this threat must be to contest and then to defeat it.

Contesting the Threat

I suggest that the best way to contest this threat is by building and strengthening the democracy of our society, by isolating extremism in its various manifestations, by strengthening the legal framework within which we contest terrorism, and by developing more effective means to protect our democracy.

First, in each of our societies, we need to strengthen our democracy. That means promoting a society which is based upon the true respect of one individual for another, one culture for another, one faith for another, one race for another. It means promoting the view that democracy is the means of making change in our societies, and it means working to strengthen our democracy so that young people from all communities can see the ways in which their engagement in our societies can bring about democratic change and reduce the alienation which can make individuals prey to those who seek to destroy us.

In Britain, we are addressing this by trying to work with all faiths, including Islam, to build and strengthen the integration of faith into our national life.

Second, we need to take steps to isolate extremist organisations and those individuals who promote extremism. In so doing, it is essential for us to work closely with the mainstream faith communities and to understand their preoccupations.

In our country, we have decided that we need legislation which outlaws incitement to religious or race hatred and makes it clear that glorification of terrorism is not a legitimate political expression of view. We wish to encourage faiths to pursue their faith openly and directly.

We intend to attack the foci of extremist organization, whether they be in training camps, in prisons, in bookshops, or in places of worship. We are working, with international allies where appropriate, to identify the networks and individuals who are promoting extremism, and we use legal power

to disrupt and weaken them. We intend to remove from the UK those foreign citizens who are using their time in our country to promote extremism, though this course is not legally straightforward.

On the international and diplomatic front, I believe that we have to build our relationships with Muslim countries which oppose extremism, such as those in North Africa. That is why I so much welcome the decision of the European Union earlier this week formally to open admission discussions with Turkey.

All of these measures will further isolate and weaken those extremists who wish to promote terrorism as an appropriate form of activity.

Third, we need to strengthen the legal framework within which we can address these issues. I assert throughout all this the need to retrain and strengthen our human rights and the values which underlie them. But I say at the same time that the right to be protected from the death and destruction caused by indiscriminate terrorism is at least as important as the right of the terrorist to be protected from torture and ill-treatment.

I believe that our peoples expect not only the protection of individual rights, but also the protection of democratic values such as safety and security under the law. We need a legal framework which seeks to address the difficult balance in these rights. We cannot properly fight terrorism with one legal hand tied behind our back, or give terrorists the unfettered right to defend themselves as they promote and prepare violent attacks on our society.

For that reason, we are proposing legal changes in Britain which outlaw acts preparatory to terrorism and terrorist training, and we are asking the

European Court of Human Rights to look again at some of the jurisprudence which has developed in this area.

Fourth, we need, as the U.N. Security Council recognized last month, to strengthen our ability to control our borders. That means doing our best to harmonize the biometric data on passports, visas, ID cards where they exist, and perhaps even driving licenses. One of the reasons I am in Washington today is to pursue the discussion between the European Union and the United States on precisely these matters. There are difficult issues here, but it is in all of our interests to resolve them.

This is a substantial agenda to contest the threats we face, but I believe it to be essential for us.

Solidarity and Determination

I conclude today by asserting that the single most important weapon that we have in defending the societies from which we come is our determination and our solidarity.

Democracy is the strongest form of society and the most resilient. It is the aspiration of peoples throughout the world. Through democracy, extremist terrorism will be defeated.

We must work internationally through the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States, through the relationship between the European Union and the United States, through the G-8, and through the United Nations.

The British government will pursue these ends with determination and commitment.

—*The Right Honorable Charles Clarke, M.P., is Home Secretary of the United Kingdom.*