TARIQ ALI COMMENTS

Much has been said in recent days about the instability of Pakistan. But the danger lies not so much within the population as a whole, where religious extremists are a small minority (more confessional Mvotes are cast in Israel than Pakistan), as within the Army. Officers and other ranks who have worked with the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Lashkar-i-Tayyaba in Kashmir have become infected with zealotry. At the same time native Islamists, aware of their weakness in the country, have focused their efforts on the Army. Estimates vary between 15 and 30 per cent: whatever the exact figure, these men will not look on in silence while their colleagues in Afghanistan are attacked from bases inside Pakistan. In Kashmir there has already been open opposition to the last ceasefire. An Islamist Pakistani captain refused to vacate Indian-held territory. A colonel despatched by the Pakistani High Command to order an immediate withdrawal was shot dead as a traitor to Islam. Already a partial wreck, Pakistan could be destroyed by a civil war.

The terrorists who carried out the killings in the US were not bearded illiterates from the mountain villages of Afghanistan. They were educated, middle-class professionals from Egypt and the Hijaz province of Saudi Arabia, two key US allies in the region. What made them propagandists of the deed? The bombing of Iraq, economic sanctions, the presence of American forces in Saudi soil. Politicians in the West have turned a blind eye to this, as they have to the occupation of Palestine and the crimes of Israel. Without profound change in the Middle East, Osama bin Laden, dead or alive, is of little significance.

In the West, Saudi Arabia is simply a source of oil. We prefer not to notice the scale of social and religious oppression, the widespread dejection and anxiety, the growing discontent among Saudis. The Wahabbi Islam practised there has been the inspiration of the Taliban. It was the Saudi monarchy that funded fanaticism in South Asia; it was they (and the CIA) who sent bin Laden to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. Islam was seen by all the experts as the main bulwark against Communism. Denied any secular openings, dissenting graduates have turned to radical Islam, accusing the Saudi royal family of hypocrisy, corruption and subservience to America. These are clever tacticians, open in their admiration of bin Laden and the regime headed by his father-in-law, Mullah Omar, in Kabul. When they blow up bases or foreigners in the Kingdom, the security forces round up a few Pakistani or Filipino immigrants and execute them to show the US that justice has been done, but the real organisers are untouchable. Their tentacles reach into the heart of Saudi society, and it's debatable whether they can now cut them off, even at the request of the United States. ■

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The editors of *Pravada* thank all our friends in Sri Lanka and abroad for sending us articles on the e-mail analysing the current situation.

ON 'TERRORISM'— THEIRS AND OURS

Eqbal Ahmad

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Jewish underground in Palestine was described a "terrorist." Then new things happened. By 1942, the Holocaust was occurring, and a certain liberal sympathy with the Jewish people had built up in the Western world. At that point, the terrorists of Palestine, who were Zionists, suddenly started to be described, by 1944-45, as "freedom fighters." At least two Israeli Prime Ministers, including Menachem Begin, can actually be found in books and posters with their pictures, saying "Terrorists, Reward —" The highest reward I have noted so far was 100,000 British pounds on the head of Menachem Begin. Then from 1969 to 1990 the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization, occupied the center stage as the "terrorist organization." Yasir Arafat has been described repeatedly by the great sage of American journalism, William Safire of the *New York Times*, as the "Chief of Terrorism."

Now, on 29 September 1998, I was rather amused to notice a picture of Yasir Arafat to the right of President Bill Clinton. To his left is Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Clinton is looking towards Arafat, and Arafat is looking literally like a meek mouse. Just a few years earlier he used to appear with this very menacing look, with a gun at his belt.

In 1985, President Ronald Reagan received a group of bearded men. They were very ferocious-looking bearded men with turbans, looking like they came from another century. President Reagan received them in the White House. After receiving them he spoke to the press. He pointed towards them, and said, "These are the moral equivalent of America's founding fathers." These were the Afghan Mujahiddin. They were at the time, guns in hand, battling the "Evil Empire." They were the moral equivalent of our founding fathers! In August 1998, another President ordered missile strikes from the US navy based in the Indian Ocean to kill Osama Bin Laden and his men in camps in Afghanistan. I do not wish to embarrass you with the reminder that Mr. Bin Laden, whom 15 American missiles were fired at in Afghanistan, was only a few years ago the moral equivalent of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson! He got angry over the fact that he has been demoted from "Moral Equivalent" of US "Founding Fathers." So he is taking out his anger in different ways. I have recalled all these stories to point out that the matter of terrorism is rather complicated.

Terrorists change. The terrorist of yesterday is the hero of today, and the hero of yesterday becomes the terrorist of today. This is a serious matter of the constantly changing world of images in which we have to keep our heads straight to know what is terrorism and what is not. But more importantly, to know what causes it, and how to stop it. The next point about 'terrorism' is that posture of inconsistency necessarily evades definition. If you are not going to be consistent, you're not going to define. I have examined at least twenty official documents on terrorism. Not one defines the word. All of them express it emotively, polemically, to arouse our emotions rather than to exercise our intelligence. One example is representative: 25October 1984,George Shultz, then US Secretary of State, at the New York Park Avenue Synagogue, gives a long speech on terrorism — in the State Department bulletin of seven single-spaced pages, there is not a single proper definition of terrorism.

What we get is the following: 1."Terrorism is a modern barbarism that we call terrorism." 2. is even more brilliant: "Terrorism is a form of political violence." Aren't you surprised? 3. "Terrorism is a threat to Western civilization." 4. "Terrorism is a menace to Western moral values." Does it tell you anything, other than to arouse your emotions? This is typical. They don't define terrorism because definitions involve a commitment to analysis, comprehension and adherence to some norms of consistency. That's the second characteristic of the official literature on terrorism.

The third characteristic is that the absence of definition does not prevent officials from being globalistic. We may not define terrorism, but it is a menace to the moral values of Western civilization. It is a menace also to mankind. It's a menace to good order. Therefore, you must stamp it out worldwide. You need a global reach to kill it. Anti-terrorist policies therefore have to be global. Same speech of George Shultz: "There is no question about our ability to use force where and when it is needed to counter terrorism." There is no geographical limit. On a single day the