

for The New People

Terrorism and US Nuclear Weapons

The new US Nuclear Posture Review projects an expanded policy of state terrorism

The terrible events and aftermath of September 11 have produced a striking convergence, in substance and in potential understanding, of the essence of the new "apocalyptic" terrorism and of "military nuclearism", both, as interwoven threats to human life and security.

It is most remarkable that in promoting the "war on terrorism" there has been no consistent or precise definition of the word "terrorism", offered by the President, military leaders, pundits or the media, beyond such loaded predicates as "evil", "barbaric", "attack on freedom". This linguistic vagueness has served to promote emotional, unqualified and jingoist support for this war-without-end and to blind the public to the hypocritical, contradictory and selective use of this rhetorical evasion. It has favored uncritical thinking about US military and foreign policy generally, and of the core role of nuclear weapons in particular.

Defining terrorism

Deliberately avoiding metaphorical use of the word "terrorism" for the many forms of human cruelty and coercion, it is important to establish a comprehensive, coherent, consensual definition of "terrorism" to allow its use with precision and consistency in public debate, analysis, and judgment of the massive human violence threatened in our new era. For a start, a commonly understood and workable definition of terrorism might be --

the illegal threat or use of indiscriminate deadly force, violence or injury, deliberately or inevitably targeted against innocent civilian non-combatants, to cause terror, for the goal of compelling desired compliant behavior.

This definition deliberately focuses on the essential nature of the "acts", the "victims" and the "goal"; and is intentionally not contingent on the "perpetrators", or the rationalizing "context" and "motivations" of their acts, because perpetrators usually deny and justify terrorism and its sinister connotation on the basis of these issues.

In the past, the destructiveness of terrorism has been limited, its undertaking symbolic and its purpose a cry of desperation and impotence. But on September 11, close to 3000 people, mostly working people, were killed in a matter of minutes, when fanatical international attackers used civilian aircraft, with hundreds of ordinary passengers, as "weapons of mass destruction". As with the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombs, though far smaller in number, the victims were primarily civilians and the city, the attack was unprovoked by the victims, and the goal was to induce terror, to shatter society, and to change national behavior. Both were acts of mass "apocalyptic" terrorism and *crimes-against humanity*. If available in the future, the agents of September terrorism might well use nuclear weapons.

So in this new age of permanent war, foreshadowed by the "total" wars of the last century, the combination of global domination by the remote remaining superpower, massive grievances and misery, fanatical religious fundamentalism, and modern technologies has created the will and ability to cause death and destruction without limits. The technology of massive lethality, joined with self-righteous beliefs and national causes, is harnessed by nations, as well as by non-government groups to threaten or use unlimited violence against "enemies" to advance their missions. We are confronted by both non-state terrorism and by state terrorism.

Military nuclearism as terrorism

The first nuclear bomb was aimed at the city center of Hiroshima, with the intent, according to the US planners, of "obtaining the greatest psychological effect against Japan and...making the initial use sufficiently spectacular...to be internationally recognized". With almost all victims civilians, it demonstrated the capability of means without limits-- tens of thousands and a city disappeared--- the goal, terror to compel surrender of Japan and to establish U.S. superpower status, threatening all potential future rivals.

Since then, first in the Cold War and now in the permanent "war against terrorism", the US and other nations harbor immense quantities of nuclear weapons, the quintessential weapons of terrorism -- uncontrollable in their effects, indiscriminate in their killing of non-combatants, and penultimate in destruction of life, property and the environment -- in the service of self-defined security, vital interests and ideology. Their core doctrine of "nuclear deterrence", targeting plans, and hair-trigger launch postures --based on "mutual assured destruction" -- have threatened and promised, both, annihilation of millions and mutual suicide. It is not happenstance that the root meaning of both "terrorism" and "deterrence", especially conjoined to "nuclear", is intended to convey and actualize overwhelming fear and terror, to compel control.

Nuclear Posture Review plans for state terrorism

Through the nuclear age, the United States has defined its operating "game plan" for nuclear weapons policies and use with a "*Nuclear Posture Review*", undertaken periodically by the Pentagon and adopted by the Administration. For most of the Cold War, it embraced huge arsenals and policies of "nuclear deterrence" and "mutual assured destruction" to confront its nuclear superpower rival, the USSR. Although often honored in the breach, the rivals established treaties of arms reductions, non-proliferation and the commitment to total nuclear disarmament, and ended with declarations to forswear nuclear war. Despite the fall of the Berlin wall, the 1994 *Nuclear Posture Review* continued the policies and premises of the Cold War, although it projected some reductions in still huge nuclear stockpiles and delivery systems.

With advent of the new administration, President Bush proclaimed the end of "outworn" Cold War nuclear policies and their core dependence on nuclear weapons, and promised huge reductions in nuclear weaponry. Instead, in true Orwellian fashion, the real "game plan" has been defined by the recently completed 2002 *Nuclear Posture Review*, but withheld from the public by secrecy. Nevertheless, the cardinal elements have found their way into the media and reveal the following:

- **General policies:** core military dependence on nuclear weapons; *first-use* against non-nuclear targets and nations; coordination with conventional weapons and antiballistic missile systems (BMD); projection of nuclear war-fighting.
- **Specified policies for use:** "against targets able to withstand non-nuclear attack;" in retaliation for the use of biological, or chemical weapons; or "in the event of surprising military developments," of unspecified nature.
- **Arsenals, systems, programs:** total warheads will not be reduced, deployed warheads will be reduced but can be reversed, and no warheads to be destroyed; new mini-nukes will be developed and nuclear test explosions probably resumed; BMD will be deployed; nuclear establishment will be greatly expanded.
- **Targeted enemies:** Russia, China, "axis-of-evil" nations (Iraq, Iran, North Korea), Syria, Libya; terrorists; nations seen to threaten or oppose US interests.
- **Consequences:** commitment to nuclear weapons forever; offensive posture (with BMD); blurring distinction between nuclear and conventional war and weapons and between potential "enemy states" and terrorists; key role in permanent war (i.e. folded into "war on terrorism"); unilateralism and violation of nuclear arms control treaties (including abrogation or virtual withdrawal).

Implementing the nuclear weapons plans and policies of the US *Nuclear Posture Review* will be a violation of international law and numerous US obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and other treaties. One respected nuclear expert, William Arkin, has called this, "an integrated, significantly expanded planning doctrine for nuclear wars." The Natural Resources Defense Council has labeled it, "faking nuclear restraint:.....(a) secret plan for strengthening US nuclear forces." The *Nuclear Posture Review* is itself the explicit "threat" to use nuclear weapons of terrorism. Its implementation will actualize their "use". This is inarguably "state terrorism" par excellence.

Since the September 11th catastrophe, the public obsession with terrorism has focused attention on this "*crime-against-humanity*", but with an extraordinary absence and evasion of a consistent precise definition of its meaning. While any and all threats or use of nuclear weapons, by their very nature, would meet a commonly understood definition of terrorism, the United States embraces their expanded use against unilaterally declared

enemies, who it believes to be terrorist, to harbor terrorists or to possess nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction.

The new preoccupation with terrorism and with weapons of mass destruction and the contradictory rhetoric and actions of United States have created a unique challenge and opportunity for education and advocacy. We must offer and promote a clear consistent application of the definition of terrorism. We must assert that nuclear weapons and policies are inherently terrorist and that their adoption by our country and others is state terrorism. Finally, we must convince the public first, then our government, that defense against terrorism will require the complete elimination of state terrorism and its prime dependence on nuclear weapons.

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3/10/02