

Haass, R. (2005) *The Opportunity: America's Moment to Alter History's Course* (New York: Public Affairs)

The greater challenge is to agree on the correct remedy when terrorism is carried out by a state or a state allows its territory to be used by terrorists. In many instances, the United States has found itself mostly on its own when it has sought to build international support for politically and economically sanctioning those governments (most notably North Korea, Iran, Syria, and Cuba) it considers to be state sponsors of terror. (The United States did do better when it came to garnering international support for sanctions against Libya, but this may have been because Libyan-sponsored terrorism affected France and the United Kingdom directly.) There is also disagreement (especially in Europe) as to the wisdom of economic sanctions as a tool. Broad sanctions can penalize the same people on whose behalf they have been invoked. Sanctions can also have the perverse effect of reinforcing central authority by requiring that all economic activity go through limited and often government-controlled channels.

Still, there is far greater international cooperation against terrorism than before. All of the other major powers have had their own painful experience with terrorism, which reinforces the perception that terrorism constitutes a common threat requiring a collective response. The recognition seems to be growing that terrorism can no longer be justified or tolerated whatever the cause, given the vulnerability of modern societies and the killing potential of modern weapons. The goal should be to codify this emerging consensus in a new international convention that would define terror and put countries on record to deny terrorists support of any kind.

As useful as such an agreement would be, international efforts to delegitimize terrorism and deny terrorists financial resources or safe haven or ever more powerful weapons, while essential, are not enough. Terrorism turns out to be not just terrible but terribly complex. Speaking of a "war on terrorism," however, does not help to define either the threat or the solution. Wars tend to be fought with military arms by soldiers on battlefields. None of this applies to terrorism. Terrorists use box cutters, civilian aircraft, parked cars, and trucks. For terrorists there is no battlefield—or every place is a battlefield, from airports and shopping malls to restaurants and movie theaters.

Also, wars have an end. Although they range from the Six Days' War in the Middle east in 1967 to the Thirty Years' War some three centuries before in Europe to the Hundred Years' War between England and France, wars usually have discernable beginnings and endings, often ratified by a treaty. But there is unlikely to be any end to the war on terrorism. There will always be individuals and groups with a grievance or a set of objectives that they believe gives them the license to kill and destroy. The fact that terrorists belong to no single organization only compounds the problem. Osama bin Laden could be captured or killed, al Qaeda could disappear, but offshoots would live on. Indeed, Osama bin Laden can in some ways be understood as a foundation president who provides resources and guidance to largely independent groups. As one U.S. government report published in 2003 realistically stated: "Victory against terrorism will not occur in a single, defining moment. It will not be marked by the likes of a surrender ceremony on the deck of the USS *Missouri* that ended World War II."

So if terrorism is not a war, how should we understand it? Perhaps as a disease. There are steps that can be taken to eradicate or neutralize specific viruses or bacteria. There are steps that can and should be taken to reduce our vulnerability. And we can reduce the consequences if despite all of our efforts we "become infected," that is, the terrorists succeed, as on occasion they will. Translated, this entails disruption (using intelligence, law enforcement, and military force), protection (homeland security, hardening buildings), and preparations to mitigate the consequences of inevitably successful actions (medical preparations, civil defense, and so on).

Success, then, cannot be defined in terms of eliminating or ending terrorism, any more than health can be defined as eliminating or ending all disease. We may eliminate a particular disease either by stamping out the cause (yellow fever) or by developing an effective vaccine (polio), but some diseases will prove resistant and new strains will emerge. The same holds for terrorism: We may destroy one group or capture and kill certain individuals, but terrorism in one or another form will persist.