UNDERSTANDING

TERROR perspectives for Canadians

Editor: Karim-Aly S. Kassam

Contents

Introduction: Why Try to Understand Terror?

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Terror is experienced in a variety of ways and it is felt among all members of civil society. While much has been said on "the global war on terror," it remains cunningly elusive and yet pervasive. The very act of critical reflection renders a concept or idea approachable. The aim of this collection of essays is to *understand* terror and not to *describe* it. It is on these grounds that this work differs from other works on the subject. Its originality arises not from new material on the subject of terrorism, but from viewing terror from a diversity of perspectives, hitherto not considered when discussing terror.[1] We feel the imminent threat of terror through its metaphorical power in our daily dosage of news (Melnyk's essay; chap. 4), from the environmental crisis (Lassoie's essay; chap. 7), and its impact on food security, or as experienced by Canadian peacekeeping troops during the Rwandan genocide, which claimed nearly a million lives (Beardsley's essay; chap. 8) or from the continuing loss of life suffered by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. Just a few years ago, in Calgary, we feared for the polarization in our social fabric resulting from the reprinting of the Danish cartoons of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad (Firby's essay; chap. 5). As I am writing this introduction, the swine flu pandemic is receiving media attention. At the height of global fears over the swine flu pandemic, while I was queued to get coffee at Cornell University, a Mexican graduate student, having noticed me, walked over to shake my hand. When I returned his gesture of greeting, he suddenly became apologetic and alarmed, insisting that he had washed his

hands. I explained to him that I did not understand what he was talking about. The hysteria caused by the media (possibly justified) had effectively made him deeply sensitive to how he would be perceived as a Mexican national. Even simple but essential things to our social fabric such as manners and courteous interactions were affected by the fear surrounding the swine flu (H1N1) virus. Subsequently, as I travelled to Afghanistan, China, Tajikistan, and Turkey to undertake research, I was viewed with suspicion for possibly carrying the virus that may infect others. Now, I was the one who was viewed with anxiety. The reasons for my travel were irrelevant, the lowest common denominator, the fact that I was a North American was sufficient to warrant concern. I, like other travellers, had to follow different procedures and rules devised by each of these countries to satisfy their legitimate concerns for the safety of their citizens. While in China, ironically, an American colleague wittily asked: "Does a person with a Muslim background catch swine flu?" Like Jews, Muslims do not eat pork (although you cannot get the virus from eating pork). The *double entendre* was clear. I was both Muslim and North American – two reasons for 'concern.' Even in barbed jest there is room for thought, so I could not help but reflect on the relevance of Glasberg's essay (chap. 9) that explores how terror and suspicion pervades our civilization. The world is made up of complex-connectivity and it demands answers to questions we may not have considered before. The uniqueness of this collection arises from the integration of essays, which are a combination of narratives in the first person with grounded explanations and analysis of historical events as provided by Dyer (chap. 1), Whitaker (chap. 2), and Farson (chap. 3).

Terror is multi-causal and cannot be reduced to single principles. This work urges the reader to reflect on its diverse contexts and expressions, and confront terror's pervasiveness in today's society. This collection does not presume to give answers but juxtaposes events and analysis that are normally not considered part of terror. While some may consider them to be tangential, we (the contributors) believe they are central to an understanding of terror. *Understanding Terror*, as a collection, views "the global war on terror" from a different lens. It defines the boundaries of terror, examines its construction in the media, and explores its relationship to the "other." *Understanding Terror* takes a historical approach to consideration of terror through specific examples and

its presence in the media, in North American society, in general, and Canada, in particular. It offers insights from those who have viewed and experienced terror. The aim is to engender questioning and discourse.

This work is primarily situated in a pluralistic orientation typical of Canadian pragmatism. Terror is multi-causal. Understanding it requires an interdisciplinary perspective informed by values of pluralism, which are distinctly Canadian. This work is uniquely Canadian because it is not easily found or taught in university classes that address terrorism. Canadian characteristics of this work do not merely arise from our own experiences of terror, such as the FLQ crisis (Whitaker's essay; chap. 2) or the Air India bombing that primarily killed Canadians (Farson's essay; chap. 3), but from the insights of Canadians who believe in such things as "the right to protect" civil society (Beardsley's essay; chap. 8) or the "balance between freedom of expression and responsibility" (Firby's essay; chap. 5). Canadian public policy does not announce absolutes; it negotiates contingencies and navigates diversity. These essays do not make presumptuous pronouncements about the war on terror; instead, they urge the reader to tease out nuances in the notion of terror in relation to the "self" as well as the "other." The collection urges Canadians to *think* instead of relying on formulaic clichés of pundits. Because examination of the notion of terror cannot be left to a narrow group of experts, these essays collectively present a variety of perspectives characteristic of Canadian civil society. Nor are all contributors in this collection *experts* on terrorism in the conventional sense. Rather, the know-how of some contributors arises from direct engagement with terror while the expertise of other contributors provides a reflective consideration of terror as it manifests itself in multiple forms.

To achieve meaningful insights, a varied collection of individuals who have dealt with the issue of terror, such as journalists, scholars, and public policy experts, have participated to engage in a dialogue with the reader. Their essays are organized in a manner that alternates between examination of specific events and reflective consideration on how these events may be interpreted. *Understanding Terror* weaves diverse perspectives with a historical sense so as to allow an appreciation and contextualization of the notion of terror. Essays in this collection take a variety of forms. Some are explanations of historical events, while others are narratives of events in the first person; and yet others

are analytical, exploring the implications of the narratives and historical events. Together, these essays peel away at the layers of the notion of terror.

The first essay is Gwynne Dyer's "Terror and its Boundaries." Dyer explains that the more powerful states have historically shown their willingness to use terror for their strategic interests. This balance of terror underpinned the Cold War. He describes the historical evolution of terror as a category of guerrilla war. He traces the development of guerrilla warfare and its use of terror as a form of resistance to, and liberation from, colonial rule. Dyer contrasts the development of rural and urban guerrilla war and the rise of "designer terrorism" in Western Europe and North America. Dyer illustrates that not only have terrorist movements been present in the West, but these powerful states have also made use of terror as a strategy both among their own societies and outside their borders. Dyer outlines the development that led to the use of terror by the African National Congress, the Irish Republican Army, the Palestinian Liberation Organization and more recently the Salafist movement that inspires al-Qaida. He concludes that the "war on terror" is misleading because terrorism has been present for a long time and will continue to exist as long as people have grievances.

Reg Whitaker, in "How Canada Confronts Terrorism: Canadian Responses to 9/11 in Historical and Comparative Context," compares the "Cold War" to the "global war on terror," revealing important parallels and differences. The comparison of "global war on terror" to the "Cold War" is significant because each has had a deeply polarizing effect on societies within the international system of nations. He explains that both wars were carried out on two fronts: without and within. The war within – that is among Canadians and Canadian civil society – has major implications for civil liberties. Compared to the Cold War, he argues that the "global war on terror" is a more populist struggle since the target of the terror is seen to be civilian. Therefore, this populist response poses a clear danger to visible minorities like the Muslim population of Canada. Whitaker also considers Canada's own home-grown terrorist movement, the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ). The crisis in October 1970, resulted in the imposition of the War Measures Act. He illustrates the seeming paradox of how an illiberal response, namely the use of the power of the state, to crush opposition during the October Crisis ultimately led to the development

of a liberal democratic Canadian public policy that increasingly safeguarded civil liberties while eliminating the threat of terrorism in Quebec. The FLQ failed because Canadians were able to develop democratic avenues to address the grievances of Quebeckers. Whitaker maintains that Canadian experiences arising from the Cold War and the October Crisis have significantly influenced policy direction resulting from the events of September 11, 2001. While the "War on Terror" is seen as primarily an American-led venture, Canadian support for it has underlying economic realities. Given the "global war on terror," Canada, Whitaker argues, has retained political distance from the United States primarily due to its response to the Cold War and the 1970 October Crisis. While not perfect, this unique historical and policy trajectory has resulted in a made-in-Canada solution to security.

Following Whitaker, Stuart Farson focuses on the events surrounding the downing of Air India flight 182. He examines the role of successive Canadian governments and media in not recognizing the destruction of Air India flight 182 as the largest civilian mass murder in Canadian history. In "In Accounting for Disaster: The Quest for Closure after Aerial Mass Murder – The Downing of Air India Flight 182 in Comparative Perspective," Farson considers the Air India bombing in light of the destruction of Korean Airlines, Iran Air, and Pan Am passenger liners. He provides examples of how state and non-state actors benefited from acts of terror. Building on Dyer's contention that state and non-state actors use the threat of terror to advance their strategic interests, Farson shows how the Government of the United States capitalized on the downing of a Korean Airlines flight to wage a propaganda war against the Soviet Union and advance its strategic military interests in Europe. Alternatively, he shows how the Pan Am disaster resulted from a private-sector decision to profit from the threat of terror. By advertising its security system as state-of-the-art in order to attract travellers and gain greater market share, Pan Am overstated its ability to protect its clients. The security system focused essentially on the wrong and ultimately ineffective aspect of passenger safety. Farson demonstrates that the families of the victims are consistently given the least consideration. In all cases, the concern for closure for the families was neither forthcoming nor a priority. The role of the Canadian government is particularly noteworthy with reference to the bombing of Air India flight 182 at the hands of Sikh separatists. Arguably

Canada's greatest civilian catastrophe, the downing of Air India flight 182 has remained, for decades, widely unacknowledged because it affected Canadians of Indian origin. Suggesting that for both policy makers and the public, the deep sense of loss felt by families of this ethnic minority of Canadian society is somehow less significant. However, building on Whitaker's assertion that Canada has a unique trajectory where public policy corrects historical injustices, the inquiry into the downing of Air India, while twenty-three years late, seeks to redress the concerns of the victims' families and find closure. Whitaker's and Farson's essays both illustrate that the tactical use of terror has diverse and context-specific origins. In the case of the downing or Air India, the origins lay outside of Canada but ended in the loss of Canadian lives.

While Dyer describes the boundaries of terror in a tactical sense, Melnyk in his essay "The Word 'Terrorism' and Its Impact on Public Consciousness" explores the term's metaphorical power. He illustrates how this politically charged word with implied morality sets the parameters of public discourse. He argues that as a result of media support and political sponsorship of the concept of "terrorism," the word has gained official and widely held meaning. This meaning of terrorism has established unquestioned legitimacy which stifles questioning and thoughtful analysis of its usage. As such, terrorism is beyond the pale of human conduct. This word effectively polarizes in order to identify enemies. It enables the separation between "them and us." It facilitates the dehumanization of individuals and criminalization of organizations. This uniform representation of the "other" through powerful media marketing has launched the so-called "global war on terror." Its heavy promotion and association with threatening images in the media has turned it into a powerful rallying cry, which cannot easily be challenged. A culture inspired by fear coupled with the spectacle of mayhem and death suits a profit-driven and sensationalist media's representation of the world. Melnyk argues that a striking feature of the war on terror is that it is perpetually self-justifying because those who can control public discourse can continue to label others as terrorists. A society can unendingly be on some form of alert. Reiterating the point made in earlier essays, Melnyk argues that the threat of terror is strategically used by media (non-state) and state actors. In other words, "the global war on terror" has economic and political currency. Having made a case for the usage of the word

"terrorism" as political rhetoric, Melnyk proceeds to deconstruct the metaphor so as to facilitate public discourse.

Firby provides an illustrative case of representation of terrorism as a powerful metaphor in the media. The cartoons depicting the Muslim Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist demonstrate vividly the metaphorical dimensions of the word "terrorist." In "Groping in the Dark: How the Media, Absent a Frame of Reference, Fumbled the Danish Cartoon Controversy," Firby provides a rare glimpse into the process of decision making undertaken by editorial page editors. He explains the role of fear and intuition as factors that influence editors in the choice of news stories to cover. Generally, fear drives editors to make "safe" decisions, which are tantamount to imitating other media outlets in what they are choosing to cover. In the case of intuition, which depends on considerable experience, it may reinforce conventional wisdom. Both amount to the same result. He describes this phenomenon as "pack journalism." In other words, "if it bleeds, it leads." Furthermore, Firby explains how this type of reporting is vacant of nuanced analysis. In the case of the Danish cartoon controversy, Firby illustrates the exception, how a Canadian city's two leading newspapers chose not to publish the cartoons despite pressure resulting from the decision of the *Jewish Free Press* and outright taunts from the *Western Standard*. The decision to publish the cartoons depicting the Muslim Prophet Muhammad as a "terrorist" was framed as expression of the "freedom of the press" by these two (hitherto) lesser-known Calgary-based print media. Firby explains why editors need to have a historical sense in order to understand context and the ability to stay ahead of issues guided by a code of ethics when addressing dilemmas about what constitutes freedom of the press and the social consequences of that freedom. He argues that the decision not to publish material that is injurious to a sector of society may also be an exercise of the same freedom. Arguably, the choice by two of Calgary's leading newspapers not to republish the Danish cartoons is also an illustration of the sensitivity to the cultural and religious diversity that forms Canadian civil society. It is a resounding, but rare, example of the media choosing to act thoughtfully and reflectively.

To complement Firby's illustrative case, Kassam provides a contextualized historical analysis of terminology. Virtually every essay in the collection makes

reference to the role of the media perpetuating an uncritical representation of terror for the purposes of spectacle. Reporting of terror in the media is often void of analysis and vacant of the historical context that gives rise to acts of terror. In the process of editing this volume, the issue of terminology arose to describe those who commit acts of terror. In the chapter entitled: "The Terrorist 'Other': The Fundamentalist and the Islamist," Kassam, examines the terms "fundamentalist" and "Islamist." He suggests that uncritical use of these terms obscures the issue of terror as solely inspired by religion. Attributing the causes of terror to religion is both vacant of understanding of grievances and dishonest. Framing the discourse of terror by some "experts" generates an (intended or unintended) monopoly where space for alternative and historically contextualized discourse is not possible in the mass media. To illustrate the dangers of uncritical use of terminology, Kassam shows the stark ideological contrast between the thought of two Muslim leaders, Muhammad `Abduh and Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, who are credited with founding the Salafist movement. The Salafist movement is said to inspire organizations like al-Qaida. He illustrates how political motivations and legitimate grievances are disguised by religious rhetoric claiming to represent all of Islam. The characterization of Muslims as the violent "Other" has antecedents in Middle Age Christian discourse to facilitate unity among Christendom. In the twentieth century, this "Other" was replaced by the threat of communist evil from the East in order to sustain the Cold War. In the twenty-first century, the characterization of Muslim "Other" has returned. However, as Firby's case shows, for some media outlets, this uncritical characterization of Muslims is not acceptable in Canadian pluralist society.

James Lassoie begins with a unique and personal description of the anxiety generated by fear during the Cold War and its resurfacing in the so-called "global war on terror." In "Maintaining Environmental Priorities in the Age of Terrorism," he argues that decision making on environmental priorities is hijacked by the pervasive fear of terrorism in the public psyche. Using the statistical concept of "probability neglect," he shows how extreme emotional distress can cause people to ignore the probability of an outcome and focus instead on the unlikely but disastrous chance that it will occur. For instance, individuals may avoid swimming because of an overwhelming fear of shark attacks or

avoid flying because of an overpowering fear of a plane crash. Lassoie maintains that as a result of probability neglect, citizens of Western democracies are afraid of the wrong dangers and subsequently ignore environmental concerns, which will have graver and longer-term consequences than an unlikely act of terror. He cites the role of the media in perpetuating the debilitating anxiety in public consciousness. The age of "the global war on terror" facilitates the advancement of not only certain political ideologies but also environmentally unsound business ventures. In other words, "the global war on terror" is profitable at the expense of the human habitat. Lassoie illustrates how the discourse of this war on terror prevents dialogue on the pressing issue of global climate change. The very distinction of the Western "Self" from the Muslim "Other" does not facilitate awareness of complex connectivity and deep interdependence between diverse human communities and their habitats on this planet. In essence, Lassoie is making a nuanced addition to the preceding essays, by arguing that pluralism is also intimately linked to biological diversity of all species (human and non-human). In other words, "the global war on terror" fails to take into consideration not only cultural diversity but also the complex connection of these cultures to their respective ecological environments.

In "Responding to the Terror of Genocide: Learning from the Rwandan Genocide of 1994," Major Beardsley speaks from a deeply personal and highly traumatic experience of the Rwandan genocide. He directly addresses the reader in a conversation about fear and subsequent fraying of the social fabric. He describes shrewdly calculated terrorization and savagely executed mass murder. Major Beardsley's account is ripe with immediate experience of horror. He explains how the ruling elite and the media are complicit in fomenting hatred. People as diverse as the disenfranchised youth of Kigali and a Christian pastor participate in committing crimes against humanity. Even the sanctuary of the Church is no longer sacrosanct. The case of the Rwandan genocide amply demonstrates the brutal and bloody consequences of the fragmentation of the "Self" from the "Other" in human society. The language of hate and fear perpetuated by the mass media does not allow for perception of interconnectivity and interdependence between cultures. Perhaps what is most significant is how genocide was carried out in Rwanda with clinical efficiency while the majority of humanity looked on with indifference. The names and the bodies

of hundreds of thousands of human beings were effectively wiped out from existence. Such mass murder required a rational bureaucratic machine in order to be effective. Rwanda has the notorious reputation of being the most rapid genocide carried out in the twentieth century. In a matter of one hundred days, 800,000 men, women, and children were killed. His narrative reflects both the pain of Rwanda and a stark warning to humanity of the consequences of fragmentation of the "Self" fuelled by fear and hostility. Beardsley argues that the impulse of genocide needs to be dealt with first internally at the individual level and then externally at the level of the family, community, and humanity.

In the "Psycho-Dynamics of Terror: A Perspective on the Evolution of Western Civilization," Ron Glasberg takes up Beardsley's challenge to engage what is internal to the "Self." He wonders how the terror without blinds us to the terror within. Using the philosophical framework of the intrinsic and the extrinsic, he explores how the societal structure of Western civilization infused with repression of the "Self" results in fear and a sense of disconnection. Using three texts as representative of Western and specifically Christian civilizations, he contends that external (or extrinsic) terror is merely a manifestation of the repression of the failure to deal with internal (or intrinsic) fears. Using the Sermon on the Mount as the setting for an individual's desire to live life without fear, he examines the terror of fate faced by Oedipus in the play by Sophocles, the alienation between the "Self" (victimizer) and the "Other" (the victim) in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and the powerlessness of the individual against a complex governing system in Kafka's *The Trial*. For Glasberg, the psycho-dynamics of terror are inherent in Western civilization. He explains that overwhelming fear results in disconnection of the "Self" from a greater whole. In turn, this alienation of the "Self" results in the stagnation of personal growth coupled with the nameless dread inspired by the seeming banality of an all-pervasive bureaucracy. The cumulative impact of persistent alienation, stagnation, and dread on the "Self" is an all-encompassing sense of terror. In short, fear inspires an endless cycle of alienation and ensuing feeling of terror. Glasberg links the alienation felt by the "Self" and the resulting personal terror arising from an individual identity articulated in the absence of connectivity with "other" human societies and cultures and their diverse ecological habitats.

The collection concludes with a discussion on over-determination of Islam as a source of a clash of civilizations. Given the change in U.S. administrations, there is a welcome sense of relief that the narrow "clash of civilizations" thinking will abate and reason will prevail. However, this type of thinking has become ingrained over a period of several decades in countries that exert considerable military and economic strength, and it is hard to change overnight the biases of civil servants who put such policies into operation. Furthermore, the recent economic crisis will merely exacerbate parochialism as it impacts countries that are affected both by terror and by poverty. Marginalization of people and their legitimate points of view will continue as humanity deals simultaneously with the economic crisis, the environmental and socio-cultural impact of climate change, and growing energy needs for livelihood and food security. The issue of terror is not going to leave us soon. Not only is it high time that we understand its multi-causal aspects, but it is our ethical responsibility as scholars to ensure there is thoughtful public discourse that avoids myopic thinking.

The motivations of the editor, who is Canadian and with Muslim heritage, teaching at an Ivy League institution in the United States, and undertaking re-search among indigenous communities in the Canadian, American, and Russian Arctic, as well as the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, must also be disclosed. It is important to note that Canadian humanitarian and military activities are present in all these locations. These are not only regions where the Cold War played itself out, but strategic areas that are gateways for energy and other resources. These are also areas at the forefront of the damaging impacts of climate change, although the indigenous peoples of these regions did not con-tribute to its causes. It is at these extremes, where people are under social and environmental stress, that terror is felt and fomented. From the periphery, we can see the impact of our civilization, both its weaknesses and its strengths, and this can inform a pluralistic outlook that is uniquely Canadian.

Notes

1   For a more conventional examination of the subject, any online bookstore will provide material using the keywords "terror" or "terrorism." This work does not seek to be conventional.
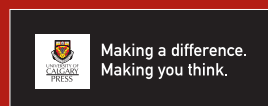
While much has been said about the "global war on terror," the concept remains cunningly elusive and yet undeniably pervasive. This collection of essays is an effort to discover the Canadian "self" through exploration of the terrorist "other." This book views the war on terror with unique eyes. It defines the boundaries of terror, examines its construction in the media, and explores its relationship to the Muslim "other."

Understanding Terror takes a historical approach to consideration of terror through specific examples and its presence in the media in North American society and particularly in Canada. Contributors to the volume include journalists, scholars, and public policy experts, many of whom have dealt with the impact of terror or experienced it first-hand. Their aim is to examine specific events, reflect on how those events might be interpreted, and provide historical context, all the while encouraging the reader to question preconceived characterizations of this highly charged political and cultural issue.

Includes essays by:

- Gwynne Dyer
- Major Brent Beardsley
- Stuart Farson
- Doug Firby
- Ronald Glasberg
- James P. Lassoie
- George Melnyk
- Reg Whitaker

DR. KARIM-ALY S. KASSAM believes that the so-called "war on terror" has hijacked international focus from more substantive issues such as the environmental crisis, poverty alleviation, food security, and conservation of biocultural diversity that are essential to human survival. In trying to understand terror, Dr. Kassam and the contributors to this work seek to broaden public discourse on the perception of terror. Among his many publications, Dr. Kassam has co-edited *Canada and September 11: Impact and Response* (2002). He recently authored *Biocultural Diversity and Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Human Ecology in the Arctic* (2009). Dr. Kassam is International Associate Professor of Environmental and Indigenous Studies at Cornell University.

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