

International Terrorism and the United Nations

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations and the United States share an interest in isolating and defeating terrorism, not each other, and in containing the threat of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of state or nonstate terrorists. Yet the rhetoric of 'war' is fundamentally misleading. A combination of factors determines whether terrorist organisations will thrive, be defeated or simply fade away. Terrorism is a problem to be tackled mainly by law-enforcement agencies, in cooperation with military forces; its magnitude can be brought down to 'tolerable' levels, but it can never be totally 'defeated', just as we cannot have an absolutely crime-free society; and it is part of the growing trend towards the lowered salience of the state in the new security agenda that emphasises human as well as national security. The wise strategy has to be a multi-layered one that addresses grievances and counteracts the causes of individual and group humiliation and indignity. The object is not to destroy the motivation of every individual terrorist but to neutralise support for terrorists in the communities in which they live and generate the will and capacity to act against them by relevant authorities. The underlying or root causes of terrorism can be grouped into five categories: lack of democratic institutions and practices, political freedoms and civil liberties; group grievance based in collective injustice; intractable conflicts; poverty; and inter-civilisation suspicions.

Readings recommended:

- Kofi A. Annan, *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all*. Report of the Secretary-General (New York: United Nations, document A/59/2005, 21 March 2005), pp. 26–27 (paragraphs 87–94).

Accessible online from: <http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/>

- Jane Boulden and Thomas G. Weiss, ‘Whither Terrorism and the United Nations?’, in Jane Boulden and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Terrorism and the UN: Before and After September 11* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 3–26.
- High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A more secure world: our shared responsibility* (New York: United Nations, A/59/565, December 2004), pp. 47–52. Accessible from: <http://www.un.org/secureworld/>
- *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 42–46.
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<http://www.humansecurityreport.info/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=28&Itemid=63>
- Edward C. Luck, ‘Another Reluctant Belligerent: The United Nations and the War on Terrorism’, in Richard M. Price and Mark W. Zacher, eds., *The United Nations and Global Security* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 95–108.
- William G. O’Neill, *Fighting Terrorism for Humanity*. Conference Report (New York: International Peace Academy).
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<http://www.ipacademy.org/Publications/Publications.htm>