

Undeterred

by [Ray Takeyh \(/experts/ray-takeyh\)](#)

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Articles & Testimony

Almost two weeks after the horrific bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, a peculiar intellectual practice is emerging in America's salons and seminars. Across the nation, the heirs of the 1960s peace movement, and some of its survivors, are once more staging sit-ins and marches. The airwaves, op-ed pages, and e-mail inboxes of the concerned have been increasingly stuffed by professors of "peace studies," advancing the notion that a U.S. military response will trigger a "cycle of violence"--usually escalating, spiraling, or crippling--and that "out of the rubble of American attacks will come thousands of new volunteers for bin Laden's anti-American jihad." But the lattes-for-world-peace class fails to appreciate the nature of the terrorist threat facing the country. What ails Osama bin Laden is not some appeasable form of road rage. In fact, it's American reticence--a lack of response--that will trigger further and even more hideous acts of violence.

Over the past three decades, terrorist organizations such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), and the Basque group ETA have employed selective violence--hijackings, assassinations, kidnappings--to publicize their causes, provoke political change, or gain leverage in negotiations. But the levels of violence remained with certain limits, reflecting an awareness on the terrorists' part that beyond a certain point, violent acts would delegitimize their cause, and harden the resolve of the targeted state.

But not all terrorists are created equal. The cycles of violence that ebb and flow in the Pyrenees and Northern Ireland and even the West Bank have little bearing on the situation between the U.S. superpower and its fundamentalist attackers. This new breed of Islamic terrorist draws on an entirely different set of inspirations and utilizes a profoundly more repulsive calculus. Operating out of Southwest Asia, these groups have an agenda that is ideological, not political, and no compunction about using indiscriminate mass violence to advance it. With little to lose but their lives, they have no reason or incentive to desist or even decrease their activities. Theirs is not a violent protest movement, but a revolt against a civilization, a culture, as a way of life.

The threat of terror emanating from Afghanistan is an ominously new phenomenon: a marriage of medieval religious extremism with technological instruments of modernity. Such fanaticism has long been gestating in Southwest Asia within a subculture of fiery clerics extolling the virtues of martyrdom, theological tracts legitimizing suicide bombing, and a transnational financial network subsidizing this ideology of wrath. To its proponents, this fervor is all-encompassing and self-generating. The divine right that militants claim for their mission of murder and mayhem transcends the world of strategic compromise; celestial rewards easily trump political ones. Militant Islamists are happy to use the language of peace studies when it fits their purpose. One leading Pakistani radical

exhorts, "America is trying to crush jihad, but this will lead to only more terrorism."

It's true that the U.S. attack on Afghanistan in October 1998 stirred the movement's energies. But only because it was so feeble. Osama bin Laden became living proof that a dutiful Muslim could hurt the United States--bombing its office buildings at home and embassies around the world--and live to tell about it. "The American embassy in Nairobi [was] considered to be the biggest intelligence gathering center in east Africa," bin Laden boasted in videotape circulating in the Middle East this summer. "With the help of God this hit was very strong against the Americans, so the Americans can taste something on what we Muslims have tasted." In earlier statements, bin Laden's exhorts all of Islam to learn from him. "To kill Americans and their allies--civilians and military--is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."

As Thomas Friedman noted last week, the Arab regimes of the Middle East may not offer the United States a model of progressive governance, but they do offer a useful blueprint for dealing with the radical Islamist terrorism. The same governments that are now advising caution and restraint certainly did not uphold those values when they confronted militant Islam's wrath. Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and the generals of Algeria (known as the "eradicators") dealt with their radical detractors not by convening international conferences, as Mubarak now suggests, but through overwhelming force. A mutual deterrence strategy only works when both sides accept its parameters and share its assumptions. The single clear truth to emerge from last week's atrocities is that Osama bin Laden and his partisans reject the implicit threat of deterrence, as wholly as they reject the laws of man. The irrationality of a movement bent on destroying the West can only be fought via a decisive anti-errorism strategy whose goals cannot fall short of destruction of bin Ladin's terror infrastructure and the overthrow of the anachronistic Taliban regime. In absence of such a concerted strategy, the American public must ready itself for further "bloody Tuesdays." ❖

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