Polemics

GLOBALIZATION OF ISLAMIC TERRORISM1

**By Yevgeny Satanovsky,
President of the Institute of Israeli
and Middle Eastern Studies**

© *Yaderny Kontrol, 2004. All rights reserved*
© *PIR Center, 2004. Translation into English.*
Abridged version

Are the nunciates of the global war of Islam against "infidels and heretics" right or is this simply an idle threat of those who resist the civilization and the military machine of the West for the sake of their traditional order? September 11, 2001 became for the "world of Islam" the day of the first grand victory in a long-lasting war against the "world of the sword". From that day on, the West has started treating the war against terrorism, and above all against the Islamic one, seriously. However, its military machine was made to fight against armies and states but not against terrorists and guerillas. Arms, tactics and strategy designed for the standoff of superpowers are inefficient in the struggle against numerous, redispersed, closed by ethno-confessional unity, professionally trained, religiously and ideologically motivated subversive groups. The "civilized" world doesn't know how to respond to the challenge that combines 21st century technology with jihad rhetoric. This was proven not only by the experience of Afghanistan and Iraq but also by the reaction to the proclaimed "crusade against international terrorism" of the international terrorism itself. After the coalition had seized Baghdad, the terror intensified and its geography expanded.

Political correctness that is widespread in the West insists on giving up direct statements about the inextricable connection between modern terrorism and Islamic extremism, especially political Islam as a whole. It's true that today, during the global war against globalization, a paradoxical but efficient union of left-wing politicians, university professors and journalists, Islamites, antiglobalists and neo-fascists has emerged supported by the Middle East petrodollar injections and whose activities at first sight go beyond its Islamic component. Domestic experts though tried by the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union can't draw historical parallels with the Bolsheviks and their "companions".

The central stand in the above mentioned alliance is taken by the Islamic politically loaded structures, and terrorism is their most efficient leverage for influencing the enemy. For quite a time now, the Russian expert community has briefly described such structures as "Islamic" or "green International" sometimes also referred to as "terrorist International". At the current stage the major components of the international terrorist movement are clear-cut Islamic, we shall in this report refer solely to them, without stretching that what is peculiar of it to the Islamic world in general.

For those who share Fukuyama's views, the attack against the West was unexpected. Still the inevitability of the conflict could have been easily predicted, had the trends of the world policy been analyzed.

Let's mention only **some elements that characterized the international situation in the early 21st century:**

* Globalization as the major trend of development

* Hegemony of the USA (a unipolar world), whose "challenges" had been purely theoretical until recently

* Shift of priorities of the world politics from the state pragmatics to *practical implementation*, also by means of violence, by the Western democracies of their values in the countries that are on other stages of social and political development.

* Increased opportunities to influence political processes of social and religious unities, lobbying organizations and press due to decreased opportunities of the state-supported institutions.

* Intensified standoff of developed and developing states, irreversible crisis of some Third World countries.

* Crisis of socialism, collapse of the USSR, economic, military and political degradation of the post-Soviet space.

Globalization altered the international economy and politics and affected the security of the world community as it increased its current exposure to the international terrorism. The fact that terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center and successfully attacked the Pentagon made one realize that the world came not only to the verge of the Third

World War, but that the war had already started on the territory stretching from China to Morocco. This is the war of "new barbarians" against the "old civilization", the annihilating war. Today we are not talking whether methods of war against terrorism are good or bad. We are talking about survival of the modern civilization that includes not only the so-called "North" but also China, India and the Southeast Asia countries.

We must also mention that the Third World countries in the 20th century chose two ways for development: India and China, Pacific and Latin American states opted in favor of developing their own economies and integrating them in the world economy, whereas many countries of Africa, Near and Middle East decided to put forward and pursue their claims to the countries of the "Golden Billion". For the first time this aspect fully manifested itself on the results of the UN Durban conference that laid down the ideological and political basis for the confrontation of the developed and the developing worlds. Possibly Durban shall take the same place in the history of the Third World War as Munich in the history of the Second World War.

President Bush identified international terrorism as the main enemy of America in its wars in the Near and Middle East. Long before the American president, President Putin called terrorism the main enemy of Russia. The analysis of the roots and current state of the international terrorism, its distinctions from the terrorism of the past decades makes us draw illustrative conclusions.

The situation of the world extremist movement of the late 20th – early 21st centuries has dramatically changed as compared to the preceding period that lasted for about half a century. After the collapse of the USSR the revolutionary leftist groups that had acted against the USA and in the Middle East against Israel, lost their patron. The same destiny struck those who were nursed by the USA against the USSR including Islamic fundamentalists. Speaking about Islamic or rather Islamite extremism, during a break-up with its recent sponsors, we must recognize its advantage against the bankrupt left-wing ideology that had dominated among extremists throughout the 20th century. This was also promoted by the Islamite's reliance not on the ever-changing political environment but on the "eternal values" as enshrined in the Koran including jihad. Islam is the youngest and most politically proactive of the monotheistic religions of Abraham's triad and yields itself easily to extremist interpretations. Huge human resources represented by a billion Muslims mainly residing in the poor Third World countries helped to extend the sphere of influence of political Islamism.

Nevertheless, it's worth describing the current picture of actions of the Islamite "green International" that was fiercely criticized by Islamic leaders who accuse experts and politicians of fuelling discord between the developed states and the Islamic countries.

If we analyze the results of a quarter of century **development of the modern political Islamism we shall note the following:**

- The modern politically loaded conservative Islam has not only held a victory in a number of states (Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan) but is also extending the sphere of its influence also by military actions.

- In the end of the 20th century, political Islamism became more active in the regions where the military standoff between Islam and the non-Islamic world ended in the 19th century (in the Balkans, Chechnya, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Iran, Afghanistan). The regions are on the border of the spheres of influence of the former empires – the Ottoman, Russian and British.

- In a number of states of the Islamic world the political Islamism successfully opposes the ruling elite (Algeria) or can attain as serious success in the near future (Egypt, Jordan) as seizure of power.

- Aggressive revolutionary and moderate revolutionary regimes of the Arab world (Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya) have the Islamite activities on their territory under tough control.

- The Islamic world supports the spread of "mild Islam" in its "export package" as a component of the foreign policy. This is exactly the mode of actions of westernized secular Turkey on the post-Soviet space.

- Modern political Islamism mastered the pseudo-democratic rhetoric and enjoys great support of the world mass media including the liberal mass media of the West. It employs a popular theory of

multiculturalism and oppositional stand of the left-wing intellectuals. As a result, it is supported not only by the regimes led by "old allies" in the revolutionary and national liberation movement (RSA and other countries in Africa and Asia) but by the information and political (Chechnya, Israel) or military (the Balkans) assistance of the West.

- "National liberation" (separatists) movements (in Chechnya, Palestine, Kurdistan) cooperate with Islamite groups in case their interests coincide.

- Natural demographic domination of the Shias in the Islamic countries with the course of time leads to a civil war. Examples – Lebanon and Iraq.

- Conservative Islamic monarchies "buy off" of the Islamite by supporting their activities beyond their own territory (funding "the Afghan Arabs", the Islamite in the Balkans, in Chechnya and Palestine).

- Modern political Islamism is equally proactive in social and political, religious, ideological and military fields. In the military sphere it resorts to guerilla, terrorist and sabotage acts including in urban areas.

- Currently, armed forces of the states that are targets of the Islamite are inefficient as they have been designed for full-scale interstate wars but not for suppression of guerilla fighting and sabotage activities that involve civilians (sometimes on a mass scale). The police are too weak for that.

- The historical experience proves that only the governing regimes of the Middle East countries that resorted to total destruction (Libya, Syria, Iraq) were successful in their actions against political terrorism. Softer measures (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine) have failed. However, this is *unacceptable* for the countries that have become major targets for the modern Islamite.

- Economic sanctions and territorial blockade applied in the Middle East by the USA and to a lesser degree by Israel as a political instrument that restricts expansion of extremism haven't proven effective.

- Modern means of transport and communication, availability of information and technologies, arrival of the *world* information space and transformation of huge regions into free movement areas for people, goods and services eliminate most obstacles for physical movement of terrorists or make it superfluous for striking at their targets. A special role belongs to the possibility to apply high technologies in terrorist activities. In the financial sphere, the management of conventional and nonconventional weapons and major industries the damage can be compared with the damage inflicted by military actions.

- The spread of information technologies renders *unnecessary* a single commanding hub or headquarters for full-scale, efficient and effective fight against beaurocratized, over-regulated and subsequently inefficient political and military systems that are confronted by highly mobile and easily coordinated groups of the political Islamite. Numerous decision-making centers with easily replaceable leaders and possibility of disperse dissemination of current groups down to units complicates the fight against them.

- The Islamite acting against Israel, Russia and the West use "moles". Well-trained terrorists can live a private life for a very long time without keeping in touch with their former surrounding and take decisions about performing a terrorist attack independently using expedient means and not coordinating this decision with anyone, which doesn't allow to detect them and render harmless on the preparatory stage.

- Globalization of the world economy makes it possible for the extremists including Islamite groups to implement personnel, financial, economic and technological means to the countries at which they aim their sabotage activities, thus acting from within the system subject to destruction.

- Modern extremists, especially the Islamite actively recruit civilians including women, adolescents and young children (martyrdom factor). Using them is even more successful as the fight of the army against civilians inevitably gives rise to a coun-

terpropaganda effect, including international.

- For modern political Islamism it has become standard to pay a substantial compensation to the families of those who "died for the faith". Death of a family member provides them with means of subsistence, which is of critical importance during a permanent economic crisis of the major part of the Islamic world.

- Possible physical destruction of civilians during antiterrorist operations is not a constraining factor for the leaders of extremist groups. It can be provoked for propaganda purposes or as a pretext for deployment of foreign "peacekeepers" in the zone of conflict, whereas the terrorists lose in the direct standoff with government forces.

- Under the pretence of protecting the Muslims residing in non-Islamic countries, the international Islamite terrorist organizations provoke governments of the countries to massive strikes against civilians and sanctions against their own Muslim residents in order to extend their organizational, personnel and political base. The peaceful Muslim population loyal to the government becomes a hostage and victim of the Islamite terrorism.

- It's possible that terrorist shall undertake large-scale provocations in the Islamic world itself to activate jihad and provoke Islamic countries to withdraw from the antiterrorist coalitions.

One of the most dangerous features of the modern political terrorism is that it yields easily to replications. Any act of terrorism provokes replication, which becomes especially easy since the international mass media cover such an act in every detail. At that, the mass media act as involuntary instructors in organizing a terrorist act. In such case the efforts to cut terrorism short are blocked since the terrorist act is committed not by organized groups that can be identified and rendered harmless, but by psychologically unstable terrorist copycats. A huge role in triggering the appearance of "home-made" terrorists is played by religious sects, and in the Islamic world by theologians and clergy, who give ideological support to terrorists in their sermons in mosques, medrese, Islamic universities, as well as by issuing fetvas that glorify jihad and suicide terrorists, the Shahids.

Today the Islamic terrorism is waging de facto a whole combination of "hot" and "cold" wars, which make up the "Third World War" mentioned above.

The hot components of it are:

1. Guerilla and terrorist wars in the Islamic, predominantly the Arab world against secular governments (Algeria, Egypt). As it was stated above, only authoritarian dictatorships (Syria, Libya and Iraq in the past), the former USSR satellites, were able to offer efficient resistance to the Islamite. By fighting them the West has made the way free for the Islamite. The fall of Najibullah's regime in Afghanistan brought, for instance, the Taliban to power.

2. Guerilla and terrorist civil wars at the periphery of the Islamic world. If there is an Islamic government in a country, then such wars are waged by state troops. The frontlines of such wars are: the Balkans and Chechnya in Europe; Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Tajikistan, Kashmir, Indonesia and the Philippines in Asia; Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya in Africa. The general strike is aimed at the non-Islamic population: Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and adherents of traditional religions.

3. The terrorist attacks, first of all in the Islamic monarchies, that are often organized with the support of representatives of governing groups and local special services aimed at foreigners and non-Muslims residing in their territory and indirectly pointed at the westernized dynasties and governments. The active support by local Islamite builds grounds for future "mild" revolutions. To this group belong Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, small monarchies of the Persian Gulf and Turkey.

4. Terrorist attacks in the colonial "empires": the USA ("9/11"), Western Europe, Russia ("Dubrovka", etc.).

The "cold" wars include:

1. "Creeping" islamisation of the Western Europe, where immigration, including the

illegal immigration, is intense especially from the Arab world. As a result, there appear closed ethno-confessional enclaves resistant to assimilation or integration processes. Such communities provide logistical and financial support to the terrorist system.

2. **Economic pressure and investment manipulations.** Such are especially efficient if backed up by the use of force. According to a number of observers it was exactly what enabled Turki al-Feisal to pay a visit to Moscow in the days of the Dubrovka hostage taking.

3. **Political pressure through the UN and international organizations,** where today Israel has become the target of such assaults, since it failed to find any response to this type of "cold war". Efficiency of such measures and the experience gained by the Islamic community in manipulating the Third World countries prompts further expansion of such practices.

4. **Massive infiltration of political Islam into states and regions of the "Islamic periphery"** including the Southeast Asian nations and the former Soviet republics including Russia. As a result of it there emerged an Islamic lobby backed up by external financial resources, functioning as a political basis of the terrorist activities.

The practice of double standards has become a typical feature of the world community's attitude to terrorism. It turns a blind eye on the acts of terror in Israel and Chechnya denouncing law enforcement agencies for their "being incompetent" and discussing "peace initiatives" put forward by terrorists and their ideological allies. Politicians, the European ones in the frontlines, attempt to put pressure not on the terrorists but on Jerusalem and Moscow. The differences in the international community in countering terrorism simplified organization of terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Turkey – the response of the Islamic world to the seizure of the Caliphate capital by the "infidels". International antiterrorism cooperation has so far been a subject of theory rather than practice. This is true even with regard to such states as the USA, Russia and Israel, whose alliance in the given sphere is predetermined and even inevitable.

It is difficult to ignore the fact that in the run of the whole post-colonial period in the development the Middle and Near East was demonstrating only three forms of governance: monarchy, dictatorship and Islamic republic. Immediate militarization of Islam that happens right after coming to power, internal repressions against ethno-confessional minorities and "heretics" unleashed by the Islamite, a shift to religious and ideological motivation of external aggression are not an exception, but a rule that in the end makes one think regimes such as Suddam's one to be a "lesser evil" to the world.

In the early 1980s a military and political axis started to shape as a result of the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan conducted by the Islamic world with the assistance from the West. The axis brought together the conservative nucleus of the Persian Gulf monarchies, Saudi Arabia, first of all, with the Afghani-Pakistani periphery of the Islamic world. Today Pakistan with its nuclear bomb, unstable military regime, and unmanageable tribal territorial enclaves poses a special threat to the WMD non-proliferation regime. The doubtful nature of control that the USA exercises in Afghanistan, a twenty year old tradition of guerilla wars against foreign "peacemakers", "dissipation" of a significant part of the Taliban in the "environment" makes one forecast the possibility of the revival of political Islam in the country at any time.

For a long time to come, Afghanistan and Pakistan shall act as a reserve for replacement of Islamic militants in the international arena and stay a source of heightened danger for the international community. The theory of the "safe Middle East" envisages the breakdown of the Afghani-Pakistani block into four – five ethnically homogenous states, which separately won't have a sufficient "critical mass" to pose a threat to anyone. However, concerns about the future of Iraq and increased pressure of the Arab world could possibly leave the USA without sufficient resources and political will to eliminate political Islamism in this part of the world.

The biggest reserve of political Islamism and Islamic terrorism is Indonesia and Malaysia. The leadership of both countries has "old scores" to settle with the West and unrealized geopolitical ambitions supported by the magnitude of the local economy and conflicts between the political elite with non-Islamic minorities who hold it under control, and above all with ethnic Chinese. The "understanding of reasons" for terrorist attacks in Morocco and Saudi Arabia expressed by the prime minister of Malaysia, his speech at the

OIC Summit makes us reckon with possible legitimization of political Islam by the "vertical power" in the Southeast Asian nations.

The undoubted component of Iran's foreign policy is the support to anti-Israel terrorist activities in Lebanon. At the same time, Iran's contribution to establishing the "green International" is insignificant in comparison with this of the Persian Gulf monarchies and Pakistan. In general, on a regional scale Iran plays a stabilizing role.

The world distribution center of political Islam is Saudi Arabia. At that, the relations between the kingdom and its former major ally, the USA, are at a critical pass. Shall there be new large-scale terrorist attacks on the territory of the USA that involve Saudi nationals, it is not improbable that the American army shall strike at Saudi Arabia, the major sponsor and one of the main organizers of the global Islamic "antiglobalism".

The discord in the uncompromising fight against the Middle-East terrorism as announced by the USA is its pursuit of diplomatic settlement to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Partly this can be explained by the heightened interest of the international community of politicians, political analysts and mass media in this issue, which throughout the past century has turned it into an experimental ground for a trial run of peace projects, resolutions, declarations and agreements. Partly, by a seeming opportunity to gain tangible results in reasonable time. But is a peace settlement possible under conditions of a terrorist war? In the war aimed to destroy Islamic terrorism that so far has been dangerous not for terrorists but rather for the Near and Middle East regimes unfriendly to the USA, Palestine-Israeli forefront is a "weak link". Contrary to Afghanistan, Iraq, and in perspective Iran or Saudi Arabia, America is not at war in this forefront. Targeted operations of the Israelis are efficient for a limited time, however they don't tackle problems in general.

As a result, further escalation of anti-Israeli Islamic terror and its internationalization are possible. Latest terrorist attacks proved that along with Palestine "Shahids", whose actions could be described as national liberation fighting, Israel had become a target for the Islamic "terrorist International". The progress of the US troops and their allies in the theater of military actions of the Near and Middle East curtailed financial, material, technical and political support to the terrorist fundamentalism, therefore it's especially important for the Islamite to carry out the most efficient, ideologically justified terrorist acts that would be widely covered by the mass media. As an attractive assault objective Israel can only be compared with the USA and outruns other Middle-Eastern "competitors".

Russia is close to it in a "terror rating" as its southern frontiers are among the major offensive fronts for the "world of Islam" against the "world of sword". Today, Russia is a regional power. In the fight against international terrorism it can at the best case become a center of a defensive alliance that includes some of the former USSR republics. After the fall of Baghdad, the Islamic threat to Russia has not decreased but increased. Emergence of a numerous Iraqi army of professional soldiers and secret service officers in the international "labor market" makes it possible that they will find their "employment" in the organized crime and "green International". The latter is essential for Russia, as many of them studied in the USSR, are personally familiar with the theatre of military actions and can join separatists in Chechnya.

In this connection, the target of a possible future attack of the US army is of special importance. An attack on Iran shall demolish the collective security system in the Caspian States and Middle Asia. The consequences for this region are predictably negative. At the same time, at all costs, the conflict between America and Saudi Arabia would deprive international Islamic terrorist organizations of one of its major sources of financing and would hit a global structure of the offensive political Islam, and if the world community controlled hadj it would eliminate the possibility for building the network of international terrorism on such a basis.

The only way to fight terrorism is to physically destroy terrorists. Measures taken to deprive terrorists of their social network also play an important role, i.e. provide for economic recovery of the Third World countries and their integration in the world economy.

Still, we must admit that to implement that the developed countries now need such a degree of control over the current situation in the Third World that reminds of the period of colonial division.

The most painful aspect in the fight of the international community against international

terrorism is a partly temporary restriction of rights and freedoms of loyal citizens, as prescribed by the laws of war. This also refers to possible state control in the countries attacked by terrorists over the freedom of information, cash flows and private life of citizens including contacts and movement, as well as intensified regulating role of the state in the economy. All these measures are profoundly contradictory to the main trends in the world order evolution throughout previous decades towards extension of human rights and liberal values. It must be mentioned though not as an excuse but as an explanation to emergence and successful operation of the enlightened authoritarian rule in domestic and liberal imperialism in foreign policy, that liberal democracy is capable of winning the direct head-to-head confrontation with terrorists, but only *morally* and *posthumously*.

---

1 This article was presented by author during the PIR Center Club meeting on February 27, 2004.