19 December 2002

Spin and Counter-spin

Governance through Terrorism

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This paper was written as the introduction to another on *Warp and Weft: Governance through alternation* and provides the context for an approach to world governance as a Gandhian challenge for the individual elaborated there -- that offers alternative understandings of 'governance **through** terrorism'.

Introduction

The focus on terrorism as a strategy employed by 'terrorists', and the response to it by the saviours of 'civilization', has created a strange environment for the evolution of governance in the 21st century. This paper explores the implications for the individual faced with the challenge of interpreting new kinds of messages from 'terrorists' and from government -- and the implications for world governance.

The strategy of terrorists is to destabilize through terror. Those claimed to be associated with al-Qaida have been remarkably successful in doing so -- as military history will be obliged to acknowledge. They have claimed to be acting in support of the underprivileged, notably in Muslim countries, and especially in Palestine. Similarly the strategy of those engaged in a 'war against terror' is to use every means to counteract terrorists and to root out those supporting them in any way. Those claiming to act in defence of 'civilization' appear to have been quite successful in doing so through their destruction of the Taliban and their seizure of suspects throughout the world.

The challenge for the individual lies in the ways in which information is being used in support of such opposing strategies and of the unstated agendas of those engaged in them. Is the claimed goal of the 'terrorists' as high-minded as they would want it to be understood to be? Is it indeed in support of the underprivileged that have, in practice, been so systematically and cynically neglected in their millions by 'civilization'? Is the claimed goal of those acting in defence of 'civilization' more than an exercise in cynical self-interest?

The problem for the individual faced with declarations and acts that purport to be evidence in support of the strategies of either side is that there is the strongest case for each to misrepresent the other through whatever means are possible. The individual is then completely disempowered in relation to both -- possibly the outcome sought by both.

Current state of play

The hard evidence for 'terrorism' available for all to see is the destruction of buildings, such as the World Trade Center, and the many tragic deaths associated with use of missiles and bombs of various kinds. Matching that is the hard evidence for the strategic response in defence of the 'security' of 'civilization', as in the change of regime in Afghanistan, the much heightened level of security associated with public places and transportation, and the constraints on civil liberties associated with draconian legislation implemented with unseemly rapidity for democracies.

Difficulties of interpretation start with the current proliferation of alternative interpretations of the evidence as well as criticism of evidence that could too easily be planted to favour particular interpretations. Whether all such interpretations can be dismissed as the

conspiracy theories of cranks is a challenge for the individual, especially if it tends to be suppressed. It is useful to ask what agendas are supported by encouraging such confusion, by the suppression of such alternative perspectives, or by the dismissal of those critical of the evidence as cranks -- or as covert supporters of an opposing strategy.

Whose agenda was really supported by the destruction of the World Trade Center? Is the evidence against al-Qaida to be taken at face value? How has the traumatic incident been seized upon by various parties to advance their own interests? Whose agendas have been marginalized by the 'war on terror'?

- 'Terrorists' reproach the 'civilized' for their cynical neglect of populations -- and are prepared to kill themselves to draw attention to that collective condition irrespective of the cost to innocent individuals
- The 'civilized' reproach the 'terrorists' for their cynical slaughter of innocent individuals -- and are prepared to accept the destruction of innocent community lives (as collateral damage) in the process of rooting out such terrorists (and their sympathizers), although any risk to their own lives in the process is absolutely unacceptable.

A different form of evidence is available from the many 'terrorists' and 'suspects' that have been seized for interrogation. The difficulty for the individual is that such evidence is treated as necessarily secret in order to safeguard interests of national security. Not only is the evidence obtained under unusual legal conditions without any safeguards for the suspect, but it is also obtained under extreme duress, notably through the use of torture. In fact it is rarely known publicly who has been seized, whether they are still alive, whether they have died under torture, or whether they have been summarily executed. Information from such sources is claimed to support particular interpretations of the terrorist threat -- but cannot be challenged in any legitimate way.

The position of governments is that the public should 'trust' them to be acting in the best public interest despite the lack of any ability to confirm the conclusions they reach. Tony Blair has made a number of pleas to that effect -- despite his failure to fulfil his electoral commitment to a Freedom of Information Act and the extent to which his government is acknowledged to have relied to a high degree on spin. However at the same time it has been only too evident that those in governments, such as the USA, UK and Israel, have other interests to defend. The financial scandals of companies such as Enron, with which members of the Bush administration had close associations, can only bias interpretation in favour of conspiracy theories regarding the use of the 'terrorist' threat as camouflage for oil corporation interests in Central Asia. Indeed, in the case of Iraq, the post-war 'carve up' of oil resources has been openly discussed in the financial media -- as well as being used as a threat in support of coalition building in response to 'terrorism'. Similar points can be made with respect to financial interests in support of the arms trade that so casually provides 'terrorists' with all the arms they need. As with the gun policy in the USA, the suppliers of weaponry are assumed to be totally blameless for any destruction their products cause.

Efforts to justify action in favour of regime change by documenting 'human rights abuses' in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq also appear suspect when the governments providing such documentation have been key allies of such regimes in the recent past -- providing them with both weaponry and training. According to Amnesty International's secretary-general: 'This selective attention to human rights is nothing but a cold and calculated manipulation of the work of human rights activists'. Such efforts are even more suspect when they are used to distract from abuses in other countries -- leading to the suspicion that 'carbonization credits', to eliminate dissenters, are issued as part of the process of coalition building (as in the case of Chechnya and the Falun Gong). Government news management may then be legitimately criticized as a 'weapon of mass distraction'.

In this context, how then to interpret efforts by the Bush administration in February 2002 to create an Office of Strategic Influence with a mandate to provide misinformation to foreign journalists? The OSI would have been a center for the creation of propaganda materials, for the stated purpose of misleading enemy forces or their civilian populations [more]. This initiative was followed in November 2002 by the creation of a Total Information Awareness initiative to support the 'homeland security' efforts. How to interpret the fact that the latter is headed by Admiral Poindexter indicted in the Iran-Contra affair, whilst at the same time Henry Kissinger (wanted in war crimes investigations in several countries) is appointed by the Bush administration to investigate unresolved questions surrounding the 9/11 disaster?

The question for the individual is whether he or she believes that government leaders have a mandate to lie to them in defence of what they (as leaders) define to be 'national security'? If so, how to determine when they are telling the truth in relation to such matters? What kind of 'truth' is obtained as 'evidence' under the levels of scientifically-enhanced interrogation sanctioned by many modern governments according to Amnesty?

Spin and counter-spin

It is in this context that people have been exposed to a succession of recordings of Osama bin Laden which may be interpreted in various ways:

- On the assumption that they are genuine:
  - confirmation of terrorist actions and intentions as claimed by the coalition against terrorism
  - support for the frustrated underprivileged (especially in the Arab world)
- On the assumption that they are false (and especially if he was dead)
  - justification for continuing measures taken in response to terrorism
  - sustaining the motivation of terrorist groups

On the question of whether the recordings are genuine or false, it might be reframed in terms of the resources required to provide reasonably convincing fakes. Given their poor quality, it might be assumed that any reasonably equipped drama studio could produce such fakes -- indeed it is surprising that such studios have not tested their skills in competitions to determine who could produce the most convincing at least cost. In November 2002, a sound recording of Osama bin Laden was evaluated by specialized laboratories in one case as fake (with 95% probability) and in another as genuine. Which laboratory is to be trusted -- and by whom? [more]

This example points to the fact that there are good reasons to release such recordings from time to time. In the case of the al-Qaida network, the aim would be to sustain those supporting it. As in the case of the death of dictators, close associates may see considerable advantage in maintaining the fiction that the leader is alive for as long as is feasible. In an electronic context such a fiction could be maintained for an extensive period of time. Advantages for doing so in a commercial context can be seen in the case of pop-idols. 'New' recordings of Elivis Presley could continue to be released long after his death -- especially given the myth that he continues to live, and in order to sustain it.

In the case of those with strategies designed to oppose such a pro-terror movement, there are perhaps even more powerful reasons to continue to produce recordings. The recordings are the only 'hard evidence' for the continued existence of the al-Qaida network to which the public has been offered access -- as contrasted with the evidence for the destruction of 9/11. All other evidence is necessarily classified in the interests of national security. Such recordings are therefore the best justification for continued funding of more restrictive legislation and the seizure of suspects. In this sense, the value of Osama bin Laden is as a propaganda focal point -- a kind of shadowy, negative Uncle Sam -- to focus the collective attention in support of government strategies. To what extent is al-Qaida being used as a 'bogey man' to frighten people to accept constraints on their liberties? Was he 'created' by the CIA for that purpose?

How then to determine whether the recordings are fake? But fake or not, who would believe the evidence one way or the other, if it failed to support their views. As with Elvis, evidence to the contrary is then readily dismissed, as with those who may attach importance to it.

In this strange new conceptual world, evidence is necessarily secret. The nature of reality is proclaimed by fiat. This was in fact a prime characteristic of the totalitarian world to which the 'free world' was so opposed throughout the Cold War. Can it be the case that the psycho-social stability of western 'civilization' is dependent in some way on such a totalitarian mind-set and the need for evil elsewhere ? With the fall of the Soviet Union as an opponent, has the west been forced to invoke a surrogate to sustain the coherence of its processes of governance -- regenerating a lost enemy needed for its coherence? And where it cannot be invoked externally, has it been obliged to evoke it internally -- embodying within western society what it most repudiated, creating many of the constraints on civil liberties that were the reasons for opposing the communist bloc?

Definition -- through target elimination

Definition in a world of spirits: It is useful to recognize the evolution of definition from the period when **shamans** provided the principal means of defining the reality of the world -- through their secret understanding of the magical world of spirits, revealed in trance. This worked provided that they could offer sufficient evidence to persuade their constituents. Powders that provided fireworks enhanced their power and gave legitimacy to their world view. Opposing magicians, and their supporters, could be marginalized by secret use of poison and accusations of evil doing. Evil was defined by the most powerful shaman -- who necessarily acquired the opposite characteristic in doing so. This dynamic continues in many societies, notably in West Africa and in cultures deriving from it. But to what extent is this different from the behaviour of charismatic politicians -- particularly those whose spouses attach great significance to astrology (Reagan) and crystal energies (Blair).

Definition in a religious world: In the subsequent world of organized **priesthoods**, definition derived from interpretations of sacred writings -- interpretations of the Word of God to which only the highest levels of the priestly hierarchy had access. Priests were the custodians of truth and took it upon themselves to identify falsehood -- if necessarily torturing ('putting them to the Question') those who endangered their souls by adhering to it or challenging the priesthood in any way [more]. It is only on 31st October 1992 that the Pope acknowledged the failure of the Catholic Church in respect of Galileo's condemnation in 1633 [more]. But the Catholic Church has been extremely challenged in the past decade on its definition and handling of sexual abuse by the priesthood. It is Christianity that has played such a primary role in defining the unquestionably 'evil' nature of the Muslim 'terrorists' -- matched only by the 'satanic' qualities attributed by some Muslims to Chrsitian 'crusaders'.

Definition in a scientific world: In the scientific conceptual regime that has followed, definition derives from a particular interpretation of carefully selected evidence (now obtained by 'putting reality to the question'). Credibility for any such interpretation is limited to **academic disciplines** grouping the specially qualified, notably in 'networks of excellence'. As with priests, some are more qualified than others to make such judgements -- depending on the 'schools' with which they are associated. As with shamans and priests, lengthy training is required into arcane secrets articulated in special jargons meaningful only to the initiated. Truths not defined through such disciplines are naturally suspect and can be expounded only at risk to reputation and career. This is justified in terms of the overriding need to defend 'truth' against 'falsehood' at any cost -- using astronomical budgets in the sacred task of advancing knowledge of questionable significance to other than their peers, and arrogating to themselves assessment of risk (eg nuclear power, genetic modification). Unfortunately, as with rival shamans and priesthoods, the various disciplines and 'schools' also remain in warring posture to one another (as indicated by the tardy clarification of 'unproven links' associated with environmental issues, and the differing evaluations of the Osama bin Laden recordings).

Definition in an ideological world: The various experiments in communism (Russia, Cuba, China, Albania, Cambodia) and fascism (Germany, Italy, Spain) highlighted different ways in which political commissars ensured a particular definition of reality. The painful consequences have been extensively documented as well as being explored in movies and plays. The tendencies towards such ideological definition in western countries have been noted in the case of MCarthyism, the secular dimensions of fundamentalism, and in manipulative sects (notably those resulting in collective suicide or necessitating de-programming).

Definition in the world of realpolitik: In contrast to ideology, *realpolitik* encourages definition in terms of concrete activity to the advantage of particular vested interests and to the exclusion of any sensitivity to other interests. Conceptual boundaries are defined solely to serve and justify the interests of those who can exert the power to advance them. Considerations that do not serve such interests are treated as irrelevant. Henry Kissinger is now recognized as the archetypal contemporary defender of this perspective. It is notably present

in the definition of the challenge to the western world of guaranteeing oil supplies currently inconveniently controlled by other sovereign countries. The capacity of the secretive, elitist world of freemasonry to define reality may be seen as an aspect of *realpolitik* -- and ensuring the protection of its members when defined by others as acting illegally. Is this exemplified by the secretive worlds of the Trilateral Commission, the Club of Rome, etc?

Definition in a mediatised world: The omnipresence of the media in modern society has ensured that effective definition by the media tends to take precedence over other modes of definition. This enhances definition by public opinion whether or not that process can be effectively manipulated to particular ends. Government leaders increasingly rely on media polls to define issues and their relative priorities.

Definition in the intelligence community: The recent past has however seen increasing prominence given to privileged definition by the '**intelligence services**' on the basis of their particular interpretation of evidence obtained in secret by secret means and at 'whatever the cost' (assisted by scientifically enhanced skills of interrogation). The basis for any interpretation is also secret -- this time in the overriding interests of 'national security' as they alone are empowered to define it. Only the specially qualified are inducted into such services and they speak of the knowledge they acquire to the unauthorized on pain of the severest sanction. Only the intelligence services can determine who is a 'terrorist' and their understanding cannot be legitimately challenged in any legal court. Of course the privileged position of secret services has a lengthy history -- most recently dramatized in the legendary battles between the CIA and the KGB characterized by complex exercises in disinformation through which competing, and often fabricated, truths were defined. The nature of their operations, and the betrayal they evoked between erstwhile friends and colleagues, is most sadly evident to Germans with access to their Stasi files.

Definition by elimination 'with prejudice': Since 9/11 a new form of definition has emerged into prominence legitimated by the combined methodologies of science, supported by the revelatory insights of the monotheistic religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), the doctrinal approach of political ideologues, and emboldened by *realpolitik*, manipulation of the media*,* and the practices of the intelligence services. The conceptual process of definition has now been streamlined into one of target acquisition and elimination -- such that any person so eliminated must necessarily have been a 'terrorist'. It is the receipt of a bullet from a government agent that defines a 'terrorist'. This is in perfect symmetry with the suicide bomber's process of including all those killed as necessarily guilty by extension. Such definition admits of no ambiguity. Those killed must necessarily be defined as within the category of those whose killing was justified. Such killing is simply conceptual definition 'by other means'. Definition acquires a form of maturity as the 'de-finiting' process whereby the 'finite' nature of an entity is terminated -- namely rendered unbounded or 'infinite'! Those doing the killing, as with the witchdoctors, priests, scientists, and James Bond's before them, are necessarily guilt-free and acting in defence of the highest collective interest. Given the unique association with the Divine attributed to the governments of some countries, their agents can only be Agents of Righteousness. Assassination and death squads have been given new legitimacy as conceptual torch-bearers in the war on terrorism -- mirroring precisely the worldviews of the assassins and suicide squads of those they oppose. Might has become right once again -- as evidenced by the impunity of security forces as extensions of the state in many publicized incidents (jet destruction of Italian cable car in 1998, trawler sunk by submarine in 2001, rape cases in Okinawa, etc) .

Curiously this final process of definition is echoed in the use by corporate decision-makers of what are termed 'presentation graphics', namely the slides shown in meetings to help define collective strategy. Typically each slide is characterized by 'bullet points' that define the elements of the strategy and its 'targets' -- and ensures the elimination of any competition. One of the most common such tools is '*PowerPoint*'. As in the previous case, it is through the set of 'bullets' that strategic power is defined and directed. However in this case the bullets are metaphorical -- and possibly more powerful for that reason [more; more]. Similarly to some, and notably in disadvantaged countries, 'missions' (whether for aid, diplomatic, religious or other purposes) may in fact be experienced in practice more like 'missiles' (and 'projects' like 'projectiles'). But as with the early framing of the Catholic Church, such initiatives may indeed be for the higher good of the souls affected -- however painful the experience imposed upon them [more].

Conceptual gerrymandering and definitional game-playing

The debate on the definition of 'terrorism' has been essentially terminated following the flurry immediately post 9/11 -- and with the passing of legislation to deal with any possible suspects, including those dissenting from 'anti-terrorist' initiatives, and even those capable of providing relevant information.

The direct support of the US for 'terrorism' in Central and South America (as long acknowledged there) has been shifted outside the operative definition. At the local level the systematic terrorizing of individuals in neighbourhoods and institutions (schools, military, prisons, workplace) -- by gangs, corrupt security services or others -- is excluded from such definition, as has the long history of terrorizing of females by males [more]. Also excluded, is the terror deliberately instilled (notably in children) by Christian preachers regarding the 'hell fire' that awaits any sinners. The challenge of distinguishing between 'freedom fighters' and 'terrorists' -- notably those intimately associated with the independence of many countries, including the USA -- has also been ignored. This is especially curious when the presidents of a number of such countries have in their time been condemned as 'terrorists'.

It is curious that, to complement efforts to measure human rights and well-being, no effort has been made to measure terror. This might indeed show that the 'terrorism' that is the focus of the current 'war against terror' is in practice constrained to a very narrow time frame in practice, whereas the forms of institutionalized terror (in marriage, schools, workplace, etc) ignored by that 'war' may last years or a life time.

This definitional game-playing process may be usefully named as 'conceptual gerrymandering'. Gerrymandering conventionally describes the deliberate rearrangement of the boundaries of electoral districts to influence the subsequent outcome of elections. It works by either concentrating opposition votes into a few districts to gain more seats for the majority in surrounding districts (called packing), or to diffuse minority strength across many districts (called dilution).[more] A case can be usefully made that the conceptual boundaries of

'terrorism' have been deliberately shifted in a similar manner -- to exclude the 'terror' which so many experience on a daily basis in order to focus on that from which a few may suffer under exceptional circumstances.

There would seem to be a striking parallel with the manner in which attention and resources have been systematically shifted to investment in western security services to respond to the immediate terrorist threat to the few -- and away from the millions whose disadvantages and injustices breed terrorists so effectively. The deaths of the millions through starvation or disease have been effectively reframed as a benefit for the West -- and even in the planet's 'highest interest'.

The mindset favouring gerrymandering might also be said to reinforce reframing of indigenous territorial boundaries by colonialists. Traditional boundaries get shifted -- most obviously in the extreme case of Native Americans forced into reservations. A similar process is to be observed in the case of Palestinians forced out of their traditional settlements by Israelis. Curiously the basis of the Israeli claim to a traditional right to Palestinian land -- supported by the USA -- is denied in the case of Native Americans, even though the colonial peoples had no historical claim equivalent to the Israelis.

Conceptual gerrymandering may also be observed in the approach by governments to 'nongovernmental' bodies that have so successfully protested government and multinational 'globalization' initiatives to undermining the determination of peoples to express their will through democratic process. From being termed 'nongovernmental' -- already a definitional ploy -- they have been reframed as 'civil society organizations' [more]. This category has subsequently been distinguished from 'nongovernmental'. At the same time the response to 9/11 has allowed legislative provisions to be broadened to include those that protest against government initiatives [more**]-- skillfully labelled as 'rejectionists'. However, having lost all the conceptual and ethical arguments to the 'anti-globalizers', the energetic popular support for alternative conceptual interpretations now encourages business lobbies like the Mouvement des Entreprises de France.(MEDEF) to define corporations opportunistically as the motor of civil society [more**]:

> L'entreprise de "refondation sociale" menee par le patronat francais depuis 1999 s'appuie sur la redefinition de termes politiques propres a promouvoir certains rapports sociaux et a disqualifier toute tentative de contester aussi bien la legitimite que les effets des politiques economiques neoliberales. La mobilisation de la notion de "societe civile", qui appartient a des traditions politiques tres diverses, constitue un exemple privilegie de ce travail d'imposition d'une vision du monde social conforme aux interets des decideurs economiques, sous l'impulsion conjointe du MEDEF et de la CFDT. [more]

Conceptual gerrymandering is clearly seen in the opportunistic response to the threat of terrorism. Because 'any means' can now be used against 'terrorists' according to the UN-supported international coalition, it is sufficient to define an opponent as a 'terrorist' to acquire legitimacy for acting savagely against protesters, unconstrained by any consideration of civil liberties. This has been the case with Robert Mugabe's efforts in Zimbabwe to define political opponents, including Z student protesters, as 'terrorists'.

There is an ethical dimension to conceptual gerrymandering in the manner in which boundaries can be shifted to avoid responsibility for problematic situations and to justify withholding support. This is notably evident in jurisdictional disputes where the challenge is to ensure that the problem becomes the responsibility of some other authority. This is most evident in bureaucratic warfare in relation to loopholes in social safety nets that leave the vulnerable unprotected. It is most tragic in the case of underprivileged countries to whom care -- cynically promised in response to starvation, disease and injustice -- is inadequately extended (or withheld) in practice.

For those seeking solace in religion, notably in the case of the Catholic Church, the manner in which priests have individually manipulated the truth (in the process of sexual abuse of those in their care) can fruitfully be explored as terrorism -- the religious authority of the priest being used to terrorize the person (including children) into submission: 'I felt that by having this little bit of intimacy with them that this is what it would be like with Christ' [more]. Such acts have been done over periods of years without any significant preventive action on the part of a religious hierarchy that has been able to misuse its own authority to reframe such events as incidental and to accuse the victims -- whilst being forced to the point of bankruptcy in settling claims out of court. Documentation on the case of the Cardinal of Boston is particularly striking in this respect. Given the direct Christian religious involvement in the conflation of Muslims and terrorists, the process of denial in the handling of sexual abuse merits careful attention.

It is a tremendous irony that the Catholic hierarchy has been obliged (as a result of the situation in the USA) to formulate a new approach to the treatment of evidence regarding the terrorizing of parishioners (and nuns) by Christian priests and to ensuring due process for those who may have been falsely accused of sexual abuse [more; more] -- whilst simultaneously governments around the world are reframing the treatment of evidence (notably under pressure from governments of Christian countries), and by-passing due process in the treatment of those they choose to suspect of terrorism. This irony is compounded by the worldwide institutionalization of 'groping' by agents at security checkpoints under conditions which invite sexual harassment and abuse under intimidating conditions and where any protest is automatically treated as justification for much more invasive investigation (strip searching, etc). A further twist is that the sacrosanct confidentiality of the confessional has been broken, reinforcing questions regarding institutionalized prurience -- whilst those suspected of terrorism are drawn into making 'confessions' under conditions in which their intimacy is invaded and abused if they are to defend themselves, but about which they are prevented from appealing. In both cases the hierarchies in question give priority to protection of their agents -- in each case systematically disguising abuse beneath increasingly dubious claims that they are acting in the public interest.

Another interesting aspect of gerrymandering is associated with the management of system boundaries which constrain definition in science and its applications. The many innovations in society have tended to focus on **closed systems** for which specific products can be successfully designed and marketed. Unfortunately the most intractable problems of society can be best understood from that perspective as **open system** problems that are not amenable to production of marketable remedies. Either the problems are then artificially redefined as closed system problems, which may distort the nature of the system (notably through imposition of an inappropriate remedy) or they are defined as 'rogue' problems not susceptible to 'rational' treatment. 'Terrorism' emerges from an open

system context. Closed system governance -- as with security issues -- is ill-suited to responding to terrorism -- however much conceptual gerrymandering is attempted. Closed systems might usefully be associated with **closed mindedness**, in contrast with the kinds of **open mindedness** that has proven so significant in the case of the process of open source software development.

Terrorism as the failure of dialogue

The claims and rationalizations presented by Osama bin Laden for the use of terrorist practices can be seen as a response to a failure by society to listen and respond to legitimate concerns regarding the unjust treatment of Muslim peoples and notably the Palestinians. Following a well-established historical pattern, these concerns may well be framed as totally 'unreasonable' as seen through the eyes of westerners or those of non-Muslim persuasion. The violent terrorist reactions will necessarily be considered as even more 'unreasonable'. The violent western response to terrorism is however seen as totally reasonable and justified -- as was always true of colonial territorial claims on indigenous lands or military intervention in other countries.

In this whole process there is little evidence of efforts at dialogue between westerners and representatives of the Muslim world concerned for their peoples -- of which increasing numbers are sub-Saharan. There has of course been dialogue between westerners and the rulers of those countries who benefit from western support -- an issue that is part of the problem voiced by Osama bin Laden because of the manner in which such rulers tend to fail to address the needs of their peoples. There have of course been reports of brief, unsuccessful secret dialogues between the USA and the Taliban -- immediately after the inauguration of the Bush administration. This was of course preceded by years of US contact with the Afghan resistance to the USSR -- that gave birth to the Taliban.

Religious encounters facilitated by priests have been seen as exemplifying a vital process of dialogue. However, as indicated earlier, it could usefully be argued that the relationship between priest and believer has become significantly distorted in a significant number of institutional environments into a situation of terror sustained and exploited by the priest. The dialogue with the vulnerable (presented as being so vital to their spiritual development) is perverted into one in which, in religious terms, the person's soul is endangered.

The past century has seen emergence of recognition that enlightened governance requires meaningful dialogue between leaders and people -- exemplified by presidential 'fire-side chats', government consultations, and other processes. It might however be asked whether governance has not, throughout history and in many countries today, been characterized by a degree of rule through terror -- Stalin's Great Terror of 1937 being an extreme example rather than an exception. Government agents have been strongly associated with terror. Such terror indeed reflects a failure of dialogue between government and the people. Saddam Hussein may indeed represent a most extreme case like Stalin. But to what extent is terror not used by the security forces in the most democratic western countries to manage populations where appropriate dialogue has not been elicited -- especially in dealing with the underprivileged?

But what is most significant, post 9/11, is the comparison of the total absence of new investment to enhance the process and quality of dialogue compared with the exceptionally high investment in innovative security activity and 'new ways of thinking' in response to a 'new kind of war' -- resulting from the failure of that dialogue. The '**con**ference industry' has proven increasingly successful over past decades in terms of gathering together people who **agree** -- there is no corresponding '**dif**ference industry' for those who differ, despite the extent to which 'making a difference' is extolled as a life objective. The 'dialogue industry' has proven increasingly successful in terms of gathering people together for workshops of many kinds using a multitude of new techniques of facilitation. The 'negotiation industry' has continued to acquire expertise for dealing with labour and other conflicts -- associated with a long-standing pattern of 'diplomatic dialogue'. However very little of this expertise has proven to be applicable to the case of peoples radically, if not existentially, opposed to each other's perspectives. Why did Getting to Yes not work with the Taliban? Where it has been applied, as in the case of Northern Ireland or the Oslo 'peace process', the results have been questionable. Undoubtedly some would claim a degree of success, notably those associated with the Transcend group [more]. But the unresolved challenges to be addressed by such 'radical dialogue' are all too evident in domestic violence, dysfunctional cross-generational communication, ethnic violence, violence in institutional settings, and for those who are regularly threatened with street violence in unprotected settings. Society is extremely ill-equipped to encounter 'aliens' of any kind [more].

Clearly, once terrorist acts have been initiated, the only effort at 'dialogue' is through interrogation -- assisted by torture following the tradition of the Inquisition. In effect the expertise for dialogue with those holding radically opposed views is now elaborated only in places like the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation and applied in extrajudicial 'dialogue centres' with appropriate facilities such as Camp X-ray at Guantanamo Bay, or the Lubyanka. Whilst dialogue between moderates on both sides may continue using techniques with which both are comfortable, the possibility that rapid innovation and 'new thinking' may be required to sustain meaningful dialogue between those holding radically opposed views is not foreseen or considered desirable. Who would want to talk with 'killers' -- or their 'oppressors'? Their perspective is of course only worth understanding to the degree that it permits those like them to be eliminated. Some hold analogous views regarding dialogue with women.

Terrorism, like torture, then becomes a perverted form of dialogue 'by other means' -- as does the innovative effort applied to its repression. Intercourse with those holding contrary views is inspired by sexual sadism and is enhanced by its tools. It becomes the only form of dialogue experienced as meaningful. What other form is on offer? It is a massive irony of our times that the global significance of terrorism -- framed by 9/11 as the initiation of a Global Terrorism Campaign -- should have become evident in 2001 during the first United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations [more]. Was any initiative ever taken within the UN system to promote the radical dialogue required of the times? The ultimate perversion of dialogue, sanctioned by UN Security Council Resolution 1441, may however be the thermobaric weapons that kill through effectively rendering masses 'voiceless'.

Emergence of thermo-barbaric culture

The mindset reinforcing such failures of dialogue is also evident in the perverted response to the environment -- the dialogue with Nature. It is only with the technologies of the 20th century that 'scorched earth' policies have been seriously implemented. Major examples

include Stalin's policy in retreating from Ukraine before the Germans in 1941 [more], and Hitler's policy there in the subsequent retreat of the Germans in 1943 [more]. It was proposed as a defensive measure for Canada during World War II [more]. The term has been applied to the forest destruction in Indonesia in 1997 [more], to the policies on both sides in the Angolan conflict [more], and to policies in the Sudan [more; more]. The term was also employed to describe a Taliban policy when in retreat before the Northern Alliance [more]. From an environmental perspective, every war can be seen in such terms [more].

The focus on use of fire in war can be seen as having been pioneered by the British in the fire-bombing of Dresden in 1945 [more; more]. This formed part of a terror-bombing strategy against civilian populations developed by the Allies [more]. The archetypal event was the bombing of Hiroshima-Nagaski in the same year by the USA -- followed by decades of nuclear tests. Iraq implemented a dramatic scorched earth policy in setting light to hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells in February 1991.

A new refinement to the use of fire in warfare in the 21st century is the thermobaric bomb. "Thermobaric" denotes any weapon that creates massive amounts of destructive overpressure. The principles behind this weapon are not new. Earlier versions were used in Vietnam and similar weaponry was employed extensively by Russian forces during the battle for Grozny in Chechnya in 2000. Those used in Afghanistan by US forces -- and nicknamed 'daisy cutters' -- create a huge pressure wave over a 4-mile radius which effectively sucks the air out of the lungs of anyone within range. 11 were used by the US in the Gulf Conflict. There is no practical difference between nuclear and thermobaric weapons. Both weapons create similar overpressures, about 10,000 pounds per square foot at ground zero. They destroy indiscriminately over a wide area, ruin farmland and pose an enormous threat to civilian populations. And while thermobarics do not create residual radiation, they do leave behind sizeable amounts of toxic chemicals not burned off in the blast, which poison civilians and farmland [more]. The US intends to use such weapons in Iraq. The New Zealand peace movement correctly advocates the alternative term 'thermobarbaric' [more].

The preoccupation with fire as a therapeutic cleansing device has long been reinforced by images of 'hell fire' and 'burning in hell' strongly articulated by Christian religions. In these troubled times, according to *Time* magazine, the most popular book in the USA in the summer of 2002 was one on the Apocalypse and the Bible, evoking the fiery image of the End Times of current civilization [more]. The web offers considerable resources in support of this perspective [more]. To what extent does this influence the policy of the Bush administration given his dependence on support from the Christian right?

In the current Christian right-wing framing of the war against various Muslim states as a 'crusade' -- a mission from God [more] -- it is a curious irony that it is a 'General Franks' who is seen as the probable US military commander of Iraq after 'regime change' [more]. It was the Franks who were a key Christian group, responding to Pope Urban's appeal for a first Crusade in 1095 that led to the establishment of 'crusader states' sympathetic to the West. At that time, the term "Franks" was applied in a general manner to all the inhabitants of Western Europe by Muslims [more]. A contemporary described their initiative as the "Doings of God through the Franks". In a further irony, the Muslims of that time used weaponry with which the Franks were not familiar, namely the employment of fire as a 'missile' [more]. The Crusades, of which eight are distinguished between 1095 and 1270, in reality continued through to the seventeenth century [more]. Sultan Al-Kamil delivered Jerusalem to the Emperor Frederick II through peaceful negotiation in 1229, ending the Sixth Crusade, arousing a storm of indignation in the Arab world although Frederick was then excommunicated by the Pope for failure to fulfil his crusading vows for bloody conquest. 1233 saw the institution of the Inquisition to deal with the Cathars -- effectively spiritual 'terrorists' -- of which 200 were publicly burnt in 1244. It would seem that similar themes are to be played out with respect to Iraq and Jerusalem.

In a larger contemporary context it is fruitful to see the emergence of scorched earth policies and thermobarics as consistent with the mindset supportive of policies conducive to global warming. As argued elsewhere with regard to the UN's Global Compact with multinational corporations:

> The Global Compact is almost the exact reverse image of that with which many would argue that the UN should be associated. The more appropriate strategy might be called a "Lo-Cal" focus. This would place the emphasis on low-energy (low-calorie) strategies to reduce the environmental footprint of the strategies currently favoured by multinationals. These could be usefully distinguished as "Hi-Cal". Globalization in this perspective should be understood as "Hi-calization". The UN's emerging predilection, shared with multinationals, is -- for what might by contrast be caricatured as "glo-bal" or "glow-ball" initiatives - articulated and sustained by endless glowing hype and consumer apathy, ungrounded in the reality in which people are increasingly obliged to live. Rather than the promotion of global business (shortly to be severely handicapped by future oil costs for transportation), why does the UN offer no focus on sustainable lo-cal initiatives? These would contrast with the unsustainable high-energy initiatives that are, ironically, causing the planet to "glow" increasingly (in the infra-red) -- but also have the sinister potential of resulting in a fiery end to the globe (as predicted by fanatics of the Apocalypse). This glittering image of globalization has the simplistic appeal of a child's ball -- illuminated or painted to glow as it is bounced. An image echoed in town high streets by the unsightly sprawl of illuminated franchise stores - controlled by glo-bal corporations. [more]

Given the highly disproportionate use of nonrenewable world energy resources by the USA, and the 'non-negotiable' position taken in defence of such usage, it might be said that the USA could well go down in history as the first thermobarbaric culture.

In metaphoric terms however, the information warfare role of thermobaric analogues could usefully be explored in relation to the destructive use of information weapons against cultures. Certainly the significance of the 'hot air' dimension is worth exploring in terms of the hype presented in justification of particular global policies unrelated to concrete action. The 'baric' (overpressure) dimension is worth exploring in terms of the propaganda pressure sought through multinational media control in support of those policies to the exclusion of alternative perspectives -- from which people might indeed hope to gain some sustaining 'oxygen'. This thermobarbaric global approach seems well-designed to destroy any local community.

The unquestioned assumption of governance

Despite the unprecedented slaughter of peoples of other countries undertaken by governments in the 20th century, the most unquestioned assumption of civilized democracies is that they would never ever engage in policies destructive of their own populations. This assumption is at the root of the credibility accorded to claims made by national intelligence agencies in indicating responsibility for acts of terrorism: no civilized government would deliberately cause death to its own citizens. As documented in the study by R.J. Rummel (*Death by Government*, 1994), this assumption is highly questionable [text].

It is useful to explore the conditions under which this assumption might well be false. There are a number of indicators:

- *Eugenic programmes:* Deliberate eugenic policies were employed in a number of western countries in the first part of 20th century with regard to the treatment of citizens who were mentally or physically disabled. The most extreme were of course those employed in Germany. Selective immigration policies may also be seen as acting as 'eugenic filters' through which the gene pool is renewed by those with sufficient vigour to navigate the hazards of asylum seeking. Capital punishment may also be usefully seen in this light as the removal of undesirables from the gene pool.
- *Indigenous populations:* The savage treatment of native populations by most colonial powers has been extensively documented (eg the Amritsar massacre of 1919). In the past century this also extended to minorities such as blacks.
- *Treatment of civil unrest:* Increasingly innovation in weaponry has been designed to handle internal threats of social unrest, rather than external attack. The pattern and extent of 'disappearances' under dictatorships has been widely publicized [more]. The degree to which this pattern is emerging in relation to seizure (and termination) of suspects under anti-terrorist legislation is only now becoming apparent. The case of Chechnya (300,000 dead) is an extreme example [more] in a country allied with the USA in the 'war against terrorism'.
- *Potentially fatal experiments on citizens:* Experimentation with fatal consequences on citizens (especially prisoners or military) has been undertaken in a number of western countries notably with respect to testing for nuclear, chemical and biological warfare [more]. It is unclear to what degree such experiments continue to be undertaken with respect to new forms of drug.
- *Acceptable collateral damage in dealing with other threats:* It is accepted that some people may be killed during the response to a threat (eg the role of SWAT teams, the Moscow theatre hostage situation of 2002). Massacres may be undertaken as an example to impose order on a population (as in Russia and China in the 20th century). Conspiracy theorists speculate on the willingness of governments to sacrifice their own nationals in airplane 'accidents' in order to eliminate opponents.
- *Political assassination:* The complicity of parts of government, or its agencies, in assassination is frequently explored in the case of high profile assassinations (the Kennedys, Martin Luther King) and suspect accidents (Princess Diana, US Senator Paul Wellstone, etc). 'Death squads', as documented by Amnesty, have been used by governments of a number of countries against their citizens. Efforts have been made, notably in the USA, to document the manner in which executives of major corporations have occasionally used 'dirty tricks' to eliminate opponents and critics, especially from labour and environmental movements. To what extent does this mindset influence such executives when they take up roles in executive government?
- *Fatal negligence:* The complicity of parts of government, or its agencies, in negligence with fatal consequences has been raised in the case of health issues (smoking, asbestos, hormones in food, etc). The question may be raised with respect to the treatment of the elderly (heating, health care).The imposition of genetically modified food on populations by their governments (notably when blackmailed by a threat of starvation) may be seen by historians in this light -- especially if such innovations give rise to the genetic equivalents of Chernobyl and Three Mile Island.
- *Irresponsible acts of warfare:* It has been argued that some forms of warfare, and the manner in which people are sent to their death (notably in the trench-warfare of World War I), raise questions as to the degree to which such initiatives are undertaken with the deliberate intention of causing loss of life to the country's own population
- *Deliberate malnourishment:* The neglect by countries of the adequacy of food made available to their populations has resulted in serious malnourishment, even in western countries, and even in mass starvation (as in the Ukraine, or in Ireland in the 19th century). Deliberately withholding assistance can also be fatal.
- *Failure to act on warnings:* Governments are often dismissive of warnings regarding imminent threats relating to the environment, notably those associated with global warming. Most concretely this is evident in allowing construction in flood plains but also it relates to various health hazards (smoking, etc) and warnings of impending famine.

The ability of government to justify such action against citizens arises in part from what was earlier termed conceptual gerrymandering. It is the ability to marginalize certain parts of society -- converting a portion of 'us' into 'them'. Once this transformation is achieved, the logic of action by 'us' against 'them' becomes quite obvious. It is this same process that converts 'humans' into 'sub-humans' or 'animals' -- to which the adjective 'evil' may be readily attached. It is this process which also cuts 'humans' out of an ecosystem that includes other species -- enabling the 'non-human' environment to be treated 'in-humanely' without concern. Extraterrestrials should be warned of this tendency -- although they might either share it in their approach to humans, or consider it a pattern that humans find appropriate.

The question is the extent to which these policies are deliberately undertaken against citizens, through the action or inaction of any part of their government -- or are only implemented by default. These issues have bred many conspiracy theories. They notably raise issues regarding the kind of government agency that might be empowered to undertake them, or allow them to be implemented through surrogates. The origin of AIDS has been explored from this perspective. Numerous Hollywood movies have explored the possible existence of secretive rogue agencies, and rogue government agents, acting in this way -- whether according to their privileged understanding of 'national security' or in support of a particular political agenda. Has development of American culture needed to articulate scenarios and scripts that evoke this pattern -- whether or not the movies were partially funded by the CIA? How is their existence to be determined and how are denials of their existence to be assessed? *Qui custodiet custodies?*

Many of these indicators suggest the existence of secret policies whose existence it is difficult to prove or disprove. This uncertainty gives weight to suspicions which may be totally unfounded but which it would be naive to discount. What credibility or probability is

then to be accorded to the claim of conspiracy theorists that it was not 'terrorists' who were responsible for 9/11 but some rogue western government group? Who could prove this hypothesis to be false -- and to whom?

In metaphoric and symbolic terms these indicators raise the question of whether countries and cultures are capable of a form of self-mutilation -- perhaps framed as a collective equivalent of body piercing. There are indeed those who cultivate mindsets so critical of their own collective self-image that they would seek to do damage to that collective. This has been evident in the position of some anarchists. It was also evident in the case of the Oklahoma bombing. Is the mindset reinforcing American patterns of over-consumption associated with other self-image-related 'eating disorders' analogous to bulimia and anorexia? Again, in symbolic terms as with the Ourobouros, is a dysfunctional culture eventually forced to bite its own tail? But perhaps it can be argued that one definition of governance includes precisely the mandate and capacity to do so.

Challenge of interpretation: who is spinning when?

Much is currently made of the difficulties of the intelligence services in sifting through the huge volume of 'intelligence' regarding potential threats. Such services have to strike a balance between responding prematurely (and inappropriately) on the basis of indicative data and allowing terrorist actions to occur for lack of hard information. A case is increasingly made for pre-emptive action whether or not it is associated with abuse of the civil rights articulated in many international conventions. To sustain the intelligence stream it becomes necessary to classify sources -- leading to a situation in which any action can be taken providing its rationale can be cloaked under 'national security'.

At a more familiar level, many citizens have now been exposed to cases of investigation into police tampering with evidence, or fabricating it. Significant numbers claim to have been 'framed' or 'fitted up'. Police may even justify such initiatives when they lack hard evidence and they 'know' that the suspect is guilty. To what extent will some UN inspectors in Iraq be tempted to fabricate evidence -- or be presented with evidence that has been fabricated? By what means might such evidence be brought into the country by interested parties as part of the inspection process? Will Iraq be 'framed' -- notably after the opportunity, offered to the USA by the UN to 'copy' the 12,000 page declaration, provided by Iraq in December 2002? Who will be able to prove that they have not been framed and on the basis of what 'evidence'?

Given the repeated assertion by the USA that it has evidence to prove that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, although unwilling to publicize it or provide it to the UN, it is a curious irony that Tony Blair (who shares that belief) was faced on 12th December 2002 with a need to make a statement to defend his wife's highly controversial handling of an apartment purchase:

> Let me very blunt with you. If anyone has any evidence at all -- I mean real evidence -- of anything criminal, illegal or improper they should give that evidence to the appropriate authorities. I say this with very great respect: I think everyone's had their pound of flesh and now it's time to move on (*Guardian*, 13 December 2002)

How different would be the world's view of Tony Blair if he addressed those words to George Bush? It is unfortunate that responsible countries, including the permanent members of the UN Security Council, are now completely unable to provide hard evidence to prove that they themselves are not deeply implicated in the most heinous activities.

Ordinary citizens are faced with an equivalent problem of how to determine when to give credibility to whom. This is a problem with which citizens of totalitarian countries have long been familiar. It is an historical irony that the 'free world' has recreated this environment in its own defence. Unfortunately it is precisely this justification that has been used in the past by totalitarian dictatorships in defence of their own regimes -- an argument deplored by the 'free world' at the time.

Maggie O'Kane (*Guardian* 5 Dec 2002), a journalist active during the Gulf War, describes two glaring examples of the use of propaganda to support the allied attack then -- as a means of raising questions about how similar propaganda might now be used to support an attack on Iraq. Just prior to the war the Pentagon insisted, on the basis of satellite photo 'evidence', that Iraq had 265,000 troops poised to attack Saudi Arabia -- successfully silencing the waverers and anti-war protesters. Photographs from Russian satellites purchased by an American journalist at the time showed no such massing of troops. What might fake satellite photographs be used to demonstrate in 2002? The second propaganda example from 1991 was the 'eye witness' report of babies being torn by Iraqis from hospital incubators in Kuwait and left to die on the floor. This planted story successfully duped Amnesty and others -- and successfully convinced hesitant US congressmen to vote for war. It was repeatedly used as a theme by George Bush Sr months before the truth emerged after the war [more]. She asks how consensus will be manufactured in 2002.

In the 'war against terror' government spin doctors must manage the news such that the negative stereotyping of 'terrorists' becomes (and remains) credible. Unfortunately they are only able to do this by imposing a degree of 'voluntary' censorship on the media and through the suppression and marginalization of dissenting voices. More unfortunately, as with bad advertising for bad products, is that the quality of public information and public discourse is perceptibly and significantly degraded by this process. When the vice-presidency of a country is directly associated with systematic efforts to silence and harass dissenting academic voices in a democracy, its citizens are forced into a mode long known to citizens of totalitarian countries. What values are incarnated by an intellectual establishment when dissenters are reduced to intercourse in private between consenting adults -- and are publicly acknowledged by forging ('spoofing') their electronic identities to frame them as a source of porn and hate mail?

But the curious feature of this situation is that coalition propagandists must necessarily be telling the truth some of the time. The problem for the individual on the receiving end, as when faced with a snake oil salesman, is how to determine when this is the case. As in the traditional tale, how many times can the little boy cry 'wolf' -- to see the people scurry -- before they cease to scurry and end up losing their sheep to a real wolf? In this respect, historians may be amused by the fact that the most extreme hawk in the US administration is

currently Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense and formerly a professor of international relations..

Equally curious is that this condition of public fear and uncertainty may well be precisely a feature of the agenda of those in the coalition who seek to benefit through subterfuge from a panicked population that welcomes 'necessary' constraints on its civil liberties. More curious is that this condition of collective fear is a prime objective of 'terrorists' -- as explicitly indicated by Osama bin Laden. In this way, **those opposing terrorism themselves become surrogates of the terrorists** -- an irony when the reverse was previously the case (as with US financing of Osama bin Laden to oppose the Russians).

The individual is then forced into a curious conceptual space where the credibility of 'terrorists' and those 'fighting for freedom' of civilization is equally difficult to assess -- since each is using the tools of the other, however much they may repeatedly claim to be morally incomparable. This becomes especially regrettable when on human rights grounds the individual may have every reason to deplore Saddam Hussein -- whilst in terms of its hypocrisy, double-standards, manipulation of information, repression of dissent, and torture of dissenters, there may be equivalent reasons to deplore governments which oppose him and which are normally held to much higher standards. The best can no longer provide credible evidence to differentiate themselves from the worst. **Should the unsavoury be deplored to a greater degree than champions of liberty who degrade themselves into acting with the same methods as the unsavoury and to questionable ends** -- whilst vigorously claiming moral superiority, denying their improbity and ensuring that their impunity is guaranteed?

Why the need for so much security classification of information and for such long periods? Is it the case that the social project of the past century has been designed to sustain a kind of Potemkin society [more] -- richly decorated by the international declarations, charters, conventions and resolutions concerning every aspect of human activity, and sustained by very selective media presentations? To what extent are these devices primarily designed to paper over the cracks and disguise the extent to which any remedial action is token or purely symbolic -- as repeatedly demonstrated by the broken policy promises (Afghanistan, Africa, Palestine, etc)?

A powerful example, presumably typical of many others currently classified, is the case of the secret group of developed nations that conspired to limit the effectiveness of the UN's first conference on the environment (Stockholm, 1972). The existence of this cabal, known as the Brussels group, was revealed British government records that were kept secret until January 2002 (under a 30-year rule). The Stockholm conference was set up in response to rising concern about damage to the environment. It ended with a ringing declaration of the need to protect the natural world, and the UN Environment Programme was set up as a result. Its programme was held in check by the activities of the Brussels group, which included Britain, the US, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and France [more]. Is it any wonder that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002) was a disaster? What other such secret agreements are yet to be revealed?

Reinforcing credibility

Challenged by this dilemma, both 'terrorists' and those opposing them can take dramatic steps to focus peoples attention. For both of them 'any means' need to be considered -- however they choose to hype and legitimate their aims.

For terrorists, the occasional use of bombs and other devices is a characteristic means of focussing public attention on their concerns. But the challenge for their opponents, in the absence of unclassified hard evidence is, most ironically, also to use such devices (but secretly) -- and immediately to claim the result to be hard evidence in support of their restrictive measures against such terrorist activity. For, in the absence of credible evidence, the most effective means of focussing public support is judiciously to plant the occasional bomb or 'specific threats' -- or even fake assassination attempts -- in support of the unpublishable intelligence information. Given the questionable basis for the 'unquestioned assumption' (above), the hard men of government would need no encouragement to act secretly in this way in the overriding interest of 'national security' and 'western civilization' -- however regrettable the collateral damage. Some conspiracy theorists see the origins of 9/11 in these terms.

Both sides can then take advantage of any incident causing loss of life or destruction of property to advance their cause. Comics are already joking that any accident is now the responsibility of 'al-Qaida' (or its supporters). Representatives of 'al-Qaida', real or wannabe, can claim it to be so -- and representatives of coalition governments (in the light of their classified 'intelligence') can freely assert that it is so. This provides an ideal escape clause for a struggling insurance industry which can then frame such incidents with 'Acts of God' as beyond their remit!

Any experience of herding cattle or sheep provides insights into how a large population can be 'managed' using similar techniques with very little manpower -- a vital challenge in governance. Children in Africa do it all the time -- as do cowboys in various cultures. It may inspire insights into more cost-effective processes of governance that avoid the 'inefficiencies' of democratic processes: party politics and funding, gaining visibility, costly media time, public appeals, horsetrading, and coalition building. As in stock-herding, it is sufficient to create (or fake) threats with a rock, a stick, a whip, or other noisemaker -- real bullets are not needed for the cowboy's gun once the lesson has been learnt through a few judicious and highly visible examples. Essentially the art is to terrorize the cattle into moving as required in a condition of controlled panic.

Is instilling such panic to be the basis of governance in the future? However, reminiscent of government preoccupation with 'avoiding public panic', the web now offers insights into the merit of newly discovered 'low-stress techniques of cattle herding' that are conducive to higher quality animal products [more; more]. One such source even makes the extraordinary challenge to students of comparing the cattle to Jews and the cowboys to Nazis [more]. Another points to the challenges of religious leaders in shepherding their flocks. Threatening believers with 'hell fire' is of course a standard technique of Christian preachers in maintaining control over their flocks. Are there government leaders that are likely to be inspired by both religious and cowboy metaphors? [more]

How then to determine which threats and bombs are planted by terrorists and which by agents of government through a chain of deniable responsibility? Does it make any difference to the individual?

[*See counterpart to this perspective in Warp and Weft: Governance through alternation, namely an approach to world governance as a Gandhian challenge for the individual*]

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