

The Open Society and Its Enemies: Confronting International Terrorism

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The world felt the impact of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington as violence against international society itself. As one of the countries immediately concerned, Japan must respond. This is not an "invisible war" against an "invisible enemy." Japanese need to overcome their fear and articulate their anger at these reprehensible acts against civilized society.

Few crimes have been as abominable as the terrorist attacks against New York and Washington on September 11. Among the nearly 3,000 victims were a number of Japanese nationals, people working in jobs at the forefront of the business world. We can only grieve deeply for all the people, whatever their nationality, whose lives of promise and potential were suddenly cut short by the attacks.

The terrorism of September 11 marks the advent of a new type of war. In the post-Cold War world the United States is the sole superpower, and in reality no country could dare to wage war on the United States state-vs.-state on the classical pattern. The events of September 11 were an asymmetrical type of war launched by a terrorist organization against a state, using tactics against which no missile defense system would be an effective deterrent and to which the traditional concepts of national defense are totally irrelevant. Osama bin Laden and his organization of terrorists are capable of piloting airliners and slipping through intelligence dragnets. They are cold-blooded enough to take hundreds of innocent civilians with them on suicide missions and possess the iron resolve (or faith) to overcome the fear of suicidal explosion. Such people are the formidable adversary of all countries, Japan included. Equipped with the organizational skills and technological know-how for out-maneuvering the U.S. airspace control system and its police and security forces, they took advantage of the weaknesses of American security. Breaking through airport screening systems and outwitting advanced intelligence networks are sophisticated crimes, but the fact that they were linked to the crude acts of killing and destruction is what categorizes the terrorist attacks as a new type of war. We may describe this as a new form of confrontation between "the open society and its enemies," to borrow the title of a 1971 book by the late British philosopher Karl R. Popper.

Some in Japan argue that the events of September 11 took place far away and were not targeted directly at Japan, so they had nothing to do with their country. Their arguments are the product of fear. Others insist that the incident could have been resolved by peaceful means. But what kind of peaceful measures will be effective in dealing with a terrorist organization that has openly launched war against the world's largest state? Suppose a terrorist group were to slaughter Tokyo citizens

in large numbers the way people in New York were sacrificed. What kind of negotiations could the Japanese government or its citizens possibly hold in the spirit of peace with people capable of such horrible mass murder? The advocates of peaceful resolution are engaged simply in fanciful idealism.

The attacks took Japanese lives and further disrupted the already difficult condition of the Japanese economy. While the tragedy immediately aroused strong emotions and reactions in Germany and elsewhere, where government and people cooperated in holding memorial services for the victims, in Japan as a whole the sense of crisis and anger vis-à-vis the terrorism was slow to surface. Given that the acts of international terrorism had killed civilians of many nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, it is hardly excusable for Japanese to see the events as not involving themselves. It is in our own best interest to deal with the issue of terrorism as a directly involved party. If we remain indifferent and Japan itself is assaulted by terrorists, no state will be likely to offer help or take much care. Japan would be internationally isolated even more than it was at the time of the Gulf War. Sharing grief for the victims of terror is a natural human impulse. The Japanese people and the government need to see the incident as an act perpetrated directly upon them and to quickly unite with other countries in fighting terrorism. Immediately after the incident Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro severely criticized the "despicable act" and declared that Japan would support whatever responses President Bush would take against the terrorists. There is no denying that crimes of a similar nature could be committed against Japan.

Japan is a peculiar country, deeply imprinted by abhorrence of war and a near-obsession with pacifism. Despite the not-so-distant experience of the Aum Shinrikyo attack in Tokyo subways with deadly sarin gas in 1995, people do not seem to be equipped to react quickly and appropriately to crisis. Even regarding crimes committed daily, there are frequently loud calls for protecting the human rights and understanding the mental instability of assailants or murderers before thinking of the plight of the victims. The events of September 11 thrust upon this ultrapacifist Japan the very real challenge of how to come to grips with terrorism and crime.

The Capacity for Anger

What came as a great shock to international public opinion was that advanced counterintelligence and security systems were so easily broken through by a small number of terrorists. President Bush immediately called the incident "war." He vowed to hunt down and punish the terrorists and those who funded and harbored them—calling them a "different type of enemy"—no matter how long it might take. He understood the attacks as a challenge not just to the principles of freedom and democracy of which the United States is so proud but also to the security of the world and the United States. The U.S. government identified Osama bin Laden as a criminal and launched a large-scale operation against him and his terrorist network, effectively unifying public opinion at home as had been done at the time of the Gulf war.

In Japan, the phrase "war against an invisible enemy" was used for some time even after it became clear how and by whom the crime was perpetrated. It is important, in the face of terrorist acts, to control fear in order to maintain peace and order in a society. Expressions like "invisible enemy" derive from fear. The results of American investigations made the criminals visible. Once visible, the enemy is no

longer to be feared. We would have expected Japanese to register stronger anger at a crime that killed thousands of innocent people.

A major concern in the United States, by contrast, was that blinded by too emotional a response, people would cast all Islamic people as well as Arab-Americans into the same mold as the terrorists. The terrorist group was apparently seeking to provoke a clash-of-civilizations scenario, prompting ethnic warfare or religious war. The terrorists hoped to make the entire Islamic world, as well as Islamic and Arab Americans, hostile to American society. The United States had to be very careful not to be caught in this trap by responding as expected to the provocation. To further support the antiterrorist efforts of the United States and Europe, an appeal should be made to the conscience and righteous indignation of antiterrorist forces within the Middle East and other Islamic countries as well as among Islamic citizens in the United States, Japan, and elsewhere. After that America must embark on initiatives that will resolve the fundamental poverty, population, and environmental problems gripping the Islamic world. This effort is necessary if the United States is to be successful in the antiterror campaign on the military and diplomatic fronts.

Terror is not limited to killing with conventional weapons. In a society like Japan, where stability and order rest on an intricate web of sophisticated financial and economic transactions, terror could take very different forms, such as damaging the market by destroying information and communications systems in an attempt to undermine the credibility and overall power of that society. It is possible to illegally infiltrate communications systems and computer control devices to alter personal data or change balances in bank accounts. Given the emotionalism and group behavior of Japanese, it would be easy to stir up social unrest and set off panic, cast doubt on the government's leadership capacity, and confuse economic information. Every possible effort and measure should be made to forestall such cyberterror. As for crisis management and preservation of peace and order in the event of such terrorist acts, preparedness is needed not only by government agencies and private enterprises; individuals as well should train themselves to behave calmly.

In the event of an electronic terrorist attack, it would be extremely difficult for some time after the attack, not to mention in the midst of it, to judge whether what has happened is mischief caused by an individual, the calculated assault of a terrorist group, or an act of war by a specific country. Japanese tend to be indifferent to, if not accepting of, trouble-maker calls by cell phone or i-mode spam. But there are places in the world where a thoughtless joke or irresponsible mischief could trigger outright conflict. In this age of sensitivity to crisis-control management it is increasingly necessary to deal sternly with irresponsible electronic misdemeanors.

Of particular importance, in any case, is that we consider conscientious people of Arab origin in foreign lands and Islamic people around the world as our partners in eradicating the terrorist threat to world peace. We should encourage them to actively participate in the fight to isolate terrorists who are parasites within the Islamic world. Japan, which has an increasing number of Islamic residents, is no different from other nations in being an open society that nevertheless has to deal with such enemies.

Bin Laden and Afghanistan

Osama bin Laden apparently perceives the world as different from the international system of independent sovereign states accepted by almost all nations, including

those of the Islamic world. For bin Laden the world is a simple structure made up of the abode of Islam and the non-Islam. Perhaps the borders of nation-states and the sovereignty of the state are to him no more than demarcations created for the convenience of European and American colonialism. He may picture in his mind some ideal world of "the Islamic state." Nowhere on his map would there be a territory called the United States of America or a land named Japan. The expanse of his "Islamic world" with the light of revelation and truth of God radiating from Mecca in all directions transcends the conception of nations and their territories. One is reminded of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a name that did not allow for any demarcation of peoples or territories. Likewise, bin Laden's world is one governed by his ideology and Islamic faith. His ideology, however, has little in common with the thinking of the vast majority of Muslims, even with that of most Islamic fundamentalists. Among Islamic fundamentalists are many moderate groups who play a constructive role in society by providing medical services, legal information, and social services, and who compete for seats in parliament by election. The movement by bin Laden and other extremists may well be defined as "Islamic terrorism." (For details, see Yamauchi Masayuki ed., *"Isuramu genrishugi" to wa nanika* [What is Islamic Fundamentalism?], Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996.)

Not only the United States but the bin Laden group itself sees the September 11 attacks as war. Bin Laden considers the assaults launched by the United States and European countries, as well as by America's ally Israel, on Palestine, Beirut, Chechnya, Sarajevo, and Kosovo to be indiscriminate attacks, justifying Muslim counterattacks. In his thinking the terrorist acts of September 11 must be part of that war. As part of his holy war, or jihad, the attacks on the United States are legitimate under the tenets of Islam.

The question of whether the United States will successfully capture Osama bin Laden goes unanswered. Moving from place to place, he makes an elusive foe. His methods are an odd combination of medieval and modern technologies, based on his rich experience with field warfare. During the Russian war against Chechnya, its president Dzhokhar Dudaev was reportedly killed when his entire headquarters was blasted by a Russian missile after having been identified as the source of a cell phone call made by Dudaev. It is reported that the radio waves from the cell phone



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call were intercepted by the U.S. airborne warning and control system and that the American side passed on the information to Russia. Osama bin Laden no longer uses satellite phones or radiophones. Some say he uses a made-in-Japan cell phone. Others say he relies on premodern methods for communication such as sending messengers, and this theory, reflecting bin Laden's wary ways, is more plausible. An unbalanced combination of high and low technologies is symbolic of bin Laden's movement and ideology.

How the relationship between bin Laden and Afghanistan will unfold is, as of this writing, hard to read. Opinion is divided over how much influence bin Laden exerts on the Taliban or vice versa. Their power relationship depends on how important it is to preserve Afghanistan as the stronghold of the Taliban-Islamic revolution, "Islam in One Country" after the fashion of Soviet-Russia as the last bastion of "Socialism in One Country." Presumably they hope to control all of Afghanistan by subduing the area ruled by the Northern Alliance in the wake of the murder of its military leader Ahmed Shah Massoud. If they seek that goal, they will not want Taliban-controlled Afghanistan to perish or be seriously damaged by U.S. forces. To avert this, bin Laden could "disappear" from the Taliban-governed area. He might very likely "die" in disguise as Ibn-ul-Khattab once tried to do in Chechnya.

But bin Laden and the Taliban are more likely to fight to the end ready to die for their faith, declaring Afghanistan as the base of "eternal Islamic revolution" against the United States, Europe, and Russia.

Aside from moves by the United States and Russia, which option they take hinges on the complicated arrangement of power relations among factions within the Taliban and between bin Laden and the Taliban, the relationship between the government and pro-Taliban forces

in Pakistan, and moves by the international Islamic terrorist group of which bin Laden is a member.

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Japanese Diplomacy and Islamic Terrorism

In dealing with the situation created by the events unfolding in Afghanistan, Japan can utilize the experience gained in unraveling the complex relations among Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asian countries, such as Tajikistan and Kirghizia, during investigations and negotiations over incidents involving Japanese nationals. In July 1998, Akino Yutaka, a Japanese university professor, was killed while on duty as a civil affairs officer of the U.N. Mission of Observers in Tajikistan, and in September 1999 four Japanese engineers were held hostage in Central Asia. The fact that Japan had no choice but to establish contact with terrorist groups in Eurasia along the way is still fresh in our memories. The two incidents were different. The Akino case involved the death of a Japanese national in the course of work as part of an international organization and the hostage incident was resolved by negotiations leading to release of the hostages. But both incidents gave Japan valuable experience. The information Japan's foreign affairs officials gathered in the field can be of much support to the United States. Indeed, the importance of Japan's foreign affairs information-gathering capabilities deserves fresh recognition.

In middle-range perspective, Japan's foreign affairs strategies for this region should be reviewed. I propose, for instance, that we rethink the results and limits of the "Eurasian diplomacy" initiated by the then Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro in 1997, the diplomatic initiatives conducted in the Silk Road region, and the comprehensive strategy on Islam started by the Kono Yohei-initiated Study Group on Islam. The idea of Eurasian diplomacy, covering a wide area including Russia and China, was aimed partly at stabilizing Central Asia and Afghanistan. Japan needs such a multifaceted perspective in order to build a constructive relationship with Russia that does not focus only on the Northern Territories issue.

In any case, the immediate challenge facing Japanese foreign policy is to resolutely confront the terrorist threat. Failing to do so would again bring down the condemnation of international opinion. Indeed, Japan may be an easy target for open assaults by terrorists. With its loose domestic laws and insular, isolationist pacifism, Japan could be made a hidden base for activity and the economic and financial transactions needed to facilitate terrorist plots. The poor sense of crisis in Japanese society concerning espionage, guarding of its territory, and preparedness for a military emergency is not just a domestic problem but a source of concern for the United States and the international community as a whole.



About
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Article

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Translated from the original Japanese, "*Hirakareta shakai to sono teki*," published in the November 2001 issue of *Gaiko Forum*. Fifty years have passed since the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which laid the foundation for Japan's security policy today. How does the United States under President George W. Bush understand security in the Asia-Pacific region? What is Japan's position on security and what should it do? Addressing these questions as well as new problems such as sea lane defense and missile defense, the November issue, featuring "It's Time for Security Reforms," deals with Japan's security policy from a strategic point of view.