

Talking Points.

“Roots” or “enabling conditions” of terrorism.

- *Poverty, underdevelopment and poor governance feed terrorism. But not always cause it. The relation between those issues and terrorism is definitely not a mechanistic one. But, at the same time, to say that they have little to do with terrorism goes way too far and seems to be equally simplistic.*
- *As to the frequent question on whether poverty is the main or the sole cause of terrorism or whether there may be other causes, of a different nature, the answer is there are multiple causes of terrorism. Sometimes they are of a religious, ethnical, or of an ideological nature. Frequently fed by ignorance. In all cases terrorist ranks are filled with people who because they may feel discriminated against or who hurt in their dignity become resentful.*
- *Those who, oversimplifying, maintain that poverty is “the main” cause of terrorism have at least three different problems to confront : (i) understanding and explaining is one thing, justifying and excusing a very different one. And there can be no excuse whatsoever to kill innocent civilians. At all. (ii) Explaining how comes that some terrorist organizations and groups operate in vibrant and well governed economies. Like Spain, or Germany, or Japan, or Italy, or even France or the US. (iii) Terrorism in poor countries has frequently leaders who are well educated and come from relatively wealthy families. Like Sendero Luminoso, the FARC, Al Qaeda, Hamas, etc.*
- *However, the link between poverty and terrorism exists and is of an indirect nature. Poverty generates frustration and eventually also resentment. Frequently terrorism has ground forces that come from impoverished areas. People with almost no prospect of a decent life whose grievances are smartly exploited by their leaders.*
- *Modern terrorism requires skills, management, logistics, finance and technological knowledge which are normally found in the upper classes who provide leadership to terrorist movements.*
- *A well fed and fully employed population will probably not provide too many opportunities nor recruits for terrorism.*
- *Failed States are a problem. They provide ideal conditions for terrorism to flourish. The list is long, unfortunately. Those are countries that can exercise only a limited sovereignty over their territories and peoples. They are submerged in corruption, live in discontent, have no independent judiciaries nor police or security forces. In their domestic environments brutality is open, organized crime is rampant, the illicit flourishes. There incomes inequalities are manifest, authoritarianism is evident and freedoms are severely restricted. People have no hope nor opportunities. No dreams nor vision of a decent future. There is therefore little to live for and humiliation generates rage.*
- *Agricultural protectionism has caused poverty for now over four decades. And it has displaced people from rural areas to shanty towns where they live without proper services nor education. The industrialized world has devastated the*

agricultural sector of the developing world. Now this may change. The “peace clause” which stopped developing countries from been able to sue the subsidizing ones for compensation expired at he end of last year. Suddenly the developing world has leverage. Agricultural protectionism may have to fade away. If this happens, what is probably the most important cause of poverty, will slowly begin to fade away. Time has come for a change. Protectionism has bred despair, alienation and lack of hope. Reversing this unhappy trend may well help in limiting the next generation of terrorists.

The situation in Latin America.

- *In the 70’s Latin America had to overcome two nightmares : (i) Marxist terrorism of a true international nature, i.e. strongly supported -beyond ideologies- by Cuba and Libya; and (ii) “State” terrorism as a completely unacceptable reply to international terrorism.*
- *Today the problem still exists. The two more important countries where terrorism is present are Colombia and Peru. In Colombia terrorism is found in both The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and in the National Liberation Army (ELN). Both guerilla groups operate today with the material support of Cuba and Venezuela. FARC, led by Manuel Marulanda (alias : “Tiro Fijo”) has approximately 18.000 full time combatants spread throughout the Colombian territory. They operate in Southern Colombia. Its members are self-identified Marxists. It finances itself through kidnappings, extortion, and the lucrative drug trafficking. They generate some 400 million dollars a year to finance their activities and operations. ELN is smaller but equally Marxist. In fact it is an outgrowth of the Cuban revolution. Originally it was made up of students and young priests (Liberation Theology). Today they have approximately 5.000 combatants.*
- *In Peru the infamous Shining Path has resurfaced. It now seems to replicate FARC structures and policies.*
- *But, in addition to domestic terrorism of an international nature, the region has suffered attacks by imported fundamentalist terrorist groups. The attacks to the Embassy of Israel and to a large Jewish welfare entity in Buenos Aires, in 1994 and 1996 are a tragic example of what these second type of terrorists can do in a region which is probably still not ready to confront terrorism with some chance of success.*

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