

Transnational Terrorism: The Newest Mutation in the Forms of Warfare

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The enemies of yesterday were more or less of the symmetric type: static, predictable, homogeneous, hierarchical, rigid, and resistant to change. The enemies of today are decidedly of the asymmetric type: dynamic, unpredictable, fluid, networked, self-organizing, and constantly adapting and evolving.

Transnational terrorism has always been what its perpetrators have so often insisted: a form of warfare. It is a form of warfare, however, in which the boundaries drawn by the states, the adherence to international law and international humanitarian law, and the responses dictated by conventional military doctrine no longer play a role. There are no front lines and there are no noncombatants. Often viewed today as a uniquely modern problem, terrorism is the current stage in an evolution whose origins extend as far back as human conflict itself. It is the contemporary name given to, and the modern permutation of, warfare deliberately waged against civilians with the purpose of destroying their will to support leaders or policies, and/or of destabilizing the social system and society that the agents of such violence find objectionable.

While the events of 9/11 saw terrorism produce its most destructive events to date, trends from the preceding decade showed an ever-increasing trajectory of violence and multiplied indications that transnational terrorism would greatly affect politics and economics over the next decades. This was less because of growing imbalances between richer and poorer regions of the world and more because of the increasing military imbalances between technologically advanced states and the rest of the world. Terrorism is not a weapon of the poor: rather, terrorism is a way for the weak to wage war. Thus, to an ever larger de-

gree, transnational terrorism is superseding guerrilla war,¹¹⁶ which had sort of the same function during the last century.

However, the replacement of guerrilla war by this new terrorism is more than an operational innovation on the part of those who can neither afford high-technology weaponry nor are able to maintain complex military systems, because guerrilla war is in essence a defensive strategy. Experimentation in offensive guerrilla war as attempted by Che Guevara failed miserably in the Bolivian jungles. Guerrillas are dependent on the support of local populations—support they only receive where they are ethnically and socially interconnected. In contrast, the new terrorism has at its core an offensive strategy.¹¹⁷ Operating globally, the new transnational terrorism has freed itself from the absolute dependence on such local support. It uses the infrastructure of the nations attacked, as per 9/11: airplanes as missiles and kerosene as explosives. Logistics are coordinated and stored in the shadows of the financial, transport, and social networks created by globalization. Terrorists, formerly intrinsically interrelated with guerrillas and one of its manifestations, have become independent strategic actors.

The aim of guerrilla warfare is the control and dominance of territory. In contrast, the aim of transnational terrorism is the interruption of the global streams of commerce, services, capital, information, telecommunications, and travel. Guerrillas are dependent on territory where they can amass and make available logistics, recruit and train fighters, and develop a new sociopolitical order—at least in the so-called liberated areas. The new terrorism has freed itself from territory. For violent acts and logistics, it is using the ultimately uncontrollable streams of modern societies. Guerrillas have to attack continuously and physically in as many places as possible against an enemy superior in force, while the new terrorists need only to strike intermittently at one highly vulnerable target at a time to achieve the psychological effects intended. At the same time, it became a prerequisite for terrorist groups to organize in small cells and distributed networks in order to remain operational and to survive. This makes evident that yet again we are witnessing a mutation of warfare.

The destructive power of nuclear weapons and the high vulnerability and susceptibility of modern societies to destruction have rendered in-

¹¹⁶ According to Herfried Münkler in his exposé “Krieg in der Gegenwart: eine Beurteilung,” given at the Militärakademie an der ETH Zürich Frühjahrstagung, 13 March 2004. And see “Ältere und jüngere Formen des Terrorismus. Strategie und Organisationsstruktur,” in *Herausforderung Terrorismus. Die Zukunft der Sicherheit*, edited by Werner Weidenfeld (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004), 29–43.

¹¹⁷ Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, February 2004), 191.

terstate war an outdated model of decreasing usefulness. Today, the Westphalian world of the nation-state as the unchallenged pillar of international order, with the defense against threats from outside as the primary mission of its armed forces, has been superseded by a far more complex reality, which has brought back the *privatization* of war and conflict and has increased their asymmetric components. The rising levels of the *privatization of violence* witnessed in civil strife and internal conflicts around the globe pit governmental forces and nonstate actors against each other. Not only have these conflicts brought the return of armed groups and paramilitaries led by *de facto* or self-proclaimed “warlords” at the periphery of well-established zones of prosperity; they have also initiated and accelerated the growing use of private military companies and private security companies—the new corporate mercenaries—by states, multinational corporations, international and nongovernmental organizations, various societal groups, and individuals. And the increasingly asymmetric warfare we witness with transnational terrorism is the strategy that enables technologically and organizationally inferior actors to wage war against militarily superior adversaries.

The strategy of maximally exploiting asymmetry is dangerous, because it produces threats we do not look for—since we do not know what to look for. Being ignorant of its multifold potential, we neither know how to prevent its application nor how to counter it. This increases unpredictability and thus uncertainty, because the threats the new terrorism poses tend to be unusual in our eyes; irregular in that they consist of means or capabilities unrecognized by the laws of war; unmatched in our arsenal of capabilities and plans; highly leveraged against our particular assets; intended to work around, offset, and negate what in other contexts are our strengths; generally difficult to respond to; and particularly difficult to respond to in a discriminate and proportionate manner.¹¹⁸

However, thinking of the threat as only asymmetric misses the mark. The combination of asymmetry and the terrorists’ ability to continually devise idiosyncratic approaches present the real challenge. Asymmetry means the absence of a common basis of comparison in respect to a *quality*, or in operational terms, a *capability*. Idiosyncrasy means possessing a peculiar or eccentric pattern. It connotes an unorthodox approach or means of applying a capability – one that does not follow the rules and is peculiar in a sinister sense. By attacking idiosyncratically, the new terrorists seek to avoid our operational advantages; and by exploiting our weaknesses or blind spots, they are capable of inflicting

¹¹⁸ Colin S. Gray, “Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror,” *Parameters* (Spring 2002): 5–14.

havoc and harm at will. Their operational asymmetry is derived from their ability to continuously evolve new tactics and from the cellular and networked nature of their support structures. To this organization, they add a continuing flow of new, unconventional means of attack. The terrorists' advantage lies in our inability to recognize these new structures of their operation and to predict their new attack vector.¹¹⁹ Moreover, when applied strategically, asymmetry combined with unconventional warfare also simultaneously results in exploitable advantages at the operational and tactical level.

Traditional terrorism, as it developed in Russia in the nineteenth century, during the anticolonial wars of liberation in China, Malaya, Vietnam, and Algeria, and with the revolutionary cells in Western Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, is closely linked with social revolution and civil war. Simplified, it was the three-phased model of revolutionary warfare: acts of terror being the first phase; guerrilla war and armed rebellion in major agglomerations constituting the second phase; and the initiation of the final and decisive military engagement constituting the third phase. Traditional terrorism was the initial phase of armed combat, to be stridden through as quickly as possible, and was simultaneously the default position of retreat in the event that the guerrillas' second phase of operations came under sufficient pressure to force a retreat back into the "underground."

The interlinking of terrorism with social-revolutionary practices demanded very specific targeting and clear limits to violence. The targets of terrorist acts were the representatives and functionaries of the state apparatus of repression and the elites: monarchs, politicians, judges, and policemen, as well as exponents of socially dominant groups such as bankers, industrialists, and owners of large estates. In contrast, much had to be done to spare from damage all those the revolutionaries wanted to win over for the guerrilla war and the subsequent revolution: socially defined groups and classes like peasants and farmers in agrarian societies; the proletariat in urban and industrial societies; or, in the Third World, oppressed peoples.¹²⁰ Whether a religious group, a nation within a multiethnic state, or a people discriminated against for racial reasons, all were addressees of the message disseminated through acts of violence. Not only did those acts demonstrate to oppressed groups the possibilities of resistance, but such "target audiences" also had to be animated for future engagement in the fight, which was initially fought between a small group and the powerful state apparatus, and later, with

¹¹⁹ Montgomery C. Meigs, "Unorthodox Thoughts about Asymmetric Warfare," *Parameters* (Summer 2003): 4–18.

¹²⁰ Herfried Münkler, "Verwüstung statt Propaganda. Schrecken ist die einzige Botschaft des neuen Terrorismus," *Die Welt* (8 September 2004), <http://www.welt.de/data/2004/03/16/251729.html>.

the audience's help, at a greater intensity, larger scale, and with a higher probability of success. At the same time, this was the most important factor limiting mass violence and guaranteeing that weapons of mass destruction would remain outside terrorists' calculations.

Hence, the new transnational terrorism, which is singularly committed to cause indiscriminate mass violence and is increasingly using suicide attacks,¹²¹ is organizationally, logistically, and operationally so different from traditional terrorism that the use of the common label "terrorism" is more misleading than enlightening. The only commonality rests in the function of the acts of violence—to sow fear, terror, and confusion. With traditional terrorism, fear and terror were aimed at the state apparatus and the reigning societal group, which were to be intimidated and provoked into irrational reactions. The masses that were to be won over initially remained mere spectators. The fear, terror, and confusion created by the new terrorism, however, target the psychological infrastructure of whole societies, which are to be forced into a radical change of attitudes. There are no societal groups to be won over, though hopes remain that groups sympathetic to the terrorists' cause may eventually develop. Moreover, the terrorist campaign is no longer a transitory phase in the frame of an overall strategy: it is the unique and sole level of confrontation. And this confrontation takes place in the two locations where the opponent is weak and most vulnerable: the critical national infrastructure and the labile psychological state of mind of people in postmodern or "postheroic" societies. Transnational terrorists have recognized that these societies, with their lifestyles and self-assurance, are particularly vulnerable to attack by individuals with values of martyrdom. By causing unprecedented carnage, preferably linked with the destruction of icons of highly symbolic value, the new terrorism aims at altering Western attitudes and the global balance of power. Concomitantly, the strategic aim is the interruption or at least diversion or derouting of the global streams of capital, telecommunication, information, commerce, travel, and tourism. Confrontations with professionalized armed forces, in which modern societies have heavily invested for their national security, are avoided; whenever possible, the new terrorists also steer clear of law enforcement. Figuratively, any confrontation with the "armoured fist" of the enemy is avoided. Instead, the soft underbelly is attacked. To use a biological metaphor: once the convergence of strings of nerves and blood vessels is hit strongly enough, an "armoured fist" will fall in on itself.¹²²

¹²¹ See Pierre Conesa, "A Cult of Murderous Self-Destruction. The Suicide Terrorists," undated paper.

¹²² Herfried Münkler, "Die Wiederkehr des Verwüstungskriegs," *Internationale Politik* 2 (February 2004): 1–10.

Thus, if tourists are targeted in terrorist attacks such as those on the temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor, Egypt, in 1997, the Synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba in 2002, or the “Casa de España” in Moroccan Casablanca in 2003, tourism may collapse across North Africa. If a desperate economic crisis follows in these three countries, which are all heavily dependent on tourism, then the collapse of the political systems and their elites may become a real possibility. If this happens, the West will not only lose important business partners, the whole system of power in all of North Africa may be changed to the advantage and interests of the terrorists.

Technology plays a critical role in the terrorists’ new equation. Strategically, from financial markets to transportation systems to electric power grids, standards of living worldwide depend fundamentally on integrated technical systems that are susceptible to terrorist threats. These systems may have internal safeguards against failure in normal operations, but they do not have an ability to avoid catastrophic failure when they are interrupted or attacked in an unexpected and peculiar way that generates cascading or accelerating effects. The blackouts in the northeastern United States in 1965 and 2003 and those in Sweden and Italy in 2003 exemplify the potential for the catastrophic failure of technologically intensive systems with high degrees of interdependence. If terrorists can find a weakness through which safety factors can be overloaded or bypassed, they can cause catastrophic failure.

The security measures introduced after the terrorist strikes of 9/11 have led to a slowdown of commerce and passenger movements which, together with higher costs for security, have also had a negative effect on Western economies. Since time is money in capitalist societies, transnational terrorism mainly uses this lever to succeed. And this approach already operates independently from real acts of indiscriminate mass violence through the constantly renewed alerts and the permanent maintenance of preventive security measures at transport nodes, public events, and locations where people congregate.

Hence, the new terrorism follows the model of the classical devastation and prey-catching campaigns conducted by nomads who broke into the peripheries of zones of prosperity of ancient empires, plundering, burning, and causing economic havoc. They showed no interest in engaging in decisive battles with “imperial” troops. Since they could not prevail in battle, they avoided military confrontation through superior mobility and speed. They forced their will onto the opponent by continuously causing economic damage, which was untenable for those societies and their rulers in the long term.¹²³

¹²³ Herfried Münkler, “Die Wiederkehr des Verwüstungskriegs,” *Internationale Politik* 2 (February 2004): 1–10.

In principle, there remained two possibilities of defence against such devastating campaigns: to fortify the borders or to invade offensively the spaces beyond the borders. The Roman Limes and the Great Chinese Wall are examples of the first strategy, in which asymmetrical attacks are averted through the construction of physical obstacles. The castles and fortified churches of Medieval Europe are other examples of this strategy. However, such fortified defensive complexes not only incurred permanently high costs, they also had the disadvantage of inflexibility and immobility, whereas the enemy could concentrate his forces wherever he wanted to. He could choose the place and time of attack while the defender constantly had to be on watch. This is why the securing of the borders of the old empires was alternatively conducted with defence and attack: offensive incursions were made deep into the spaces beyond the defended borders, where logistics and infrastructures were devastated and in which all attempts to assemble military might were eliminated out of necessity.

It is here that the analogy between the classical devastation campaigns and the new terrorism transpires. While in the campaigns of devastation the invaders banked on superior mobility and speed, the new terrorists now use secrecy. They hide and conceal themselves, appearing in the open solely for the terrorist strike itself, so that no time is left for taking appropriate defensive measures. They bank on stealth and surprise, and only this provides them the possibility to attack an opponent who is superior in almost all domains.

Only in two domains is this opponent unable to dominate: the disposition of available time and the possibility to count on the distinctive readiness or willingness of the population to make sacrifices. It is here that the strategy of transnational terrorism puts its weight: through secrecy the terrorists can control the rhythms of time, and by attacking civilian targets—thus taking advantage of the greatly diminished willingness of the people in postheroic Western societies to make sacrifices—the terrorists can increase the pressure on the governments, which themselves may seek to achieve quick results in fighting terrorism or by making political concessions to rapidly end the threat.

Democratic governments have a particularly difficult position in the confrontation with the new terrorism. The terrorists know how to use the high media density of modern societies to reinforce the psychological effect of their strikes. In particular, they use pictures and the Internet;¹²⁴ for transnational terrorists, these have become prime means of communication and warfare. Governments, in contrast, cannot afford to control the media to reinforce defence. This enables even weak actors

¹²⁴ Lawrence Wright, "The Terror Web," *The New Yorker* (2 August 2004): 40–53.

to become a dangerous challenge for modern nations. In essence, it is such asymmetrical constellations that characterize the new terrorist threat. Although classical terrorism and the strategy of guerrilla war are also forms of asymmetric warfare, the difference is that in these older cases, asymmetry was the expression of the initial weakness of the insurgents or revolutionaries. They counted on gaining strength via guerrilla war in order to slowly transform the initial asymmetrical conflict into a conventional, symmetrical war. To win the war by waging the final decisive battle in a symmetrical confrontation was the intended endgame of almost all conceptions of guerrilla warfare, as exemplified by the Maoist and Vietnamese doctrines. This, however, is no longer the case for transnational terrorism. Asymmetric confrontations are no longer phases of an aspiration for symmetry—symmetry itself is no longer sought after. This is the terrorists' political-strategic innovation, and at the same time it is a realistic assessment of the existing forces and power structures. Thus, asymmetry—the salient feature of transnational terrorism—is no longer an emergency measure limited in time, but the key to success.

For the new terrorists, it remains crucial to evade detection before committing atrocities and attacking the critical national infrastructure of postmodern Western societies. To this end, the structure of the terrorist organization—small groups of deterritorialized networks—is the optimally adapted form. If hit, this adversary will adapt, regroup, generate new leadership, shift its geographic locus, adjust tactics, and evolve into a new collection of cells and networks capable of self-healing, dispersal, reassembly, and innovation.

How Can This New Terrorist Threat and Challenge Be Countered?

Strategically, the United States has reacted against these new threats and challenges with a new National Security Strategy¹²⁵ that calls for the preemptive use of military and covert forces before an enemy unleashes weapons of mass destruction – underscoring the United States' willingness to retaliate with nuclear weapons for chemical or biological attacks

¹²⁵ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington D.C., September 2002). The classified version is identified jointly as National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 17 and Homeland Security Presidential Directive 4. This was followed by five additional National Strategies: (1) for Homeland Security; (2) for Combating Terrorism; (3) to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction; (4) for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets, and (5) to Secure Cyberspace.

on U.S. soil or against American troops overseas. The task of defending the nation is seen to have changed dramatically.¹²⁶ And the war against terror is seen as a global enterprise of uncertain duration that “will be fought on many fronts against a particularly elusive enemy over an extended period of time.”¹²⁷ Thus, the consequence imposed by the increasing asymmetry of the new threat is the change from a reactive to a proactive posture, “to exercise our right of self-defence by acting preemptively against such terrorists,” recognizing “that our best defence is a good offence.” “The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack.”¹²⁸ For the last few centuries, international law recognized that nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take actions to defend themselves against conventional *symmetrical* forces that present an imminent danger of attack.¹²⁹ Now, under *asymmetric constellations*, the concept of imminent threat must be adapted to the capabilities and objectives of today’s adversaries. To prevent indiscriminate hostile acts of devastation by adversaries exploiting *asymmetry*, the defender will have to act *preemptively*.¹³⁰ However, preemption should be used “only after other remedies have been exhausted and principally in cases where a grave threat could arise.” Moreover, “the risks of waiting must far outweigh the risks of action.”¹³¹

¹²⁶ Foreword by the White House: “Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us. To defeat this threat we must make use of every tool in our arsenal – military power, better homeland defence, law enforcement, intelligence, and vigorous efforts to cut off terrorist financing.”

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6, 15. “Traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against an enemy whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents; whose so-called soldiers seek martyrdom in death and whose most potent protection is statelessness.”

¹²⁹ Preventive action is taken on the assumption that an offensive attack by the enemy will occur sooner or later. See Walter B. Slocombe, “Force, Pre-emption and Legitimacy,” *Survival* (Spring 2003): 124.

¹³⁰ The proof of the intention to attack – that is, the *attack itself* – might possibly be the detonation of a nuclear device or biological weapon in a city. To wait for such a case would not be acceptable in view of the potential number of victims.

¹³¹ Guidelines offered by the U.S. National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, in a speech at the Manhattan Institute, 1 October 2002. Moreover, there are the other criteria: (1) urgency of the threat, (2) plausibility of the danger, and (3) proportionality of the means – with intelligence remaining the basis for decision. None of these criteria are exactly measurable or enforceable.

Although preemption has been widely criticized as being in violation of international law, there are also strong arguments for it.¹³² NATO does not exclude preemption.¹³³ Preemption is also the strategic doctrine adopted by Russia,¹³⁴ France,¹³⁵ and Australia,¹³⁶ and even Japan¹³⁷ has reserved the right of preemptive defence. And in essence, we find the same diagnosis of the problem of asymmetric terrorist threats in the European Security Strategy.¹³⁸ “In an era of globalization, distant threats may be as much a concern as those that are near at hand... The first line of defence will often be abroad... Conflict prevention and threat prevention cannot start too early.”¹³⁹ Thus, the European strategy calls for enlargement—building security in the European neighbourhood. The future may show whether this is only a different choice of words, resulting from different military capabilities. It might well be

¹³² Marc Houben. “Better Safe than Sorry: Applying the Precautionary Principle to Issues of International Security,” Center for European Policy Studies, CEPS Working Document No. 196, November 2003, <http://www.ceps.be>.

¹³³ At the Prague summit in November 2002, NATO adopted a document (MC 472) in which, at least implicitly, preemption is discussed. Though “preemption” and “anticipatory self-defense” are not explicitly quoted in the new military concept of the Alliance for the fight against terrorism (at the insistence of Germany and France), it is clear that NATO does not fundamentally rule out preemptive strikes. See also Adam Tanner, “NATO says could launch pre-emptive strikes,” *Reuters*, 31 October 2002.

¹³⁴ “Putin reaffirms Russia’s right to preemptive strikes,” *AFP*, 4 November 2003. See also Russian Chief of the General Staff, General Yuri Baluyevsky: “We will take any action to eliminate terrorist bases in any region at the earliest stage,” *RFE/RL*, 8 September 2004. And: “We will take steps to liquidate terror bases in any region,” Baluyevsky told reporters at a meeting with U.S. General James Jones, NATO’s SACEUR. *AFP*, 8 September 2004.

¹³⁵ France, which not only opposed “Operation Iraqi Freedom” but also rejected the discussion over the principal option of preemption within the framework of NATO, explicitly mentions “capacité d’anticipation” and the necessity of the option of a preemptive strike in certain situations in its new “Programmation Militaire.” See Elaine M. Bunn, “Preemptive Action: When, How, and to What Effect,” *Strategic Forum*, no. 200 (2003): 6.

¹³⁶ The prime minister of Australia, John Howard, expressly called for a change in the UN Charter to allow for preemptive military strikes against terrorist threats. See John Shaw, “Startling His Neighbors, Australian Leader Favors First Strikes,” *New York Times*, 2 December 2002.

¹³⁷ General Shigeru, the Director General of the Japanese Defense Agency stated in January 2003 the readiness of Japan to launch a “counterattack” should North Korea bring its missiles into a “ready for takeoff” position. See Ishiba, “Japan to ‘Counterattack’ if North Korea Prepares to Attack,” *The Yomiuri Shimbun/Daily Yomiuri*, 25 January 2003.

¹³⁸ *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy* (Brussels, 12 December 2003).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6–8.

that “prevention through enlargement” is just the regional equivalent of the global American strategy of preemption.

Giving cause for concern since 9/11, however, is the fact that many authoritarian regimes – and even some democratic governments – are abusing the war on terror for the consolidation of power. The practice to declare all opposition or separatist resistance as acts of terrorism is only aggravating the problem, enlarging the list of those ready to engage in suicide attacks and thus leading to massacres of ever greater dimensions. These regimes have to be singled out and forced into moderation, since tough policies do not protect but rather produce a mood conducive to more terrorist recruiting.

Basically, there are *four lines of defence* to counter the new terrorist threats:

Intelligence will remain the first line of defence and the most critical element in combating terrorism. The adaptable nature of the adversary demands an equally agile intelligence effort. Countering asymmetry and unconventional warfare requires an atypical approach. If asymmetric warfare involves an enemy’s ability to constantly change form and methods from the fragments of the old operation and recruiting base, then intelligence needs to detect signs of this new operational shape as well as the emergence of new families of capabilities – conventional and unconventional.

Thus, intelligence needs to first discover how the enemy might change his operational structure and actual organization in an attempt to accomplish his ends. Then intelligence needs to find out in what areas this enemy might develop superior knowledge or some unprecedented, perverted use of a capability. It must filter out the capabilities the adversary has that we do not understand or expect. And it must detect the links to organized crime and how that source of assistance can be countered.

Exposing asymmetry goes hand in hand with isolating opportunities for unconventional warfare. We have enough specialists who understand the capabilities that terrorists could exploit to produce mass effects. The problem is to discover in advance the unprecedented and eccentric ways in which substances or mechanisms of destruction may be delivered. Additional problems to solve are: how do we recognize and preempt the opponents’ approach? And what are the back doors that we are not watching?

The second line of defence in the confrontation with the new terrorist threat is an attitude of the population one might call “heroic calmness” or “heroic composure.” Governments have a responsibility to produce balanced responses that do not feed the population’s insecurities. Indiscriminate terrorist mass violence aims foremost at the fragile psychological infrastructure of modern societies in order to achieve, with modest

investment,¹⁴⁰ tremendous effects and repercussions. If the greater part of these effects can be brought under control by the coldblooded reserve of the population, rather than have these effects amplified by hysterical reaction, then neither tourism will be disrupted nor will airlines suffer economic ruin, and even the deflection of shares in stock markets may remain limited.

The third line of defence is of a more offensive character, consisting of an interoperable mix of law enforcement measures with military operations, assisted and facilitated by diplomacy. We continue to debate whether terrorism should be treated as war or as crime – and therefore whether it should be handled by military force or through law enforcement. The fact is that we need both. The aim is to keep up a sustained pressure of pursuit in order to restrict the capabilities of terrorist groups, and to deny them the availability and control of the tempo of the confrontation. Transnational terrorists do not profit from unlimited resources. This is why, in priority, they need to be forced into a situation where they have to invest the greater part of these resources for their own survival. The more time and energy they must devote to remaining undetected, the less time and energy they will have for the planning, preparation, and implementation of new strikes of indiscriminate mass violence.

Thus, the often repeated claims that transnational terrorism cannot be combated by armed forces will have to be reconsidered. It is here where military operations have the mission to put terrorist groups under permanent stress, requiring much higher use of resources and provoking the terrorists into making mistakes. Obviously, such an engagement of the armed forces cannot aim at a fast and decisive military success, as military doctrine calls for in symmetrical military confrontations. These engagements are more comparable with the long-drawn-out preventive offensive operations by which the classical devastation campaigns of the potential aggressors of previous epochs were made less likely. Though by doing this, the new terrorism cannot be permanently defeated, but the terrorist capability of attack can be diminished,

¹⁴⁰ The costs of the 9/11 attacks were between \$250,000 and \$ 500,000, while the direct costs have been estimated at \$30 billion. According to a study by the New York City Partnership, the attacks on the two buildings cost about \$83 billion (in 2001 dollars) in total losses. The ratio between the direct costs to the terrorists and the direct costs to the United States was something like 1:60,000. Estimating the indirect costs is difficult, as these are partly unknown and partly still evolving. Some of these are: (1) Insurance costs at \$40–50 billion; (2) New York City capital losses at \$30 billion; (3) New York City economic (tax) losses at \$16 billion; (4) New York City cleanup costs at \$14 billion; (5) Government “bailout” for airlines at \$15 billion; (6) Increased security costs at \$10 billion; (7) Travel related losses at \$7 billion; (8) Private business losses at \$11.8 billion; and (9) Individual and family wage earner losses at \$2.4 billion.

just as the devastation campaigns of ancient times could reduce the probability of terrorist attack.

A *fourth line of defence* remains, which, however, will become effective only in the mid- and long term. Efforts and investments must aim at the separation of the terrorist groups in the narrower sense from their supporting environment – from the inflow of new fighters, from finances, the availability of arms and weapons of mass destruction, access to and use of training facilities, as well as the undermining of their ideological and political legitimacy. And there is the task of dismantling the “fifth columns” in urban centres. These may be far-reaching and lead to the “dehydration” of the structures of terrorist groups. They may also reduce the terrorist structures to marginality and meaninglessness. The fifth columnists, together with the terrorist leadership, the command and control networks, and the sanctuaries are the real centres of gravity that have to be eliminated. Since this implies a very long fight, sustainability will become of decisive importance. However, investments and success cannot be predicted with sufficient confidence.

Though this fourth line of defence is the most often and intensively publicly debated, so far no really convincing operational concepts have emerged. Creating such capabilities is very important. But as long as the requisite measures are only pleaded for and remain, as far as workable concepts are concerned, without consequence, not much can to be hoped for from this line of defence. Hence, innovative strategies, operational concepts, the development of appropriate tactics, and – foremost – the creation and application of *specifically tailored asymmetries* that can also be engaged preemptively, are desperately needed.