

Correspondence: The Sources of Terrorism

Charles Knight and Melissa Murphy

published in *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Fall 2003) pp. 192-195,
comment on Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror,"
International Security, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03) pp.5- 29.

In his article "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," Michael Mousseau frames a hypothesis about the contemporary "social origins of terror". According to Mousseau, "As a result of globalization, [the values and beliefs of liberal democracies and those of collectivist-autocratic clientalist states] are increasingly clashing in the mixed market–clientalist economies of the developing world, triggering intense antimarket resentment directed primarily against the epitome of market civilization: the United States."¹

This is a proposition with sufficient plausibility to make it a worthwhile subject of scholarly exploration. Mousseau's ambition, however, appears to be much greater than opening up a productive vein of study. Instead he asserts that his work, which "builds on several generations of research in anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology...explains much of the historical record of sectarian terror around the globe" (p.6). This is an overstatement of the explanatory power of his hypothesis and of the evidence he presents in support of it.

The most immediate problem with Mousseau's claim is that he fails to provide as contextual evidence a summary review of terror incidents in recent decades. Mousseau's argument links the phenomenon of suicidal mass murder with anti-Americanism and antimarket rage. The majority of suicidal terror incidents, however, are related to two long-lasting and intense ethno-political struggles, one in Sri Lanka and the other in Israel-Palestine. In each case, particular historical and political aspects of the conflict have much more direct and parsimonious explanatory power than a theory that the terror is motivated by resentments against American market values. Regarding suicidal attacks on U.S. targets, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, are unique as mass terror incidents by foreign agents on U.S. territory. The September 11 attacks also account for more than 85 percent of all American civilians killed in the last twenty years in terrorist incidents of all sorts.²

During the last twenty years, there have been seven major suicidal attacks targeted primarily at Americans or American facilities in foreign countries.³ More than 90 percent of the Americans who died in these incidents were military personnel or employees of government offices, such as embassies. It is reasonable to assume that the perpetrators did not view these Americans as innocents, but rather as legitimate targets of political violence because of their direct involvement with or complicity in political acts (including acts of warfare) against the interests of the terrorists and their communities. In these cases, findings of "a paucity of empathy" and "a deeply embedded antimarket rage" are neither necessary nor particularly relevant to an explanation of the incidents,

although they may be factors affecting the capacity of terrorist leaders to recruit suicide bombers (pp. 21, 22). This is not to argue that there are not classes of terror incidents to which Mousseau's "social origins" findings might apply as significant contributing factors, but Mousseau does a disservice to his argument by overgeneralizing and failing to carefully specify which types and what aspects of terror incidents his theory helps to explain.

These shortcomings aside, Mousseau offers some promising avenues of theory and analysis. An outstanding example is his construct in which those patrons in a clientalist economy whose privileged economic status is threatened by the transition to a market economy find sponsorship of terror to be an attractive strategy for demonstrating their power to clients whose traditional loyalty is waning. Mousseau puts it this way:

Those with the most to lose, however, are patrons and their lieutenants who hold privileged positions in the old clientalist hierarchies....because it is in a client's interest to have a powerful patron, leaders attract and maintain followers by demonstrations of strength. In this way, the mass murder of Westerners serves two purposes: It reflects the leader's power, and it taps into widespread antimarket fury (p. 20).

Mousseau's insight into the dynamics of power relationships in a clientalist economy is a useful addition to our capacity to fully explain sponsorship of terror by a patron such as Osama bin Laden. Nevertheless, this is, at best, a lesser contributing factor to bin Laden's behavior. Analysis of al-Qaeda's published statements reveals sufficient logic and motivation to explain most of its major activities. Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda associates are dedicated to the establishment of Islamic governance throughout the Muslim world, and their main activity has been training and deploying jihadist military cadre in direct support of this goal. A secondary activity has been to mount terror attacks on Western, and especially U.S., targets with the expressed goal of "pushing the American enemy out of the holy land." In an assessment of select Muslim guerrilla battles and terrorist attacks against Americans, bin Laden finds considerable evidence of success with these tactics:

The Defence Secretary [William Perry] of the Crusading Americans ha[s] said that "the explosion at Riyadh and AlKhobar had taught him one lesson: that is not to withdraw when attacked by coward terrorists." We say...[w]here was this false courage of yours when the explosion in Beirut took place on 1983 CE (1403 A.H.). You were turned into scattered bits and pieces at that time....And where was this courage of yours when two explosions made you to leave Aden in less than twenty four hours! But your most disgraceful case was in Somalia; whereafter vigorous propaganda about the power of the USA and its post cold war leadership of the new world,...when tens of your solders were killed in minor battles and one American Pilot was dragged in the streets of Mogadishu, you left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you.⁴

We do not know how bin Laden would assess the strategic effect of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the consequent counterattack by the United States and allied nations. What is important is not whether bin Laden is a clever or successful strategist, but rather that he thinks strategically about using the means of war and terror to further his ambition of leading the Islamist political movements to victory.

Mousseau dismisses cultural explanations of the use of terror and, in particular, explanations emerging from the study of Islamic values and beliefs. He says, "Traditional cultural mores are a constant, not a variable, and thus cultural explanations cannot sufficiently account for variation in levels of social support for terror across time and place" (p. 8). We doubt that many scholars of human culture observe much constancy in their subject, but in regards to the Islamist movements of the recent period, they are not conservative and traditional in the sense of wanting to simply defend Muslim societies against a perceived challenge from intrusive Western values. Rather these movements are, for the most part, harshly critical of contemporary Muslim leaders and societies. They are reactionary or revanchist in the sense of sharing an agenda of returning Muslim societies to the order of Shari'ah law. We find it remarkable that Mousseau does not discuss Shari'ah law in the course of contrasting liberal market values including a commitment to "the rule of common law" with clientalist value systems and their "greater respect for loyalty and hierarchy than for the rule of law" (p. 12).

The contemporary political movements that have most prominently declared a program of promoting a "rule of law" are Muslim fundamentalist movements that in some cases have also made use of terror tactics. Most Western scholars have paid little attention to the question of how the demand for the imposition of Shari'ah law might or might not relate to the inclusion of terror tactics in political struggles. Nonetheless, Mousseau's discussion of the contrasting values of market and clientalist economic societies suggests some entry points for investigation.

Mousseau makes another important observation, unfortunately relegated to a footnote, that "a market economy may be highly regulated (e.g., Sweden) and, in theory at least, be publicly owned" (p. 25, n. 65). This observation begs the question of whether the international market economy can be regulated with the objective of mitigating some of the social and economic dislocation and "Hobbesian anarchy" affecting developing societies and thereby reducing their supposed inclination toward terrorism. Several times Mousseau mentions the importance of subsidizing enterprise in developing economies, but the international economic policies aggressively advanced by the United States in the last several decades have been strongly opposed to subsidies. Free market ideologues argue that regimes of economic regulation and subsidy tend to degenerate into the less productive sort of economic relations that Mousseau characterizes as clientalist. This view is hotly contested by those who believe that time-limited and targeted subsidies as well as protection of selected markets are necessary

conditions for economic development, especially in the context of highly competitive global markets.

Mousseau advocates that "an outside power is needed to act as a sort of Leviathan: to push the governments of target countries to establish the prerequisites of a market economy. These include impartial enforcement of contracts and common law; destruction of clientalist linkages (corruption); subsidization of private enterprises (with fair bidding practices); widespread equitable subsidization of small loans so people can purchase homes or start small businesses; and redistribution to widen the scope of opportunities for market engagement" (p. 25). The obvious choice of a nation to play the role of Leviathan is the United States, but most of the "prerequisites of a market economy" such as the subsidization and redistribution that Mousseau would push on developing countries are off the table as policy options because of the close adherence by the United States to a radically liberal free market ideology.⁵

This line of inquiry suggests the possibility that the target of resentment in developing countries may not be generalized to Western market countries, but rather particularized to the least socially regulated (ultra-liberal) developed market nation, the United States, and its aggressive free market agenda. For instance, it would be worth investigating whether feelings toward Sweden in developing countries are significantly different from feelings toward the United States, and, if any difference is found, whether it is associated with a perception that Sweden behaves more benignly in its international relations and in its care for the welfare of its citizens. Perhaps the United States has become a prime target of resentments not only because it is the biggest, but also because it is experienced as the meanest. Thus it may be misleading to generalize the observation of antipathy to "Western market civilization" broadly. Rather scholars might get better results by looking more closely at the particulars of U.S. economic and security policy as it affects people's lives in developing countries.

—Charles Knight

—Melissa Murphy

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Charles Knight is Co-director of the Project on Defense Alternatives at the Commonwealth Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Melissa Murphy is research assistant to the Project on Defense Alternatives.

1. Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03) pp.5- 29 at p.6. <http://www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/02mousseau.pdf>. Subsequent references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

2. Suicide incidents make up less than 5 percent of all terror incidents. In regards to the number of civilians killed, the second-ranking mass terror incident (nonsuicidal) against Americans, at home or abroad, was the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995, which was carried out by U.S. citizens whose values presumably reflected the mature market economy in which they were raised. Terrorist incident and

casualty statistics in this section are derived from three U.S. Department of State reports: "Patterns of Global Terrorism," <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/>; "Total International Terrorist Attacks 1981-2001," <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2001/html/10266.htm>; and "Significant Terrorist Incidents, 1961-2001: A Brief Chronology," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/5902.htm>.

3. These include the U.S. embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, on April 18, 1993; the bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, on October 23, 1983; the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kuwait City, Kuwait, on December 12, 1983; the airport shootings at the Pan Am and TWA check-in desks in Rome, Italy, on December 18, 1985; the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya, on August 8, 1998; the attack on the USS *Cole* in Aden, Yemen, on October 12, 2000; and the coordinated shootings and bombings at three housing complex for foreign workers and an office of a Saudi-American corporation in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on May 13, 2003.

4. Usama Bin Muhammad Bin Laden, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," Hindukush Mountains, Khurasan, Afghanistan, August 23, 1996. Translation to English from Arabic by the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights, originally published in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* newspaper (London), <http://www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/960823binladen.html>.

5. The term "liberal" is used here in accordance with the European tradition to refer to economic doctrine rather than political orientation in the American tradition.

Subscribe to *International Security* at <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/loi/isec>.

Project on Defense Alternatives
Commonwealth Institute
Cambridge, MA USA
<http://www.comw.org/pda/>