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STATE MISUSE OF THE ANTITERRORISM CAMPAIGN

By Taras Kuzio

Since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, it has become commonplace for states to denounce "terrorism" and adopt measures to deal with this new threat by "nonstate actors."

Unfortunately, for many states outside the West, the 11 September terrorist attacks have become a convenient tool for stamping out

separatist revolts and domestic opposition.

The struggle against "terrorism" is a convenient tool for authoritarian regimes to target their domestic opposition. These states define "terrorism" in a broad manner. In China, the definition of "terrorists" includes "underground gangs," "unstable social elements," and separatists, as well as the Falun Gong spiritual movement, for instance. Uzbekistan has also defined its all of its domestic opposition as Islamic "terrorists" in order to provide justification to arrest and imprison its members.

At the same time, Islamic extremists are not always a liability for authoritarian regimes. In Indonesia, the Islamic extremist Laskar Jihad group -- which was trained by the army's special forces (Kopassus) -- has been unleashed by authorities against Christians. Charities openly raise funds for Islamic terrorist groups in Saudi Arabia, while it has long been suspected that Al-Qaeda does not launch terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia in return for financial and other support by rich Saudis.

State-organized "assassination" attempts are used to crush dissent and blacken the opposition as "radicals" or "extremists." Much new legislation in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is directed against both "terrorism" and "extremism." CIS states routinely define "extremism" as the domestic opposition. In Turkmenistan, a highly suspect assassination attempt on the

country's leader, "Turkmenbashi" Saparmurat Niyazov, was used as an excuse for a clampdown against the opposition. A highly suspect "assassination" attempt also took place in Belarus against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

In Ukraine's 1999 presidential elections, Socialist leader and candidate Oleksandr Moroz was accused of organizing an assassination attempt on Progressive Socialist Party leader Nataliya Vitrenko. Incumbent Leonid Kuchma no doubt feared entering a second electoral round with Moroz; Vitrenko's Progressive Socialists have meanwhile long held close ties to the executive and arguably were used as a patsy against Moroz. Kuchma has routinely defined the opposition as "extremists" and has attempted to blacken them as "radicals" bent on the country's destabilization. Kuchma described the March 2001 anti-Kuchma riots as akin to "terrorism."

States do not want to be seen to be rewarding "terrorism." Beginning in the 1980s, Western governments, encouraged by then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's hard-line stance against the Irish Republican Army, refused to negotiate any deals with "terrorists." This has remained Russian President Vladimir Putin's stance in Chechnya, despite calls by the United States for negotiations to end the conflict. Negotiations have been turned down in Nepal with Maoist guerrillas and in Tibet and Xinjiang, where China has arrested 3,000 "separatist terrorists."

In other regions of the world, separatist groups have launched campaigns of violence that have been rewarded. In Corsica, the decade-long campaign of violent separatism was ended only after the island was granted autonomy. This tactic might prove contagious. In Brittany, young radicals have also begun a violent campaign. One Breton activist admitted: "Look at the Corsicans. They are incredibly violent and they are being rewarded with the offer of autonomy."

In Kosova, the campaign of violence by the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) is likely to lead to an independent Kosova. In Macedonia, the Albanian National Liberation Army, which launched a separatist struggle in early 2001, has also been rewarded with government positions and autonomy. As its leader, Ali Ahmeti, boasted, "The peace deal is good for us." In the cases of both Kosova and Macedonia, the Albanian separatist strategy was to get NATO and the United States involved in order to exert pressure on the Macedonians and Serbs.

Some states refuse to accept that they have minorities and thereby defuse separatist violence. Until recently, Turkey denied it had a Kurdish population, calling them instead "Mountain Turks." To some Israelis, the Palestinians are simply "Jordanians" and should go to Jordan if they wish to exercise Palestinian self-determination. To many Moroccans, it is unclear what the Polisario are fighting for in the Western Sahara, as Morocco itself has a large Berber population.

Separatists are now routinely defined as "terrorists."

Although separatists might engage in violence, a state's response can be worse or as bad. In Indonesia, pro-Jakarta paramilitary groups were trained by the armed forces and used against East Timorese separatists, where they committed crimes against humanity. Indonesia has only labeled as "terrorists" separatist groups, such as the Free Aceh Movement and the East Timorese, not its own pro-Indonesian paramilitaries. In December, 17 members of the radical Ukrainian National Assembly were sentenced for instigating riots in March 2001 in Kyiv. However, many observers allege that a rival right-wing group -- the S. Bandera Sports-Patriotic Association Tryzub, which they claim is controlled by the Ukrainian Security Service and used to stage provocations to embarrass the opposition -- organized the riots.

11 September has allowed Russia to justify its hard-line approach in Chechnya, where human rights groups estimate there have been 80,000 deaths (compared to 70,000 in Kashmir). The scale of the atrocities committed in Chechnya range from summary executions to "disappearances," mass graves, looting, rape, and the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas.

Not all separatists are defined as "terrorists." Depending on geopolitics, they might be perceived as "freedom fighters." The United States has backed China's effort to define its Muslim

separatists in China's Xinjiang province as "terrorists." On the other hand, the United States and NATO have been reluctant to label Albanian groups in Kosova or Macedonia in such a manner. Albanian groups are called "armed combatants."

Pakistan under General Pervez Musharraf has a long record of arming, training, and supporting pro-Pakistani separatist groups in India-controlled Kashmir. A year ago, Musharraf urged before the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in Nepal that "a distinction be maintained between acts of legitimate resistance and freedom struggles, on the one hand, and acts of terrorism on the other." This was a clear reference to Kashmir, where most Pakistanis believe "freedom fighters" struggle against Indian rule. To the Indians though, they are simply "terrorists."

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