



Backgrounder

The Nexus of Terrorism & WMDs: Developing a Consensus *How could a Leaders' Level G20 make a difference?*

**Paul Heinbecker, Centre for International Governance Innovation &
Dr. Wesley Wark, University of Toronto**

While 9/11 has had a profound and extensive political, social and economic impact, and while fear persists that it could be a prologue to a much more deadly and costly future, international consensus on the importance of the terrorist phenomenon and on the most availing response to it is scarce. There is an urgent need to develop a common, viable understanding on the way forward. A carefully prepared and circumspectly managed approach to terrorism might help reconcile dissonant views and contradictory practices and make a common counter-terror/counter-proliferation strategy possible.

In this regard, it may not be useful to think in terms of global terrorism, of some sort of unity of terrorists, their disparate purposes notwithstanding. World leaders may be better advised to deconstruct the phenomenon and sharpen their discourse to specify international, globe-trotting terrorist gangs such as Al Qaeda and its spin-offs which, albeit with difficulty, can be identified and dealt with. Similarly, does “war on terror” remain a useful label for galvanizing international action? Or does such a martial term, with its evocations of armies and inter-state conflict, signal old think about a new threat and a predisposition to inter-state, military responses? Is it appropriate to think in terms of Islamist extremism? Or does that approach risk provoking a conflict between the West and Islam and permit all manner of governments to act under the same banner, whatever their own records? In any case, how should the international community proceed in order to circumscribe and diminish the danger rather than nourish and enlarge it?

Many international and multilateral bodies have, of course, engaged in discussions and policy initiatives on counter-terrorism, from the United Nations to NATO to the OAS to the G7/8. Issue-specific coalitions have, also, been called into being. None of these initiatives has so far succeeded in bridging the differences that exist, in part, at least, because their respective memberships have been too broad or too narrow and their interests too diverse or too similar. The answer may lie in creating an informal caucus of the leaders of broadly capable countries to complement existing organizations and institutions. Such a group would be small enough in number to permit efficient dialogue, representative enough geographically and culturally to be

credible and effective enough to transcend or, at least, narrow political divides on the issue of terrorism. A leaders group of 20 (an LG 20), with membership patterned approximately after the Finance Ministers' G 20¹, would meet these tests and could generate a relatively tightly focused and intimate discussion. The goal would be an agreed outcome that the group would commend to existing institutions and the rest of the international community.

Following extensive international consultation, Prime Minister Paul Martin of Canada believes that there is at the level of heads of government very considerable support for such an approach. An LG 20 could, if it found it advisable, endorse some or all of the counter-terrorism and non-proliferation findings of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. An LG 20 would, if successful, be available to tackle other intractable, inter-institutional issues.

That the stakes are enormous is obvious. Globalized terrorism and the overt and surreptitious spread of WMD each represent grave national security risks. 9/11 made their potential nexus an urgent concern. The international community arguably has no greater priority than ensuring that terrorist organizations never acquire the capacity to launch a WMD strike, particularly one that might involve nuclear weapons. The LG 20 could foster a global standard on counter-proliferation. And, as any international consensus on action in the face of proliferation challenges would be difficult to achieve, and because there are jurisdictional limits to how far government ministers and senior officials can take these cross-cutting issues, leaders themselves would have to lead.

An LG 20 initiative could focus on the issues of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction and deliver, as well, important benefits in other related and unrelated policy areas. It is possible to imagine broadened global public safety measures to deal with such issues as health pandemics, safe travel modes, legitimate migration, and so forth.

In contemplating an LG 20 on terrorism, at least four broad considerations arise, including:

- Efficacy
- Legality and Legitimacy
- Affordability
- Sustainability

¹ Member countries include: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, México, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. The Managing Director of the IMF and the President of the World Bank, as well as the Chairpersons of the International Monetary and Financial Committee and Development Committee of the IMF and World Bank, participate fully in the discussions.

Efficacy raises the complex issue of root causes of terrorism and how to address and remedy them where possible. It raises, as well, the impacts, intended or inadvertent, of foreign policies and whether and how to attenuate them. In this regard, ignoring the conflation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Iraq issue, which appears to be creating militants faster than they can be destroyed, would be counterproductive. Efficacy, also, raises the issue of how best to fight terrorists and prevent proliferation, specifically the appropriate instruments to use, including intelligence as a first line of defence, the expansion of intelligence sharing among nations and between security services within nations, and innovations such as the Proliferation Security Initiative and the G 8's Global Partnership Against Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Counter-Terrorism Action Group. It, also, raises the issue of the appropriate contributions capacity building, military, police and development assistance, foreign policy and communications need to make in creating success.

Legality and legitimacy issues involve a discussion of the significance of the rule of law, including international law, in combating terrorists. How to fight terrorists effectively and at the same time safeguard values, rights and norms? Also, as regards the role of criminal justice systems and law enforcement in countering terrorism and WMD proliferation, what legal powers, constraints and accountability represent the best mix?

Affordability is a matter of common concern, but rarely addressed. Terrorism can be catastrophically costly. Stopping terrorism and preventing WMD proliferation is likewise expensive, an onerous tax on national and global economies. Defusing this danger, also, requires extensive capacity-building in developing countries and for political and other reasons tends to disrupt planning and distort funding priorities. How to make the costs affordable for a range of economies? How to avoid the self-defeating outcome of diverting or supplanting development assistance expenditures that can otherwise be part of the long-term solution. Would counter-terrorism/WMD proliferation cost-sharing, in addition to other mechanisms for development aid and global economic growth, be worth pursuing?

Sustainability addresses the question of long-term strategy. What targets or benchmarks might be set for global counter-terrorism, and counter-proliferation? How can the vital global movement of people, goods and ideas be safeguarded while counter-terrorist and counter-proliferation efforts continue. How will we know when we have won?