Counter terrorism measures for global safety

Terrorism has inflicted fear and panic on almost every corner of the globe. Due to the pain that it inflicts on people indiscriminately, the United Nations has taken the threat of terrorism seriously and is actively engaging all member nations to participate in counterterrorism efforts (United Nations [UN], 2008). The counterterrorism agenda is a priority one for the UN for many years now. Countering terrorism has been a difficult pursuit because it is immediately laden with ethical and moral issues. Due to terrorism targeting even innocent women and children and random civilians located at the wrong place and at the wrong time, many are tempted to pursue counterterrorism through the " eye for an eye" approach. However, doing this would make the counterterrorism efforts no less evil than the terrorists, so engaging in acts to combat terrorism must adhere to democratic principles (Steven & Gunaratna, 2007). While terrorism has been a scourge for many decades now, the United States was forced to combat terror more aggressively in the advent of the September 11 attacks which claimed the lives of thousands. Measures have been promulgated using various anti-terror approaches in order to protect civilians and to defend the world against terrorism (Bater, 2010). However, combating terrorism has become more difficult because the US is forced to deal not only with terrorists from overseas but even " homegrown terrorists" such as 19-year old Osban Muhamud who allegedly planted a bomb in a Christmas tree (Thomas, Goldman & Ryan, 2010). Nine years after 9/11, the terror threat has not waned and resolving the threat of terror at home and abroad is far from over.

Models and Measures of Counterterrorism

There are three general models to combat terrorism. The first model, the criminal justice model (CJM), aims to combat terrorism while at the same time preserving fundamental human rights and democratic principles. The second model, the war model (WM), emphasizes on restraining terrorism itself than preserving democratic rights and places the state in a war-fighting mode to counter terrorism effectively. The third model integrates the previous two, called the " expanded criminal justice model" to provide greater flexibility in counterterrorism efforts (Steven & Gunaratna, 2004).

These models also reflect current counterterrorism measures recommended by the UN and its member nations, chiefly the United States (Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2008). Due to the fact that terrorists operate at various levels, whether political, legal, economic, military, and through the media, efforts to combat terrorism also encompass these areas (UN, 2008).

Political Measures: Political strategies in combating terrorism require that states address the root causes of terrorism in their respective countries. Terrorists legitimize their violent acts as a response to poverty, unemployment, and other socio-political programs. Political measures to counter terror require that states negotiate with terror groups and making small concessions with them. The danger with this strategy is that it gives terrorist groups legitimacy and may even encourage other groups to resort to terrorism in order to achieve their political goals and demands. Nonetheless, some governments have addressed terrorism by using poverty-reduction programs, employment and livelihood activities, land redistribution, and offering amnesties (UN, 2008).

Punitive Measures: Punitive measures are aimed at severing a terrorist group's lifeline by cutting off its finances and other resource-generating capabilities (DHS, 2008). This involves banning fund-raising initiatives of known front organizations of terrorist groups. Other punitive measures that are used in many include freezing assets of known front organizations or of key leaders, boycotting countries found to harbor terrorists, and placing economic sanctions, as in the case of Iran and Iraq.

Judicial Measures: Judicial measures consider international human rights law and enact legal measures to prevent terrorism. This includes ratification of international conventions or regional agreements relating to the extradition, prosecution, and mutual legal assistance to facilitate the capture of terrorists. Although this measure is the most democratic form of counterterrorism, it presents many problems such as the possibility of nations refusing to cooperate where the legal systems are not compatible and the refusal to prosecute suspected terrorists out of fear of retaliation. Legally, prosecuting terrorists is a challenge given the non-uniform definition of terrorism among countries (Steven & Gunaratna, 2004).

Intelligence gathering: The lapses of 9/11 brought several measures to strengthen intelligence in the United States. One of the earliest measures undertaken was the passage of the controversial Patriot Act which reduced the limitations that law enforcement agencies were subject to in terms of searching email, telephone, medical, financial, and professional records (The Investigative Project on Terrorism, 2008). The Act also reduced the restrictions of the US when gathering information on other countries. The law also amended the definition of terrorism to encompass domestic terrorism,

thus, expanding the powers of law enforcement agencies to combat terrorism. The law came under fire from civil rights groups and enhanced fears regarding breach of privacy and increasing surveillance powers of the government (Bater, 2010).

Military Response: The use of military for retaliatory response is an application of the war model whereby civilian legal systems are temporarily suspended in favor of martial law (UN, 2008). The military response is a controversial measure in terms of international law. It poses the likelihood of alienating the public and giving the terrorists " hero status"; moreover, military response can be interpreted " acts of aggression" and heighten anti-US sentiment, making the capture of terrorists more difficult (The Investigative Project on Terrorism, 2008).

Conclusion

Different models and approaches to counterterrorism have been applied by the United States and members of the United Nations. While each have its advantages in zeroing in on terrorists and preventing the further loss of life, certain democratic rights and ethical issues make such measures precarious and difficult. This is because any effort to weed out terrorism must be balanced against international norms on human rights and democratic freedoms.