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Trends. Terrorism Wins Again and Again: Explosion in the Port of Aden

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(Written as of October 12, 2000, 4:15 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time) As of this writing, at least four United States (US) sailors were killed with dozens more injured or missing after a probable terrorist attack on the US Navy destroyer, the USS Cole, in the port of Aden, Yemen. The attack--if verified as terrorist--underlines a number of 21st century observations about terrorism that have been equally supported for thousands of years.

Terrorism is usually the choice of the militarily weak against the militarily strong. Here the terrorist tactic seems to have been a small rubber boat packed with explosives. The immediate target was a vessel of the Burke destroyer class with sophisticated Aegis weaponry. Here the terrorist source--again, if terrorism is validated--was most likely non-nation-state entity directly or indirectly supported by one or more nation-states, other non-government organizations, and even independent wealthy individuals. The distal terrorist target was the most powerful nation-state in the world.

Terrorism is engaged in to achieve political objectives. Thus, government leaders often announce that they never negotiate with terrorists because political objectives never should and never can be achieved through terrorism. But they do. Just in the last week, US government officials let it be known that the major reason why the US abstained on (as opposed to voting against) a United Nations resolution censuring the Israeli government was to decrease the possibility that the baseline of terrorist attacks against US targets would increase. Just in the last week, various Israeli political leaders stated that they were making policy decisions partially based on how the decisions would affect the baseline of violence against Israelis by representatives and supporters of the Palestinians National Authority, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

Terrorism is basically a psychological technique ultimately targeted against survivors of terrorist threats and attacks, not those who die, are injured, or are killed through them. The psychological essence embraces the motivations of terrorists and the intrapsychic pathways of targets to behavior supporting terrorist political objectives. Potential targets become even more vulnerable if they do not identify and understand this psychological essence. In this context, US policymakers seem to have been uniquely obtuse to the development and incitement of motivating psychologies that become terrorist. Again, in the context of Israel and regarding so-called moderate and immoderate Arab and/or Muslim nation-states and various other Mideast population segments, the beliefs of US policymakers about the (1) meanings of "fair broker," "compromise," "sovereignty," "peace," and "end of struggle," (2) stimulus press of "Jihad," "Jerusalem," and "Jew," and (3) collective dynamics bearing on violence bear little resemblance to a very strong and very widely shared reality.

The 21st century may bring with it a host of novel developments. However, terrorism will be one of the oldest human enterprises going along for the ride. (See 4 U.S. sailors killed in attack on navy ship in Yemen. (October 12, 2000). CNN.com at <http://www.cnn.com>; Akhtar, S. (1999). The psychodynamic dimension of terrorism. *Psychiatric Annals*, 29, 350-355; Alford, C. F. (1997). The political psychology of evil. *Political Psychology*, 18, 1-17; Crenshaw, M. (2000). The psychology of terrorism: An agenda for the 21st century. *Political Psychology*, 21, 405-420; Florian, V., & Mikulincer, M. (1998). Symbolic

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immortality and the management of the terror of death: The moderating role of attachment style. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 725-734; Orme, W.A., Jr. (October 11, 2000). Mideast violence begins to subside as diplomats talk. *The New York Times*, p. A1, A10; Post, J.M. (2000). Terrorist on trial: The context of political crime. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 28, 171-178; Safire, W. (October 12, 2000). Israel needs an ally. *The New York Times*, p. A31.) (Keywords: Social Psychology, Terrorism, USS Cole.)