

Victory in Spite of All Terror

From the July 18, 2005 issue: The resoluteness of the Blair government and the British people could well mean that July 7 will turn out to be a setback for al Qaeda.

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"You ask, What is our policy? I will say; It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us. . . . That is our policy. You ask, What is our aim? I can answer with one word: Victory--victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival."

--Winston Churchill, first speech as prime minister to the House of Commons

May 13, 1940

THE ARMED FORCES designate the struggle in which we are currently engaged as the GWOT--the Global War on Terror. The term encompasses everything from the military battles in Afghanistan and Iraq, to covert operations, intelligence gathering, and diplomatic efforts all around the world.

The term "global war on terror" has come in for considerable ridicule from sophisticates on the left, and for some disparagement from Bush supporters on the right.

Much of the left believes that the various struggles against different forms of terrorism are better understood as local challenges, and are not part of one "global" struggle; that in any case the effort shouldn't be thought of as a "war"; that "terror" is far too broad a term to use to categorize the deeds of the very different opponents we face. Meanwhile some on the right are made nervous by the "Wilsonianism" of "global," the militarism of "war," and the rhetorical imprecision of "terror." Of this last point in particular, some conservatives have made intellectual sport, pointing out that "terror" is a tactic or a method, that you can't fight a war against a tactic, and that we should more bluntly acknowledge that what we are at war against is radical Islam.

More by William Kristol

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But President Bush and the U.S. military are more right than their critics. Over the last decade, the attacks have ranged from Nairobi to New York, from Bali to Madrid, and from Casablanca to London. This suggests that it is reasonable to consider the struggle a global one. The bloodiness of the attacks suggests it is reasonable to call this a war. And the fact that the attackers' strategy depends entirely on creating terror among civilized people--and the fact that terror in the West is necessary for the jihadists to accomplish their more concrete

political aims in the Middle East--suggest it is by no means unreasonable to speak of a war against "terror." After all, we shun and condemn acts of terror. Our enemies embrace and glorify such acts.

Last Thursday's attack on London is the latest in the global war on terror. But it was not the only attack that day. On the same day, "the insurgent group al Qaeda in Iraq," as the Washington Post put it, announced it had killed Egypt's top diplomat in Baghdad, Ihab Sherif. Yet how is this "insurgent" group different from the "terrorist" group "the Secret Organization of al Qaeda in Europe"? It isn't.

The insurgents in Iraq are terrorists. They are killing innocent civilians just as surely and just as ruthlessly as their allies in London. Could the war on terror have been successfully prosecuted without removing Saddam? We at The Weekly Standard do not believe so. Given the terrorist ties between al Qaeda and Saddam, given what a victorious Saddam, freed of sanctions and inspectors, would have meant to the cause of extremism and anti-Americanism and, yes, terrorism in the Middle East--we cannot imagine leaving Saddam in power. Yet, however one comes down on that judgment, it cannot be denied that the current war in Iraq is part of the global war on terror. Indeed, it is that war's central front. Not only because there are so many terrorists in Iraq, but because, as Abu Zarqawi has acknowledged, creating a successful democracy in Iraq will be the beginning of the end for jihadist terrorists worldwide.

The terrorists who attacked London demanded that Britain pull out of Iraq, as well as out of Afghanistan. It could well be that the deplorable decision of the Zapatero government in Spain to accede to the terrorists' demand to withdraw from Iraq inspired al Qaeda to see whether they could achieve a comparable success in Britain. But in that respect, the resoluteness of the Blair government and the British people could well mean that July 7--despite the terrible cost in innocent lives--will turn out to be a setback for al Qaeda. Certainly we must do our best to help make it so.

"We will show through our spirit and dignity that our values will long outlast theirs," Tony Blair said Thursday. "The purpose of terrorism is just that--to terrorize people, and we will not be terrorized." This is the necessary, and admirable, first response. The second is to do everything it takes to crush the terrorists in Iraq, Afghanistan, Europe, and elsewhere; to deter or remove regimes that cooperate with terrorists; and to insist on practical change in nations whose dictatorial regimes provide a breeding ground for terror. Victory in this respect may never be final or complete. But victory remains nonetheless the indispensable aim for the civilized world, if it is to remain civilized. London reminds us that there really is, in this case, no substitute for victory.

-William Kristol