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Michael Mousseau

The Sources of Terrorism

In his article "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," Michael Mousseau frames a hypothesis about the contemporary "social origins of terror." According to Mousseau, "As a result of globalization, [the values and beliefs of liberal democracies and those of collectivist-autocratic clientalist states] are increasingly clashing in the mixed market–clientalist economies of the developing world, triggering intense antimarket resentment directed primarily against the epitome of market civilization: the United States."[1]

This is a proposition with sufficient plausibility to make it a worthwhile subject of scholarly exploration. Mousseau's ambition, however, appears to be much greater than opening up a productive vein of study. Instead he asserts that his work, which "builds on several generations of research in anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology . . . explains much of the historical record of sectarian terror around the globe" (p. 6). This is a overstatement of the explanatory power of his hypothesis and of the evidence he presents in support of it.

The most immediate problem with Mousseau's claim is that he fails to provide as contextual evidence a summary review of terror incidents in recent decades. Mousseau's argument links the phenomenon of suicidal mass murder with anti-Americanism and antimarket rage. The majority of suicidal terror incidents, however, are related to two long-lasting and intense ethnopolitical struggles, one in Sri Lanka and the other in Israel-Palestine. In each case, particular historical and political aspects of the conflict have much more direct and parsimonious explanatory power than a theory that the terror is motivated by resentments against American market values. Regarding suicidal attacks on U.S. targets, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, are unique as mass terror incidents by foreign agents on U.S. territory. The September 11 attacks also account for more than 85 percent of all American civilians killed in the last twenty years in terrorist incidents of all sorts.[2]

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1. Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03) pp. 5–29, at p. 6. Subsequent references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

2. Suicide incidents make up fewer than 5 percent of all terror incidents. In regards to the number of civilians killed, the second-ranking mass terror incident (nonsuicidal) against Americans, at home or abroad, was the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995, which was carried out by U.S. citizens whose values presumably reflected the mature market economy in which they were raised. Terrorist incident and casualty statistics in this section are derived from three U.S. Department of State reports: "Patterns of Global Terrorism," http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/; "Total International Terrorist Attacks, 1981–2001," http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2001/html/10266.htm; and "Significant Terrorist Incidents, 1961–2001: A Brief Chronology," http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/5902.htm.

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During the last twenty years, there have been seven major suicidal attacks targeted primarily at Americans or American facilities in foreign countries.[3] More than 90 percent of the Americans who died in these incidents were military personnel or employees of government offices, such as embassies. It is reasonable to assume that the perpetrators did not view these Americans as innocents, but rather as legitimate targets of political violence because of their direct involvement with or complicity in political acts (including acts of warfare) against the interests of the terrorists and their communities. In these cases, findings of "a paucity of empathy" and "a deeply embedded antimarket rage" are neither necessary nor particularly relevant to an explanation of the incidents, although they may be factors affecting the capacity of terrorist leaders to recruit suicide bombers (pp. 21, 22). This is not to argue that there are not classes of terror incidents to which Mousseau's "social origins" findings might apply as significant contributing factors, but Mousseau does a disservice to his argument by overgeneralizing and failing to carefully specify which types and what aspects of terror incidents his theory helps to explain.

These shortcomings aside, Mousseau offers some promising avenues of theory and analysis. An outstanding example is his construct in which those patrons in a clientalist economy whose privileged economic status is threatened by the transition to a market economy find sponsorship of terror to be an attractive strategy for demonstrating their power to clients whose traditional loyalty is waning. Mousseau puts it this way: "Those with the most to lose, however, are patrons and their lieutenants who hold privileged positions in the old clientalist hierarchies. . . . Because it is in a client's interest to have a powerful patron, leaders attract and maintain followers by demonstrations of strength. In this way, the mass murder of Westerners serves two purposes: It reflects the leader's power, and it taps into widespread antimarket fury" (p. 20).

Mousseau's insight into the dynamics of power relationships in a clientalist economy is a useful addition to our capacity to fully explain sponsorship of terror by a patron such as Osama bin Laden. Nevertheless, this is, at best, a lesser contributing factor in explaining bin Laden's behavior. Analysis of al-Qaeda's published statements reveals sufficient logic and motivation to explain most of its major activities. Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda associates are dedicated to the establishment of Islamic governance throughout the Muslim world, and their main activity has been training and deploying jihadist military cadre in direct support of this goal. A secondary activity has been to mount terror attacks on Western, and especially U.S., targets with the expressed goal of "pushing the American enemy out of the holy land." In an assessment of select Muslim guerrilla battles and terrorist attacks against Americans, bin Laden finds considerable evidence of success with these tactics:

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3. These include the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, on April 18, 1983; the bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, on October 23, 1983; the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kuwait City, Kuwait, on December 12, 1983; the airport shootings at the Pan Am and TWA check-in desks in Rome, Italy, on December 18, 1985; the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya, on August 8, 1998; the attack on the USS *Cole* in Aden, Yemen, on October 12, 2000; and the coordinated shootings and bombings at three housing complexes for foreign workers and an office of a Saudi-American corporation in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on May 13, 2003.

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The Defence Secretary [William Perry] of the Crusading Americans ha[s] said that "the explosion at Riyadh and AlKhobar had taught him one lesson: that is not to withdraw when attacked by coward terrorists." We say . . . [w]here was this false courage of yours when the explosion in Beirut took place on 1983 C.E. (1403 A.H.). You were turned into scattered bits and pieces at that time. . . . And where was this courage of yours when two explosions made you to leave Aden in less than twenty-four hours! But your most disgraceful case was in Somalia; whereafter vigorous propaganda about the power of the USA and its post cold war leadership of the new world, . . . when tens of your soldiers were killed in minor battles and one American Pilot was dragged in the streets of Mogadishu, you left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you.[4]

We do not know how bin Laden would assess the strategic effect of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the consequent counterattack by the United States and allied nations. What is important is not whether bin Laden is a clever or successful strategist, but rather that he thinks strategically about using the means of war and terror to further his ambition of leading the Islamist political movements to victory.

Mousseau dismisses cultural explanations of the use of terror and, in particular, explanations emerging from the study of Islamic values and beliefs. He says, "Traditional cultural mores are a constant, not a variable, and thus cultural explanations cannot sufficiently account for variation in levels of social support for terror across time and place" (p. 8). We doubt that many scholars of human culture observe much constancy in their subject, but in regards to the Islamist movements of the recent period, they are not conservative and traditional in the sense of wanting to simply defend Muslim societies against a perceived challenge from intrusive Western values. Rather these movements are, for the most part, harshly critical of contemporary Muslim leaders and societies. They are reactionary or revanchist in the sense of sharing an agenda of returning Muslim societies to the order of Shari'ah law. We find it remarkable that Mousseau does not discuss Shari'ah law in the course of contrasting liberal market values including a commitment to "the rule of common law" with clientalist value systems and their "greater respect for loyalty and hierarchy than for the rule of law" (p. 12).

The contemporary political movements that have most prominently declared a program of promoting a "rule of law" are Muslim fundamentalist movements that in some cases have also made use of terror tactics. Most Western scholars have paid little attention to the question of how the demand for the imposition of Shari'ah law might or might not relate to the inclusion of terror tactics in political struggles. Nonetheless, Mousseau's discussion of the contrasting values of market and clientalist economic societies suggests some entry points for investigation.

Mousseau makes another important observation, unfortunately relegated to a footnote, that "a market economy may be highly regulated (e.g., Sweden) and, in theory at

4. Usama Bin Muhammad Bin Laden, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," Hindukush Mountains, Khurasan, Afghanistan, August 23, 1996. Translation to English from Arabic by the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights, originally published in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* newspaper (London), http://www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/960823binladen.html.

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least, be publicly owned" (p. 25, n. 65). This observation begs the question of whether the international market economy can be regulated with the objective of mitigating some of the social and economic dislocation and "Hobbesian anarchy" affecting developing societies and thereby reducing their supposed inclination toward terrorism. Several times Mousseau mentions the importance of subsidizing enterprise in developing economies, but the international economic policies aggressively advanced by the United States in the last several decades have been strongly opposed to subsidies. Free market ideologues argue that regimes of economic regulation and subsidy tend to degenerate into the less productive sort of economic relations that Mousseau characterizes as clientalist. This view is hotly contested by those who believe that time-limited and targeted subsidies as well as protection of selected markets are necessary conditions for economic development, especially in the context of highly competitive global markets.

Mousseau advocates that "an outside power is needed to act as a sort of Leviathan: to push the governments of target countries to establish the prerequisites of a market economy. These include impartial enforcement of contracts and common law; destruction of clientalist linkages (corruption); subsidization of private enterprises (with fair bidding practices); widespread equitable subsidization of small loans so people can purchase homes or start small businesses; and redistribution to widen the scope of opportunities for market engagement" (p. 25). The obvious choice of a nation to play the role of Leviathan is the United States, but most of the "prerequisites of a market economy" such as the subsidization and redistribution that Mousseau would push on developing countries are off the table as policy options because of the close adherence by the United States to a radically liberal free market ideology.[5]

This line of inquiry suggests the possibility that the target of resentment in developing countries may not be generalized to Western market countries, but rather particularized to the least socially regulated (ultra-liberal) developed market nation, the United States, and its aggressive free market agenda. For instance, it would be worth investigating whether feelings toward Sweden in developing countries are significantly different from feelings toward the United States, and, if any difference is found, whether it is associated with a perception that Sweden behaves more benignly in its international relations and in its care for the welfare of its citizens. Perhaps the United States has become a prime target of resentments not only because it is the biggest, but also because it is experienced as the meanest. Thus it may be misleading to generalize the observation of antipathy to "Western market civilization" broadly. Rather scholars might get better results by looking more closely at the particulars of U.S. economic and security policy as it affects people's lives in developing countries.

—Charles Knight
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5. The term "liberal" is used here in accordance with the European tradition to refer to economic doctrine rather than political orientation in the American tradition.

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The Author Replies:

I welcome the opportunity to reply to Charles Knight and Melissa Murphy's thoughtful response to my article. They appear to appreciate the possibility that, as I argue, clientalist culture may be a prerequisite for the social support for terror, and that anti-American and anti-Western feeling may have roots in the cultural conditions of underdevelopment. Their primary concern, however—that I overstate my evidence—is erroneous because it rests on (1) an application of my proposition to the wrong level of analysis, and (2) a specious epistemology. In this reply, I offer clarifications for these and other issues.

First, Knight and Murphy assert that the "most immediate problem" is that I did not include a summary review of terror attacks that support my theory. They contend that "the majority of suicidal terror incidents" have occurred in Sri Lanka and Israel-Palestine, and that in these cases idiosyncratic factors "have much more direct and parsimonious explanatory power than a theory that terror is motivated by resentments against American market values." A review of terror incidents, however, is not needed to defend my thesis. I did not claim that the theory predicts terror incidents. Rather it predicts "when and where the use of indiscriminant violence against out-groups is likely to be socially approved."[1] Therefore the theory's level of analysis is not the terror incident, but the society. As such, the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Israel-Palestine are only two of many social conflicts. Moreover, an effective modeling of a phenomenon also accounts for the absence of that phenomenon. I demonstrated that the theory can account not only for the widespread resentment against the market democracies as well as social support for terror against them in many parts of the developing world, but also for the absence of sectarian conflict and terror within and between the market democracies.

The purpose of a theory is not to suggest a full (or better-than-particular) accounting for any individual case, but to identify common causation across similar types of cases. Indeed the particulars of any case will offer additional explanation for that case than any theory alone can offer, and some cases may even appear entirely unexplained by the theory. In fact, Knight and Murphy accept that in the Sri Lanka and Israel-Palestine cases, my theory may account for "the capacity of terrorist leaders to recruit suicide bombers." So I am mystified as to how I overstate the explanatory power of the theory.

I also demonstrated how the values of individualism, universalism, tolerance, and respect for equal rights under the law may emerge from the norms of exchange that prevail in market economies. In this way, the model can account for the emergence of liberal political culture and its well-established association with economic development and democratic stability. The model can also account for the prevailing collectivism, in-group loyalty, and dearth of empathy for out-groups in developing nations. In this way it can explain the frequent civil wars, instability, and illiberal governance in the developing world today (such as in Indonesia and Colombia) as well as sectarian conflicts in many West European countries during their transitions to market economies in the

1. Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," *International Security,* Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03), p. 9.

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nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (including rising anti-Semitism and nationalism). I also showed how the theory can account for several long-standing research puzzles in anthropology, economics, and sociology, such as the linkages of clientalist and market norms with, respectively, collectivist and individualist value orientations. Thus far the theory has successfully predicted that the peace among democratic states is limited to the developed market democracies, as is the tendency to cooperate and agree at the United Nations.[2] Knight and Murphy did not question any of this evidence.

Second, Knight and Murphy suggest that my theory "is, at best, a lesser contributing factor to [Osama] bin Laden's behavior" and that "analysis of al-Qaeda's published statements reveals sufficient logic and motivation to explain most of its major activities." On this point, strategy ought to be distinguished from motives. Al-Qaeda's published statements may indicate that bin Laden thinks that terror is his best strategy for achieving his aims, but these do not explain his motives. Why do bin Laden and his followers hate the United States, feel morally justified in killing innocent people, and want to establish "Islamic governance throughout the Muslim world"? I offer an explanation for these motives and values: Fearful of losing his esteemed status in a clientalist hierarchy, bin Laden turned to radical Islam and anti-Americanism as antimarket ideologies. The mass murder of Westerners attracts followers by showing his power and tapping into widespread antimarket fury (pp. 19–20). Unlike al-Qaeda's published statements, the model predicts other symbols of market economies and culture as potential targets of terror (as was the World Trade Center), such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the headquarters of major corporations or their affiliates in terrorist-producing countries.

Third, Knight and Murphy are critical of my dismissal of "cultural explanations of the use of terror" and models drawing on "Islamic values and beliefs." In this regard, it is important to distinguish political culture from traditional culture. I asserted that *traditional* cultural mores are generally constant across time (an assertion that is axiomatic), and thus such values can hardly explain variation in the social support for terror across time. In fact, my theory seeks to model changes in *political* culture, offering an explanation for the emergence of antimarket social movements and their willingness to use terror. It identifies radical Islam not with tradition but with the demise of clientalist protections in an economy mired in underdevelopment, not unlike earlier communist and fascist movements. Therefore the observation that contemporary Islamist movements are "harshly critical of contemporary Muslim leaders" is not contradictory but rather consistent with the theory. Knight and Murphy further suggest that because my theory identifies respect for the rule of common law as an aspect of market civilization, the contemporary Islamist agenda of returning to Shari'ah law contradicts the theory. But I deliberately used the phrase "common law" to distinguish the rule of law found in market democracies from other systems of law, which can be Islamic, Justinian, or anything else.

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2. See Michael Mousseau, "Market Prosperity, Democratic Consolidation, and Democratic Peace," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (August 2000), p. 478; and Michael Mousseau, "An Economic Limitation to the Zone of Democratic Peace and Cooperation," *International Interactions*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2002), pp. 137–164.

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Fourth, Knight and Murphy appear to agree with the main policy implication that to win the struggle against terror, the United States should drop its free market agenda and instead actively promote redistribution and strong regulatory regimes in the developing world. They doubt, however, that the United States will modify its "aggressive free market agenda." I share their concern, but this is a policy, not a theoretical, issue. They offer an alternative view that the United States may have "become a prime target of resentments" simply because it is "experienced as the meanest" market democracy. This rationalist view rests on the questionable assumption, however, that the many millions of people living in developing countries who resent the United States have a full grasp of global economics and U.S. foreign policy. Nor can this view explain social support for mass murder, which requires more than a distinct set of strategic inputs: It also demands a set of moral values not widely present in market societies.

The primary concern raised by Knight and Murphy is important: the state of the evidence for my proposition of market civilization and its clash with terror. They contend that for their two cases my theory is "neither necessary nor particularly relevant." They discussed only two of countless cases, however: The assessment of a theory rests not on the particulars of one or two cases but on its power to explain a pattern of similar cases as well as other phenomena, and its ability to make accurate predictions. By this standard, I think I demonstrated the plausibility that there is a market civilization in cultural conflict with significant portions of the developing world.

—*Michael Mousseau*
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